THE CLASSIC DEBATE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON: SOME CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF RELATIVISM AND POSTMODERNISM

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Are faith and reason compatible? If not, why? If so, in what sense(s) are the two notions compatible? What implications do contemporary relativism and postmodernism have for the classic debate about the relationship between religious faith and logical reason? The purpose of this essay[1] is to examine these and related questions.

1. Introduction

Many scientists, as well as some theologians and philosophers, have argued that religious faith and logical reason are not compatible. Some scientists and humanists have further suggested that natural reason alone is sufficient to provide us with answers to questions about the meaning or purpose of human existence.2 Pope John Paul II believed that this view of human existence has been influenced by contemporary secular positions that he referred to as rationalism and scientism.3 However, we should also note that some scientists (as well as many philosophers and theologians) have argued that faith and reason are indeed compatible.[4] Yet, the precise sense in which these notions are said to be compatible (or incompatible) has not always been clearly articulated. A key objective of this essay is to elucidate and analyze some key concepts and claims underlying the arguments that have been advanced both for and against the thesis that faith and reason are compatible.

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[1]This essay is a substantially revised and updated version of an earlier work entitled "Faith, Reason, and Relativism in a Postmodern Secular World," which was presented at the Spring 2000 Newman Colloquium, Rivier College, and printed in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Rivier College Faculty Summer Seminar* (2000). The idea for this essay emerged from my research as a participant in Rivier's 1999 Faculty Summer Seminar on "The Struggle to Believe in a Postmodern Secular World." I am grateful to seminar participants Peter Frost, Paul Lizotte, Martin Menke, and Sheli Peterson for helping me to clarify and refine some of the claims I made in an earlier version of this essay that I presented at that summer seminar. And I am especially grateful to Lloyd Carr and John Caiazza for their comments and helpful suggestions on earlier drafts this essay.

[2]See, for example, E. O. Wilson. *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998). One recent area of confrontation involving religion and science has been in the hotly-contested debate involving evolutionary theory and intelligent design. This debate could be viewed as just one more (and perhaps even the latest) battle in the ongoing "war" between religion and science. For an interesting historical account of this dispute, see J. Caiazza, *The War of the Jesus and the Darwin Fishes: Religion and Science in the Postmodern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007). The present essay, however, does not examine that particular controversy; rather, it analyzes issues affecting the faith-reason debate in a broader context.

[3]See John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998).

[4]See, for example, F. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006). Collins, who served as Director of the Human Genome Project, presents an interesting defense of religious belief from the perspective of a practicing scientist.

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Perhaps the most significant challenge for those who defend the compatibility of faith and reason comes from neither rationalism nor scientism, as John Paul II suggests, but rather from contemporary relativism and postmodernism. Consider that many scientists and rationalists who have questioned the compatibility of faith and religion do so because they believe that the application of natural reason is limited to claims affecting empirical phenomena and conceptual analysis. However, scientists and rationalists believe that both empirical and conceptual claims can be verified via objective and universal standards that are based on logical reason. Contemporary relativists and postmodernists, on the contrary, reject the view that there are any objective and universal standards of truth (and, in so doing, also reject the possibility of logical reason as a basis for verifying empirical and conceptual claims). Consider that many claims affecting one's faith commitment presuppose religious doctrines that also purport to be universal and absolute. So, it would seem to follow that both relativism and postmodernism pose a clear threat to the possibility of a rational foundation for religious faith. In this sense, relativism and postmodernism also challenge the thesis that faith and reason are compatible.

Before considering the challenges posed by relativists and postmodernists, we need to elucidate what is meant by the question, Are faith and reason compatible? To provide an adequate answer to this question, however, we first need to clarify the meaning of three key concepts: *faith*, *reason*, and *compatibility*.

2. Some Preliminary Definitions of *Faith*, *Reason*, and *Compatibility*

We begin by analyzing the concept of faith – or, more precisely, the notion of religious faith. If one were to look up the term "faith" in a dictionary, she would likely encounter a definition that included terms such as "confidence" or "trust" – for instance, "confidence or trust in a person or thing."[5] If we closely examine the notion of religious faith, however, we find that there are at least two different senses in which that concept could be understood: one having to do with faith as an *act*, and the other with faith in terms of its *content*. Initially, the two aspects of faith might seem to be inseparable. For example, the content of one's faith (i.e., the principles, doctrines, and articles that comprise a certain faith) might well inform an individual's act of faith (i.e., one's choice, decision, commitment, etc.). Nevertheless, I believe that these two senses of religious faith are clearly distinguishable in relevant respects that are also helpful for our analysis in this essay.

2.1 Faith *as Act* vs. Faith *as Belief*

First, consider the notion of religious faith as an act of believing or an act involving a commitment. Thomas Aquinas speaks of faith as an "*act* of the intellect assenting to the truth at the command of the will" (Italics Added),[6] and Paul Tillich defines faith as an "*act* of the total personality" (Italics Added).[7] Along somewhat similar lines, John Locke speaks of faith as an "assent to [a] proposition...",[8] and William James describes faith as our "right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters."[9] Using Tillich's phrase "dynamics of faith," we can refer to the aspect of faith involving an act or activity as the

[5]See, for example, the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Random House, 1968).

[6]St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II (Qu. 4, Art. 5) In A. C. Pegis, ed. *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas* Vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1945).

[7]P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 4.

[8]J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A. C. Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press), Vol. II, p. 416.

[9]W. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1896), p. 1.

dynamic sense of faith. In its dynamic sense, faith can also be understood as an interactive and interpersonal relationship that one has with God. It can also be seen in the form of a commitment that an individual consciously makes to a certain way of living, including an individual's commitment to a vocational form of religious community life, or it can involve an individual's commitment to following a set of doctrines such as when one "professes" his or her faith.

Religious faith can also be viewed in terms of its content – i.e., the content of the beliefs themselves as opposed to an individual's act of believing. Here the focus on "faith" is in terms of a particular set or system of religious beliefs and doctrines, rather than on one's subscribing or committing to those beliefs. We can call this sense of faith having to do with the collection of principles and doctrines the *substantive* aspect of faith. It is perhaps interesting to note that in *Hebrews 11:1*, faith is described as "the *substance* of things, hoped for..." (Italics Added).[10] In its substantive sense, religious faith can be understood to mean the collection of articles and doctrines (including dogma), belief in which defines what it means to be a member of a certain religion, such as the Roman Catholic Church. When discussing the concept of faith, we often vacillate between its substantive and its dynamic aspects, especially when conversations shift from a description of faith at the level of the activities of individuals to faith at the institutional level (as a system of beliefs and doctrines), and *vice versa*. In this essay, we consider both senses of faith in our attempt to determine whether reason is compatible with faith in each of its two senses. We return to our discussion of faith as belief in Section 5 of this essay.

