

G. White's comments on John 3:1-17: "So with the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. It can no more be explained than can the movements of the wind" (p. 172). She continues, "It is impossible for finite minds to comprehend the work of redemption. Its mystery exceeds human knowledge" (p. 173).

- 9 The notion that the knowledge of faith exhibits the character of immediacy is corroborated by Ellen White in her description of Mary's inability to understand or explain her anointing of Jesus' feet: "The Holy Spirit had planned for her, and she had obeyed its promptings. Inspiration stoops to give no reason. An unseen presence, it speaks to mind and soul, and moves the heart to action. It is its own justification" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 560); and in her description of the possibility of knowing God's will on the basis of the content of one's own impulses: "And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668).
- 10 The history of science reflects the continual refinement of scientific theories resulting from the progressive accumulation of factual information. Because it can never be assumed that all the information pertaining to a certain natural phenomenon has been discovered, no scientific explanation of a state of affairs can be regarded as apodictic. Though absolute certainty is the goal of scientific investigation, its approach to this goal is always asymptotic.

Comment

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Rice begins his article by defining *reason* as "understanding," and contrasting it with *knowledge*. "It is possible," he says, "to know something without understanding it." One can know an automobile runs without understanding *why* it runs. Understanding is a clear perception of the "causes" of the engine's running, the "reasons" it runs. To understand is to "know" in a particular way. "To know something on the basis of reason means being able to give reasons [causes] for its being the case. What is reasonable is what is capable of rational explanation."

I

It seems to me this definition of reason is much too narrow for theology and philosophy. It is the notion of reason often associated with science and its methods. That is why it fits Rice's example of an automobile so well. By

contrast, theology and philosophy, when dealing with metaphysical questions, are not seeking the many causes of one effect or group of effects (such as the running engine) but in a sense the *one cause