2.2 Logical Reasoning vs. *Common-Sense* Thinking

The term *reason* is also ambiguous and is sometimes used equivocally. In an informal and colloquial sense, reason is sometimes associated with "common sense." For example, we often hear claims to the effect that such and such "only stands to reason." In this sense of "reason," many of the inferences that we draw, which might well accord with certain assumptions involving our received notion of common sense, can be shown to be *non-logical* and in some cases even *illogical*.[11] For example, many of our assumptions and unreflective beliefs that a certain event must either have been the cause of, or the effect of, some other event often turn out to rest on essentially non-logical foundations. The inference

Because glass is brittle, if someone throws a stone at the glass window, the window will shatter

is an example of an inference that cannot be justified deductively (on purely logical grounds). Of course, there is a pragmatic (non-logical) justification for making such an inference, because in the past whenever a similar cause occurred (i.e., throwing a rock at glass), a similar effect likely followed (*viz*., the glass shattered). However, any inference that the glass will shatter the next time it is struck by a rock is based on essentially non-logical considerations (perhaps on associations that are, at base,

[10]This passage (from the King James Version of the Bible), as well as other passages included in Section 2 of this essay, are originally cited in E. Miller, ed. *Questions that Matter* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), p. 279.

[11]Many inferences that are strictly deductive in terms of their logical form might appear to go against our received notion of "common sense." Conversely, many inferences that we might be inclined to make because of their perceived agreement with common sense can turn out to be fallacious. See Chap. 3 in J. Nolt *Informal Logic: Possible Worlds and Imagination* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002). Also see my discussion of some common-place confusions regarding our beliefs about factual claims *vis-à-vis* common sense in Chap. 1 in H. Tavani, *A Short Introduction to Critical Reasoning* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Custom Services, 2005).

psychological rather than logical). Yet, such an inference might clearly conform to our received notion of common sense.

Other inferences, which might also initially seem to conform to common sense are not merely non-logical, but are actually illogical or fallacious. For example, one might correctly observe that ever since a certain political party came into power, the number of persons employed in a certain community has decreased. That person might then be tempted to draw the following inference:

> *Since Party X came into power, the number of jobs in Community Y decreased; therefore, the number of jobs in Community Y has decreased because Party X came into power.*

Such an inference would, of course, be fallacious because, even if all of the statements in the inference turn out to be true, the inference itself is based on faulty reasoning. In fact, this fallacious line of reasoning would be an instance of what some logicians describe as the "False Cause" argument, also referred to as the logical fallacy *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. So, many inferences that might initially appear to conform to our received notion of common sense, turn out to be either non-logical (non-deductive) or illogical (i.e., fallacious) inferences.

Some philosophers, especially logicians, also distinguish between a *strong* and a *weak* sense of reasoning. These logicians sometimes refer to claims and inferences involving the latter type of reasoning as "soft thinking," which can be contrasted with "hard thinking."[12] Claims involving hard thinking are based on rigorous standards of logical analysis. Here, the criteria are much more stringent than those typically used in so-called "common-sense reasoning" to determine whether a particular inference will count as "rational." In this essay, we are primarily concerned with reasoning in the strong or "hard" sense than with the weaker sense of reasoning frequently associated with our received notion of common sense. With this sense of reasoning in mind, we next examine the notion of *compatibility*.

2.3 Different Senses of *Compatibility*

We begin by noting the colloquial sense in which "compatibility" is sometimes loosely used. For example, we speak of a married couple as being compatible when that couple shares a core set of values, such as agreeing on values and objectives affecting finances and child rearing. We also sometimes use a stretched sense of "compatible" when we speak of two nations or political systems as being compatible if those nations or political systems are not in total disharmony with each other, or perhaps if nations with vastly different political ideologies agree to coexist peacefully because of fears related to a mutually shared enemy. These are both instances of what can be called non-logical compatibility, which can be contrasted with logical compatibility. When philosophers speak of compatibility, they typically mean agreement in a strict logical sense between two or more propositions. So when they say that two or more propositions are compatible, they mean that the propositions in question are logically consistent, coherent, or possibly "consilient".[13] Strictly speaking, it is only propositions or statements (i.e., assertions or claims) that are held to be either logically compatible or incompatible. The criterion used in determining whether propositions are logically compatible is based on logical consistency. If two propositions are such that their conjunction is logically consistent (e.g., their conjunction does not involve a logical contradiction), the propositions are said to be compatible. On the contrary, if two

[12] See J. Mullen. *Hard Thinking* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995).

[13] E. O. Wilson, *op. cit*., uses the term "consilience" to mean compatible in the sense of coherent.

propositions are logically inconsistent – i.e., their conjunction results in a logical contradiction of the form *P and not-P* – it would follow that the two propositions are logically incompatible.

The sense of logical compatibility described thus far could be viewed as *formal* or *syntactic* compatibility, since it considers merely the formal conditions or syntactic rules for what it means for two or more propositions to be logically compatible. Within the sphere of logical compatibility, we can also distinguish different strengths of compatibility – i.e., different degrees to which propositions can be said to be compatible. We can use the expression *semantic compatibility* or *epistemic compatibility* to refer to the sense of logical compatibility that is concerned with differentiating various strengths of compatibility. We can differentiate among three distinct senses of compatibility-strength, which I refer to as *strong compatibilit*y, *weak compatibility*, and *moderate compatibility*.[14]

With the preceding – albeit preliminary – definitions of faith, reason, and compatibility in mind, we can now return to the central question of this essay: Are faith and reason compatible? In fact, we can now recast our original question in terms of the distinctions we have drawn.

3. Reframing the Question, "Are Faith and Reason Compatible?"

Having distinguished between faith as act and faith as content, between logical reasoning and non-logical reasoning, and between logical compatibility and non-logical compatibility, let us return to our original question. We can now ask whether faith, in both its dynamic and substantive senses, is compatible (in a sense of logical compatibility) with reason in its strong or logical sense. Essentially, we can now pose two separate questions:

A. Is the act of faith (i.e., one's believing that God exists) compatible with logical reason?
B. Is the content of one's faith (i.e., the set of religious doctrines, articles, etc.) compatible with logical reason?

We begin with question A. First, we should note that strictly speaking, one's acts (or actions) are neither logically compatible nor logically incompatible with reason, since acts are not propositional. What is perhaps really being asked in Question A is not so much a question about logical compatibility, but instead one having to do with whether there can be a logical justification – i.e., a rational foundation – for one's religious beliefs. But what exactly would count as a rational justification for one's religious choices, convictions, or commitments?

Some interesting arguments have been put forth to show why it is rational to believe that God exists. A classic argument along these lines, advanced by Pascal in the 17th century, is now commonly referred to as *Pascal's Wager*.[15] Pascal argued that by weighing advantages and disadvantages of the wager involving God's existence in terms of rational decision theory, there are good reasons to wager (and, hence, believe) that God exists.[16] Some, however, have challenged Pascal on this point.[17]

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[14]We define and further consider each of these distinctions in Section 4.

[15]See Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* (*Thoughts*) Trans. W. F. Trotter (New York: Collier, 1910).

[16] Pascal argued that we can wager either that God exists or that God does not exist. Independent of our wager (or our belief) about God's existence, it is the case (necessarily) that either God exists or God does not exist. If God exists and we wager (i.e., we believe) that God exists, then our gain is infinite (eternal salvation). If we wager that God exists but God does not exist, then there is no infinite gain, but neither is there infinite loss (only the finite loss of having sacrificed some earthly pleasures that might have been gained in living as a non-believer). If we wager that God does not exist, and if God does not exist, then we also experience no infinite loss (and we might instead experience some finite gain). However, if we wager that God does not exist, but it turns out that God does exist, then we suffer infinite loss.

Although Question A, which deals with issues related to a rational foundation for faith as act, is an important and interesting philosophical question, let us assume for the sake of argument that the *act of faith* (i.e., the act of one's believing that God exists) can be justified on rational grounds. Because Question A raises interesting questions about the nature of justification for an individual's holding one or more beliefs, it appears to be an epistemological question; as such, it might be better handled by epistemologists who examine notions such as epistemic and non-epistemic beliefs, as well as criteria for evidence and justification for holding a certain belief. However, an analysis of that question based on those kinds of criteria would take us beyond the scope of this essay.

We next turn to Question B, which focuses on the *content* of religious beliefs. Unlike Question A, which is concerned with epistemological issues involving the nature (as opposed to the content) of religious beliefs and which is really not a genuine question about logical compatibility, Question B can be resolved via an analysis of criteria that have to do solely with the rules for logical compatibility. Because of this possibility, I believe that it would be more fruitful, for our purposes to focus on questions of logical compatibility involving *faith as content* or faith in its substantive aspect. So we will henceforth limit our analysis of the question of logical compatibility between faith and reason to the sense of "faith" that we earlier called "substantive" – i.e., the sense of faith *qua* articles and doctrines that define a specific religion, such as Roman Catholicism.

4. Compatibilism, Incompatibilism, and Fideism: Some Distinctions

Essentially, there are two positions that one can take with respect to the question of whether faith (as content) and logical reason are compatible: (i) Faith and reason *are* logically compatible, and (ii) Faith and reason *are not* logically compatible. We begin with an analysis of (ii), which we can call the *incompatibility thesis*. Those who hold this view include some theists as well as non-theists.[18] Theists who subscribe to the incompatibility thesis are also often referred to as *fideists*. A fideist is one who believes that faith is independent of, and superior to, reason. Because of this belief, many fideists claim to have no difficulty in reconciling the fact that logical reason and religious beliefs might well be at odds.

4.1 Two Types of Fideism

Fideists tend to fall into one of two different groups. Following religious thinkers like Calvin,[19] some fideists hold that faith is not so much against reason, but rather that it transcends reason. We can call this theory the *transrational* view of fideism.[20] A different view of fideism, held by Kierkegaard[21] and his

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[17]In the philosophical literature, some have claimed that it is not moral to hold a particular belief, such as the belief that God exists, merely because of the cost-benefits analysis associated with it. See, for example, W. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief." On the contrary, William James (in "The Will to Believe") has defended what some call "the pragmatic justification of belief," suggesting that it is not immoral to assent to certain beliefs in light of the consequences of holding those beliefs. We will not pursue this line of debate here since doing so would take us beyond the scope of this essay. Instead, we can assume with Pascal and others that because there are rational grounds (based on pragmatic criteria) for believing that God exists, faith and reason are compatible notions when analyzed from the perspective of Question A.

[18]Non-theists, such as atheists and agnostics, would also likely be incompatibilists. However, if non-theists are by default non-believers, then they might view arguments about whether faith and reason are compatible notions to be irrelevant.

[19]See, for example, J. Calvin. *Institutes of Christian Religion*, tr. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster press, 1960).

[20]L. Pojman uses the term "transrational" to describe one strand of fideism. See L. Pojman, ed. *Philosophy: The Quest*

followers, is that faith and reason are incompatible because faith "flies in the face of reason." Kierkegaard maintains that because of this incompatibility, faith requires that we take a "leap." On Kierkegaard's view, not only are faith and reason viewed as logically inconsistent notions, but faith itself is said to be "absurd." We can call this type of fideist theory the *anti-rational* view of fideism. Unlike transrational fideists, who believe that faith involves doctrines that are above or superior to logical reason, anti-rational fideists suggest that religious faith is contrary to or against reason.
One could argue that some thinkers, such as Tertullian[22] and St. Paul,[23] have held both the transrationalist and anti-rationalist views of fideism. Regardless of which position a fideist holds, most would likely concede that religious faith might well appear to be irrational when judged against the rigorous and objective standards of deductive reason.[24]

Contrary to the position held by fideists (and other incompatibilists), many compatibilists believe that faith (as content) and logical reason are perfectly consistent. Yet, the sense in which these two notions are said to be compatible has not always been clear articulated. We can now return to some earlier distinctions we drew regarding the three different senses of semantic or epistemic compatibility: weak, moderate, and strong compatibility.

4.2 Compatibilism and Incompatibilism: Three Senses of Logical Compatibility

In the weakest sense of the claim that faith and reason are logically compatible, all that is required is that the two notions do not logically contradict each other. As such, faith and reason can be viewed as domains that coexist harmoniously, even though no elements in either domain intersect or overlap. For example, the domains of faith and reason could be viewed as parallel (and thus non-converging) domains in a universe. Let us call this the *weak* sense of compatibility regarding faith and reason.

A second sense of compatibility suggests that the relationship between faith and reason is one such that each is incomplete without the other. For example, in *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II argues that reason is "incomplete" without faith and that faith "seeks out" reason.[25] (For John Paul, reason also appears, at times, to be subservient to faith.) On this view, faith and reason could be seen as elements in a single domain, perhaps as a continuum of elements in a vertical domain with faith constituting the upper portion and reason the lower portion of that domain. In this scheme, reason would be incomplete and thus inadequate without faith. Because of the strong dependency that reason has on faith in this scheme, we can call this view of the relationship between faith and reason the *strong* sense of compatibility.

A third and final view of compatibility suggests that faith and reason are more than merely harmonious, but less than mutually dependent, notions. Unlike weak compatibilism, where elements in the domains of faith and reason need never overlap or intersect, in moderate compatibilism certain

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for Truth (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992).

[21]See S. Kierkegaard. *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts*. In R. Bertall, ed. *A Kierkegaard Anthology* (New York: Random House, 1946).

[22]On the one hand, Church Father Tertullian proclaims "I believe because it is absurd" (*Credo ad absurdum*). On the other hand, he asks: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"

[23]L. Pojman, for example, interprets St. Paul (in *Corinthians I*) as holding both views of fideism. See L. Pojman, "Faith and Reason." Chapter 10 in *Philosophy: The Pursuit of Wisdom* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1994).

[24]For a fuller discussion of this point, see L. Pojman, "Is Faith Compatible with Reason?" In *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*, *op. cit*.

[25]See John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (*op. cit*.), Chapters 3 and 4.

elements of the two domains overlap or intersect at certain points.[26] And unlike in the strong compatibilist position where the relationship between faith and reason can be viewed as elements existing in a domain portrayed vertically – a scheme in which faith has the "upper hand" – in the moderate compatibility position, faith and reason can be seen as elements in domains that can be portrayed along a horizontal axis. It is interesting to note that in *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II seems, at times, also to hold the moderate compatibilist position. Thus John Paul tends to vacillate between what we have called the moderate and strong senses of compatibilism.

5. Faith as Content: Three Types of Beliefs

Having drawn some critical distinctions among and within compatibilism, incompatibilism, and fideism, we can now consider more directly the question whether the content of faith is compatible with logical reason. With regard to faith as content, it should be noted that virtually every institutionalized religion is comprised of a *system* of beliefs and doctrines. The beliefs can be further categorized into three types:[27]

1. Beliefs whose truth is discoverable by natural reason
2. Beliefs whose truth is not discoverable by reason, but whose truth is logically compatible with natural reason
3. Beliefs whose truth is logically incompatible with reason (i.e., they defy the laws of reason because they consist of contradictory claims of the form P and not-P).

We next apply this threefold model to beliefs corresponding to the doctrines that make up the Roman Catholic Faith. Among the beliefs in Category 1 – viz., those whose truth is discoverable by natural reason – are beliefs identified with the Preambles of Faith. (The "Preambles" can be contrasted with the Articles of Faith). The belief that the universe was created by a supreme being is an example of a belief that is both a Preamble of Faith and one whose truth is held to be discoverable by natural reason. St. Thomas Aquinas in his Cosmological and Teleological arguments for the existence of God,[28] for example, defends such a belief on rational grounds alone by appealing to natural reason to establish the existence of God in the forms of a *first-mover*, an *uncaused cause*, and a *grand designer*. And St. Anselm of Canterbury, in the 11th century, put forth an argument that purports to deduce the existence of God from the very concept of a necessary being.[29] So, Anselm and Aquinas both argued that belief in the existence of God could be demonstrated purely on rational grounds.

Examples of beliefs in Category 2, which are compatible with reason but which are not discoverable through natural reason alone, are certain beliefs that are also included in the Articles of Faith. For example, the following three beliefs

(I) Humans are born with Original Sin
(II) The Sacrament of Baptism removes Original Sin
(III) God created the universe in six days (and rested on the seventh day)

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[26] This connection can be illustrated in overlapping sections of Euler diagrams in which some Articles of Faith (as we will see in the next section of this essay) can be viewed as elements that reside both in the domain of faith and the domain of reason.

[27] I am grateful to Lloyd Carr for pointing out to me this distinction regarding the content of religious beliefs.

[28] See Thomas Aquinas, "Five Ways." In *Summa Theologia*, *op cit*.

[29] See St. Anselm, *Proslogium*. In *St. Anselm, Basic Writings*. trans. S. W. Deane (Lasalle, IL: Open Court, 1903).

are all examples of beliefs whose truth is compatible with reason but which is not discoverable through reason alone. Each of these beliefs is compatible with reason because each avoids committing a logical contradiction. Yet none of these beliefs is such that its truth can be demonstrated by reason alone. In addition, each belief requires faith as a means for a justification in holding it to be true.

Some Articles of Faith are such that not only is their truth unable to be discovered by natural reason, but are also entail claims that are strictly speaking, incompatible with logical reason. Consider the beliefs in Category 3. These beliefs are incompatible with reason because their truth claims defy the laws of logic. For example, consider the following three propositions, each of which is also an Article of Faith:

(IV) God is three persons and God is one (trinity/unity)
(V) God is immutable and God became man
(VI) God is all-powerful and all-caring, and God allows evil to exist.

Each of these beliefs contains a logical contradiction of the form *P and not-P*. In this sense, they are like beliefs involving square circles.[30]

Whereas beliefs included in Categories 1 and 2 are compatible with reason, those in Category 3 are not. And whereas beliefs included in Category 1 are such that their truth is discoverable through natural reason, beliefs included in Categories 2 and 3 are not. Because the latter set of beliefs are such that their truth can only be revealed (and not demonstrated through natural reason), they are called Articles of Faith. Beliefs in Category 3, unlike those in Categories 1 and 2, are not compatible with reason because they are logical contradictions. Sometimes Articles of Faith in Category 3 are referred to as "mysteries."[31]

6. Some Preliminary Conclusions Regarding the Compatibility of Faith and Reason

Thus far we have differentiated two senses of "faith" – dynamic and substantive – and three senses of "compatibility." With respect to the two senses of faith, we have seen that two separate questions related to the compatibility of religious faith and logical reason can be generated:

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[30]We might be inclined to assume that certain beliefs in Category 3 are less controversial than some of those in Category 2. For example, one might infer that the claim "God created the universe in six days (and rested on the seventh day)" – a claim that falls in Category 2 – is difficult to defend on logical grounds because of our contemporary beliefs involving scientific evidence. However, this claim is clearly compatible with the principles of logic, since it does not commit a logical contradiction. Conversely, one might believe that a claim such as "God as Jesus is both human and divine," which would fall in Category 3, is uncontroversial with respect to logical reason. However, if God is human, then God cannot be non-human. And if God is divine, then God cannot be non-divine. Although it is logically possible that God created the universe in six days, it is not logically possible that God is both human and non-human, at the same time and in the same respect. The latter claim, as in the case of a claim involving a square circle, has the logical form *P and not-P*.

[31]The term "mystery," however, is ambiguous. Sometimes it is used to describe a type of puzzle, the answer to which *is* discoverable in principle. For example, there are occasions in which we claim to need one more piece of evidence (or some missing conceptual link) to solve a certain mystery *qua* puzzle. Consider, for example, a murder mystery, where "the mystery" could be resolved if only the "missing gun" were to appear. Also consider the sense of "mystery" as an enigma or conundrum. In this sense of the term, a mystery is *not* solvable – not even in principle. What *kind* of evidence could ever resolve the conundrums included in Category 3? Rather than referring to our beliefs that fall into Category 3 as mysteries, perhaps we should call them "enigmas." Of course, the important point here is not one of nomenclature but rather to see why some kinds of beliefs can never be confirmed through logical reason, since, by their very nature, they violate the principles of logic. We briefly return the concept of mystery and its role in the faith- reason debate in the concluding section of this essay.

(A) Is one's act of faith (i.e., one's believing that God exists) compatible with logical reason?
(B) Is the content of one's faith (i.e., the doctrines, articles, etc.) compatible with logical reason?

Regarding Question A, we have seen that, strictly speaking, acts and actions are themselves not the kinds of things that are either logically compatible or logically incompatible with reason. We also saw that Question A, when properly understood, is not so much concerned with questions related to logical compatibility between faith and reason as it is with whether there can be a rational foundation or logical justification for one's religious beliefs. And we have granted, for purposes of this essay, that such beliefs might indeed be justified on pragmatic and on rational grounds. Our primary focus has been on compatibility questions related to faith in its substantive sense, as expressed in Question *B*, with respect to three categories of logical compatibility (weak, moderate, and strong). We have seen that the Preambles of Faith (which are among the beliefs included in Category 1) as well as certain Articles of Faith – *viz*., those in Category 2 – are compatible with logical reason. The Articles of Faith in Category 3 *are not* compatible with logical reason because, by definition, they violate the principle of logical contradiction. Of course, this is not problematic for transrational fideists, since these articles are based on beliefs whose truth lies "beyond" logical reason.

Saying that the articles in Category 3 are incompatible with reason is simply to say that these articles involve logical contradictions and that logical reason alone could never help us to understand them. Thus, it would seem to follow that articles in Category 3 can be accepted only on faith (as act), and in spite of logical reason. The incompatibility thesis regarding faith and reason fails for several reasons. First, it misses the point that the Preambles of Faith as well as certain Articles of Faith (*viz*., beliefs in Category 2) are indeed compatible with reason. However, since Articles of Faith in Category 3 are based on beliefs whose truth cannot be understood by reason alone, it would seem that certain incompatibilists – *viz.*, the transrational fideists – are correct with respect to what is required to accept of articles in that category.

Next, consider the three compatibilist positions: weak, strong, and moderate compatibility. Although the weak compatibility thesis correctly holds that faith and reason are compatible, this version of the compatibility thesis is overall inadequate. As in the case of the incompatibility thesis, the weak compatibility thesis fails. The problem with the weak compatibility thesis is that it doesn't go far enough in showing the relationship between faith and reason as domains with overlapping elements. Thus, the weak compatibility thesis fails because it does not seem to recognize that the domains of faith and reason can do more than *merely* coexist in some parallel scheme, and because it unable to show at which points elements in the two domains overlap or intersect.

Whereas the weak compatibility thesis is too weak, the strong compatibility thesis seems to go too far. The latter thesis correctly holds that certain Articles of Faith, such as those in Category 2, are logically compatible with reason. However, it incorrectly assumes that all Articles of Faith, including those Articles in Category 3, are logically compatible with reason.

Finally, the moderate compatibility thesis would seem to be the most plausible of the four positions – i.e., the three compatibilist positions as well as both versions of the incompatibilist position – considered in this essay. With respect to the three compatibilist positions that we considered, only the moderate compatibility position can show which Articles of Faith are logically compatible with reason and show why they are compatible. In showing how and why those Articles of Faith in Category 2 are compatible with logical reason, and why those Articles in Category 3 are not, the moderate compatibility position provides a useful technique for distinguishing more clearly among the various Articles of Faith. It is also shows us how certain Articles of Faith – *viz*., those Articles in Category 2 – are more similar in

terms of their logical character to the Preambles of Faith (in Category 1) than they are to those Articles of Faith in Category 3.

So it would seem that despite the claims of both transrational and anti-rational fideists, as well as incompatibilists of the non-theistic sort, the moderate compatibilist position can successfully withstand the attacks leveled against it by those who argue that doctrines of faith are incompatible with logical reason. However, even if the compatibilist position has withstood the attacks advanced by certain "traditional" incompatibilists, a more recent threat to compatibilism has come from a view that can best be described as *relativism*. As noted briefly in the introduction to this essay, contemporary relativists can be seen as advancing a set of claims that need to be addressed by those who hold that faith and reason are logically compatible.

7. Relativism and Its Implications for the Compatibility of Faith and Reason

Because contemporary forms of relativism have significantly influenced our popular culture, especially with respect to debates affecting moral and social issues, I believe that relativism poses a more insidious threat to the compatibility thesis than many of the more traditional arguments that have been advanced to establish either the irrational or transrational aspect of faith *vis-à-vis* logical reason. What, exactly, is relativism? Why is it so attractive? And why does it threaten the position that religious faith and logical reason can be compatible? We briefly consider each of these questions.

Relativism is the view that what *is* true or false, or what is (morally) right or wrong, depends upon a certain group's (e.g., a specific culture's) beliefs about what is true or false or its beliefs about what is morally right or wrong. We can further distinguish between *epistemological relativism* and *ethical relativism*. Whereas the former raises issues concerned with standards of truth and falsity, ethical relativism introduces concerns involving standards for morally right and wrong behavior. Postmodernism seems to imply or presuppose elements of epistemological relativism, while (non-reflective ethical relativism has influenced the thinking in decisions affecting our popular culture). We briefly examine both forms of relativism, beginning with an analysis of ethical relativism.

7.1 Ethical Relativism

Initially, some of the claims made by ethical relativists might seem plausible and even attractive; however, these claims are replete with conceptual difficulties. To understand why this is so, it is helpful to draw yet another crucial distinction – i.e., one between ethical relativism and cultural relativism. According to the latter thesis, different groups have different beliefs about what is right or wrong. As such, cultural relativism is simply a descriptive thesis. We can concede that the descriptive claims advanced by cultural relativists might indeed be true. But even if cultural relativism is correct as a descriptive thesis, it is by no means clear that it logically implies ethical relativism, which is a normative thesis.

As a normative thesis, ethical relativism goes beyond cultural relativism by asserting that (because different groups have different views about what is morally right or wrong) there can be no universal standard of morality. So, ethical relativists conclude that what *is* morally right or wrong can be determined only within a particular culture or context.[32] It has now become commonplace in our popular culture to assume that what is morally right or wrong must simply be *relative* to the standards of a

[32]For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between cultural and ethical relativism, see H. T. Tavani, *Ethics and Technology*. 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007).

particular group of culture. Many also assume that because of this, we should be tolerant of diverse cultures and diverse systems of beliefs. However, Pojman believes that ethical relativists who claim we should (i.e., have a moral obligation to) be *tolerant* in our assessment of the moral values exhibited in various cultures are making a claim that is logically inconsistent with ethical relativism.[33] In effect, these relativists are saying that tolerance is, or *ought* to be, a universal norm. But critics such as Pojman note that if this latter claim is true, then ethical relativism is a logically inconsistent thesis because now there is at least one universal moral value or norm – viz., tolerance.[34]

Other conceptual difficulties also arise in the case of ethical relativism. For example, relativists tend to equate the notions of "morally right" and "morally permissible" simply with getting agreement or consensus within a group. Thus, ethical relativism implies that if the majority of the members of culture *C* agree that a certain course of action is permissible, then such a course of action *is* morally permissible. Those who hold such a view often go on to say that what is right or wrong can only be defined by a community, and that those outside the community cannot make valid ethical judgments that pertain to individuals within a community. However, as Pojman and others point out, some rather bizarre consequences would seem to follow from the doctrine of ethical relativism. For example, on the relativist's line of reasoning, Joseph Stalin's behavior, if accepted by the majority of a culture, would be morally permissible in that culture. This view would further seem to imply that Stalin was morally no better or no worse a person than Mother Teresa, since the two individuals were merely different persons participating in cultures that had different standards and conceptions of right and wrong.[35] However, this inference runs counter to our received intuitions about morality.

Why has ethical relativism been so attractive, given its significant logical flaws? One possible answer is, as Pojman suggests, that many people seem to assume that the only alternative to relativism is moral absolutism, which is also difficult to defend and which is often associated with religious intolerance. Hence, many people seem reluctant to accept moral absolutism as an alternative position. But Pojman and others, including the present author, do not believe that one must always choose between moral absolutism and moral relativism. For example, Pojman presents a view called "moral objectivism," which avoids the extremes of both relativism and absolutism.[36] And Bernard Gert proposes his theory of *common morality*[37] as an alternative to relativism, which also does not require one to accept moral absolutism because he or she rejects relativism. Unfortunately, an analysis of Gert's position in the detail that it deserves is beyond the scope of this essay. In addition to Gert and Pojman, other philosophers have shown that rejecting moral relativism does not mean that one must necessarily accept ethical relativism.

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[33] See, for example, L. Pojman, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong*. 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2006).

[34] *Ibid*.

[35] *Ibid*.

[36] *Ibid*.

[37] B. Gert has argued that even if there is no uniquely correct answer to every moral problem, there are still many "incorrect" answers. Thus he believes that philosophers can avoid being committed to moral relativism merely because they reject moral absolutism. See *B. Gert Morality: Its Nature and Justification*. Rev ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) and *Common Morality: Deciding What to Do* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). For a brief description and summary of Gert's position, see my accounts in H. Tavani, *Ethics and Technology*, 2007 (*op. cit.*), and in H. Tavani, ed. *Ethics, Computing, and Genomics* (Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett, 2006).

In our analysis thus far, we have defined relativism (briefly distinguishing between ethical relativism and cultural relativism), have shown why it is initially attractive, and have exposed some of its major conceptual flaws. Having shown some of the reasons why ethical relativism is an incoherent and irrational position, we can ask why it would pose a threat to the compatibilist view regarding faith and reason. For many non-reflective relativists who also purport to be Christians, it might be difficult to see the logical inconsistency in accepting core claims of Christianity while at the same time holding the view that morality is ultimately relative to a given culture. This inconsistency is perhaps more readily apparent when relativism is analyzed as an epistemological thesis.

7.2 Epistemological Relativism

Examples similar to those used in the preceding section to illustrate conceptual flaws inherent in ethical relativism can also be applied to epistemological relativism, which we defined earlier as the view that there are no absolute truths since the criteria or standards for truth will vary from group to group. And as in the case of ethical relativists' claims involving tolerance, claims put forth by epistemological relativists can also be shown to be self-refuting. That is, epistemological relativism turns out to be a logically-contradictory (and thus self-destructive) position for many of the same reasons that ethical relativism does. Like ethical relativism, epistemological relativism might at first glance seem to be a very attractive position. However, the latter brand of relativism, like the former, is severely flawed and thus it easily "self-destructs."

A paradoxical thesis that that results from all variations of epistemological relativism is: If relativism is true, then it must be false! Consider, for example, the epistemological relativist's claim that there are no absolute truths. Is that claim true? If the answer is *no*, then the relativist's claim is false since there would then have to be at least one absolute truth. If, on the contrary, the answer is *yes*, then the relativist's claim must also be false. For if relativists are correct in claiming that there are no absolute truths, then there would appear to be at least one absolute truth – *viz*., the claim that there are no absolute truths! Of course, once we have admitted the existence of one absolute truth, it would seem to follow that the epistemological relativist's program is futile.

Other kinds of paradoxes are generated by relativism, but there is no need to articulate them here. A more important task for our purposes would be to determine whether there is a conceptual connection between epistemological relativism and postmodernism. For if postmodernism rests on a foundation of epistemological relativism, as I believe it does, then the postmodernist's position would also seem doomed to a fate of self-refutation.

8. Postmodernism

Much has been written about postmodernism as a contemporary literary movement, and I do not believe that there is any need to repeat the substance of those discussions here. Perhaps it is worth noting that many contemporary thinkers who have been identified with postmodernism object to being labeled "postmodern." Some of those thinkers might also reject the label of relativist as well. It is also worth noting that individuals who have been identified as postmodernists, including those who readily accept that label, are by no means unified in terms of their beliefs or in their methodological approaches to various issues. Instead, postmodernists seem to differ a great deal among themselves with respect to the degrees to which they subscribe to various "postmodern tenets."[38] However, we will not concern

[38]Thinkers as diverse as J. Derrida, J.F. Leyotard, and M. Focault are all commonly grouped under the heading

ourselves here with any of the subtle (or even any of the extreme) differences that might be found in the various strands of postmodernism. Nor will we attempt to provide a comprehensive and coherent account of postmodernism as a philosophical theory – if indeed it can satisfy the requirements for being one![39]

For purposes of this essay, we will consider a postmodernist to be someone who, among other things, rejects the possibility of universal truths and objective standards of rationality.[40] On the postmodernist view, no claims purporting to involve universal and objective truth would be possible since for postmoderns there is no *privileged* position (i.e., privileged culture, privileged individual, etc.) or context-independent standard (or, to use their nomenclature, independent "text") against which such claims could be verified. An interesting question that arises from this position is whether, at least on a practical level, one could consistently be a thoroughgoing postmodernist. Although at the theoretical level, a postmodernist might wish to dismiss the principles of Western science and engineering as merely Western or Eurocentric, and thus not universal, it is not so easy to dismiss certain principles of science and engineering in one's day-to-day affairs. As Dawkins so aptly exclaims, "Show me [a postmodernist] at thirty thousand feet and I will show you a hypocrite. Airplanes built according to scientific principles work."[41] So it would seem that postmodernism, like epistemological relativism, “self destructs” (or perhaps "self de*con*structs").[42] For a more extensive critique of postmodernism with respect to scientific principles and claims, see the account in Norris.[43] We will neither comment on nor add to that discussion here.

Our concern with postmodernism in this essay is mainly with the implications it has for the debate on the compatibility of faith and reason. Since postmodernism rejects the possibility of truth claims based on standards of reasoning that purport to be universal and objective, it would seem that the question of whether faith and reason are compatible is irrelevant for postmodernists. After all, on the postmodernist view, objective standards of reason would be unattainable (and would perhaps even be considered undesirable, if they were attainable). But this, in turn, raises the question of whether a person can consistently be both a postmodernist and a person of faith. In other words, can one be a postmodernist and, at the same time, accept the absolute truths that are central to a religion such a Roman Catholicism? If the answer is yes, how would the postmodernist do so in a way that is coherent? It would appear, then, that a *Catholic postmodernist* must be a schizophrenic individual, and that the expression "Catholic postmodernist" must be an oxymoron.[44] A critic might object that a postmodernist could consistently be a Roman Catholic in the same way that a fideist can proclaim one's faith in spite of

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"postmodern," despite the fact that each thinker's views differ markedly from each other's.

[39]Kenneth Schmitz has recently argued that postmodernism might be better viewed as a "distinctive *atmosphere*" or "a *tonality*," rather than as a legitimate philosophical theory. See K. Schmitz. "Postmodernism and the Catholic Tradition," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (Vol. LXXIII, No. 2, Spring 1999), pp. 233-252. (Italics, Schmitz).

[40]Of course, we should not infer that anyone who rejects the possibility of objective and universal truth claims is, *ipso facto*, a postmodernist. Rather, I suggest merely the weaker claim that to be a postmodernist is, among other things, to hold the view that there are no objective and universal truths.

[41]Cited in C. Norris, *Against Relativism: Philosophy of Science, Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), Preface.

[42]If postmodernism is based on a form of epistemological relativism, which I believe it is, then to the degree that epistemological relativism is internally inconsistent and self-destructive, postmodernism is inconsistent and self-destructive.

[43]*Ibid*.

[44]Some have attempted to reconcile postmodernism with religious beliefs as they related to organized or institutionalized religions. See, for example, B. Stull, *Religious Dialectics of Pain and Imagination* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).

his or her belief in the inadequacy of logical reason when applied to religious beliefs. However, fideists – whether they are anti-rationalists or transrationalists – acknowledge the existence of certain absolute and universal truths, even if those truths are ultimately inaccessible to human reason. This point would clearly seem to separate fideists from postmodernists, who reject the very notion of absolute and universal truth.

Thus far we have shown some of the inadequacies of postmodernism, especially when examined from the perspective of the classic debate about the compatibility of faith and reason. However, some critics, including postmodernists, might respond by asking what contribution contemporary philosophers have made to this discussion.

9. What *Can* a Philosopher Contribute to Discussions Involving Faith and Reason?

In our examination of the question whether faith and reason are logically compatible, we have elucidated key concepts at the core of this classic debate, including the notions of "faith" and "reason." We have also distinguished between two separate components or aspects of the debate: one regarding issues related to faith as *act* (which we saw was really a question about the rational foundation for one's belief and not about logical compatibility), and another regarding the issue of whether faith as *content* (or faith in its substantive sense as a set of doctrines and articles) is compatible with logical reason. We further differentiated among two senses of "theistic" incompatibilism or fideism and three senses of compatibilism. We argued that with respect to faith as content, both senses of fideism are misguided and that two of the three senses of compatibilism – viz, weak compatibilism and strong compatibilism – are not adequate, but defended a version of moderate compatibilism. The view of moderate compatibilism that we have articulated in this essay is largely in agreement with John Paul II's remarks on the compatibility of faith and reason, as stated in *Fides et Ratio*. If the arguments advanced in this essay succeed, then it would also seem that John Paul is correct in at least some of his claims regarding the compatibility of faith and reason.

A conclusion that faith and reason are compatible in the moderate sense of logical compatibility will not be particularly satisfying to many non-philosophers, especially to those who would prefer a more "black-and-white" answer to this question. So what can a philosopher say on this issue that might satisfy the non-philosopher? What more light can a philosopher *qua* philosopher possibly shed on the debate over faith and reason? Unlike scientists who set out to *discover* truth, philosophers approach truth claims by way of a methodology that engages in the analysis and clarification of key concepts employed in those claims. And unlike those theologians who venture beyond the world of natural reason into the realm of revealed truth, philosophers are bound by the limits of logical reason. So when asked, "What kind of a contribution can a philosopher possibly make to questions regarding the compatibly of faith and reason?" the answer, put quite simply, is that philosophers can help frame the question more clearly. It should be noted that only when a particular question is properly framed, the concepts clearly elucidated, and the necessary distinctions properly drawn, can we possibly hope to get a satisfactory answer to that question.

As a result of the analysis of certain key concepts, positions, and arguments in this essay, my hope is that non-philosophers might also gain a clearer understanding of some of the subtle, yet significant, points in the debate about the compatibility of faith and reason – points that we saw need careful and critical analysis. It is in this sense, then, that a philosopher might indeed have something worthwhile to contribute to the debate. Yet, I realize that many non-philosophers will still not be satisfied with such an answer and will still insist on much more being said!

By showing through philosophical argumentation that faith and reason can be compatible, at least in the sense of moderate compatibility that we articulated, philosophy has taken us to the next step in the debate. We can now call upon theologians to help us to better understand the remaining questions that philosophers *qua* philosophers cannot hope to answer. For example, how are we to understand those Articles of Faith that we grouped into "Category 3," which involve logical contradictions of the form *P and not-P*? Earlier in this essay, we saw that this set of articles might be better understood when viewed as "mysteries," or possibly as enigmas or conundrums. Lizotte has suggested that the notion of mystery might serve as a promising entry point into discussions involving certain riddles, inherent in religious doctrines, that are not merely beyond the grasp of logical reason but that also tend to defy logic itself.[45] It is perhaps worth noting that in contemporary philosophy, the concept of "mystery" has not received the serious consideration and discussion that some believe it deserves. Because discussions involving the concept of mystery have often been viewed as antithetical to scientific inquiry, one might infer that such discussions would be antithetical to philosophical inquiry as well. According to Marsh, however, "transcendental mysteries" are "not antithetical to thinking" but instead provide "the very milieu" in which thinking "functions."[46] Unfortunately, Marsh does not offer an argument to support this provocative claim. Since a detailed discussion and analysis of mystery would take us beyond the scope of this essay, that concept will not be further considered here.[47]

10. Closing Remarks

Since I have commented on relevant sections of *Fides et Ratio* throughout this essay, it would perhaps be appropriate to close with a few final comments on John Paul's II's encyclical. In several sections of that work, John Paul expresses his concern about current trends in science, philosophy, and literary criticism, which he believes undermine the possibility of compatibility between faith and reason.[48] John Paul correctly notes that since contemporary movements such as postmodernism have dismissed the important role that reason plays in attempting to understand universal truth claims, they have also undermined our ability to grasp clearly the compatibility that exists between faith and reason. On more than one occasion in *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul calls for a return to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. John Paul believes that contemporary philosophy has "lost its way," because of influences from a series of recent secular movements that include existentialism, empiricism, positivism, and most recently postmodernism. John Paul correctly notes the dangerous implications that these popular contemporary movements have had for the Catholic intellectual tradition and thus for the Catholic Church. But, as an alternative, can contemporary philosophy successfully embrace a Thomistic philosophy of the sort that John Paul suggests? Accepting such a position raises two distinct kinds of challenges: one having to do

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[45]See P. Lizotte. "The Problem of Mystery in a Consilient Age." In *Proceedings of the First Rivier College Faculty Summer Seminar*, 2000, pp. 5-16.

[46]J. Marsh, "Comments on Schmitz, 'Postmodernism and the Catholic Tradition'," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (Vol. LXXIII, No. 2, Spring 1999), pp. 266-275.

[47]For a more detailed discussion of mystery, see P. Lizotte, *op. cit*. See also fn. 31 in this essay.

[48]See John Paul II, *op cit.*, who points out that many scientists and rationalists believe that reason alone is sufficient to account for our understanding of human nature. Some contemporary scientists such as E. O. Wilson (*op. cit.*) believe that virtually all aspects of human nature (including our beliefs about God, the soul, and ethics) can be understood solely in terms of certain epigenetic rules. However, it is not at all clear how Wilson can claim to succeed in reducing any of these beliefs to a set of epigenetic rules. In the case of ethics, for example, his reductionist program fails to account for the *normative* (in addition to the merely descriptive) aspects of morality.

with the nature of philosophical *methodology*, and the other with the *autonomy* of philosophy as academic discipline. We briefly examine each challenge.

With respect to contemporary philosophical methodology, a number points need to be made. First, John Paul is essentially correct in his observation that contemporary philosophy has "turned inward on itself." Relatively few contemporary philosophers would dare to take on the range of metaphysical questions examined in many of the grand philosophical systems of modernity and premodernity. But it is important to note that contemporary mainstream philosophy, unlike postmodernism, has not abandoned the notion of objective reason, nor has it in any way minimized the role of reason in the pursuit of truth. Also, and perhaps more importantly, philosophy has not abandoned the ideal of objective truth, which is critical to many religious systems including Roman Catholicism. Thus, contemporary philosophy is fundamentally compatible with Catholicism in a way that postmodernism is not and cannot be.

We should note that although postmoderns reject modernity, they have not advocated that we return to the premodern era – i.e., a time when philosophy and the Church generally enjoyed a greater sense of cooperation. Because many of the positions advanced by modern philosophers (since the 17th century) have been at odds with the Church, some religious thinkers might initially perceive postmodernism as an ally that can help the Church to dismantle the framework of modernity. However, in the dismantling process, postmodernists have – perhaps unwittingly – dismantled (or to use the language of postmodernism, "deconstructed") certain aspects of the Church's framework as well.

In one sense, Catholicism and mainstream philosophy have been at odds since the beginning of the modern period when Descartes led the way in shifting the primary focus of philosophical inquiry from metaphysical questions having to do with *being* (in an independent and objective sense) to epistemological questions having to do with "knowing" – especially with the role of *the knower*. For Descartes and the moderns, the critical question of the day was no longer one of ontology or being (including a Supreme Being), but rather: What can "I," *qua* knower (as conscious subject) possibly claim to know? Thus we see a shift in inquiry from concerns about *objective being* (i.e., "what kinds of things are there, and what truths can be known *objectively*?") to one focusing on *subjective conscious* (i.e., "what can *I* know?"). Yet despite this shift, modern philosophers tenaciously held to the claim that there are objective standards of reason. Indeed, Descartes himself uses such standards to demonstrate the existence of God on grounds similar to those advanced by Aquinas four centuries earlier.[49] Perhaps we should not be surprised that Descartes – given his appeal to standards of deductive reasoning – arrived at conclusions similar to those of Aquinas, in spite of the fact that each philosopher used a different mode of philosophical inquiry. It is certainly worth noting that on the postmodernist's mode of inquiry, which eschews objective standards of reason, no such conclusion can be reached.

Can contemporary philosophy return to an updated version of Thomism, as John Paul seems to suggest it should?[50] Is there a "new Thomas," in the role of reconciler, waiting in the wings? Could there

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[49]In the *Third Meditation*, Descartes uses a "causal" proof to demonstrate the existence of God. This argument bears an interesting resemblance to Aquinas' celebrated "Cosmological Argument" for demonstrating God's existence. It is also worth noting that in his *Fifth Mediation*, Descartes employs a variation of the Ontological Argument, introduced by St. Anselm, to show that God, as a necessary Being, must exist. So Descartes, the "father" of modern philosophy (and presumably of "modernity" as well), arrives at conclusions similar to those of his medieval predecessors (in what we can now call the "premodern era"). See R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In E. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, eds. *Descartes: Philosophical Works*. Vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

[50]J. Caputo has suggested a return to the philosophy of St. Augustine (rather than to the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas). See J. Caputo, "Commentary on Ken Schmitz, "Postmodernism and the Catholic Church," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (Vol. LXXIII, No. 2, Spring 1999), pp. 253-259.

be such a reconciler? Perhaps a look at the discipline of academic philosophy in Thomas Aquinas' time will shed some light on this question. During the Scholastic Period, natural science was a part of philosophy. At that time, many scholars believed that the methodologies of philosophy and science were continuous. Indeed, the methodologies and the objectives of philosophy and theology were also considered to be continuous. For Aquinas and other great philosophers before the 17th century, many questions in science were also considered questions of philosophy. The natural sciences, of course, broke off from philosophy, and the social sciences later followed in staking out separate disciplines. Today, scientists continue their pursuit of discovery through a methodology that is largely empirical. The methodology of philosophy, on the contrary, is non-empirical or analytical. Furthermore, many of the questions that philosophers consider, unlike those considered by most scientists, are often either metaphysical or axiological in nature. Contemporary philosophers, however, do not presume to have a privileged access to metaphysical truths. In contemporary philosophy, speculation has, in large part, given way to a method of conceptual analysis. And gone are the days when philosophy was a viewed simply as a "handmaiden" to either science or theology.[51]

The final point that I wish to consider in this essay has to do with the question of autonomy in philosophy. As John Paul correctly points out in *Fides et Ratio*, philosophy must be autonomous to be a legitimate academic discipline. And he tells philosophers that they "should rest assured of [the Church's] respect of the rightful autonomy of their discipline." Yet John Paul seems at times to waver on this point, especially in those passages in which he also calls for a return to a kind of Thomistic philosophy. Can John Paul consistently hold both views – i.e., can he tell philosophers what kind of philosophy they should do, and at the same time say that philosophy should be an autonomous academic discipline? It is difficult to see how anyone can embrace both views in a way that is logically consistent. To be autonomous, philosophy as an academic discipline cannot be subordinate to any external authority, ideology, or institution. It can, however, advance rational arguments to support certain positions central to a given institution or to a particular ideology, provided that those positions are in accordance with (i.e., are logically compatible with) objective standards of reason.

In this essay, we have seen that because faith (as content) and reason are (with the exception of certain Articles of Faith in "Category 3") logically compatible notions, philosophers can advance arguments to defend the Church's position regarding the compatibility of faith and reason. Philosophers, through the use of arguments based on objective standards of reason, can also assist the Church in attacking contemporary secular movements such as relativism and postmodernism, which threaten Catholicism's very foundations. Philosophical argumentation can also be used to show the flaws in claims advanced by contemporary rationalists and scientists, including reductionists such as E. O. Wilson who attempt to reduce religious questions (having to do with the soul and human nature) to scientific questions. In order to support the Church's claims on these and other positions, in a way that has academic credibility, philosophy must be an autonomous discipline; that is, it must enjoy the same measure of autonomy as any other academic discipline.

There is perhaps a certain irony or paradox for John Paul regarding his preferred role for academic philosophy and philosophers. On the one hand, he would no doubt like for philosophy to become a discipline whose methods and objectives better served the Church and its ends. On the other hand, if philosophy were that kind of academic discipline, it would lose its force as an objective means for defending (on logical and detached grounds) a range of positions that are essential to the Church. Thus it

[51]For an interesting discussion of the role of philosophy as "handmaiden," see J. L. A. Garcia, "Death of the (Hand)maiden: Contemporary Philosophy in *Faith and Reason*," *Logos* (Vol. 2, No. 3, Summer 1999), pp. 11-19.

would seem to follow that a truly autonomous philosophy[52] – i.e., one whose methodology and modes of inquiry are determined within philosophy itself, and not by institutions or authorities external to the discipline – is John Paul's strongest advocate in defending the Church against the challenges posed by contemporary relativism and postmodernism, as well as by the positions he describes as scientism and rationalism.

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[52] R. Spinello believes that John Paul's position allows for philosophy to remain an autonomous discipline. See R. Spinello, *The Genius of John Paul II: The Great Pope's Moral Wisdom* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 2007), p. 5. But Spinello (like John Paul and others) believes that an autonomous philosophy cannot be "self-sufficient" if it is not completed by faith. See also A. Dulles, "Can Philosophy Be Christian?" *First Things* (April 2000), pp. 24-29, for a similar defense of this position.

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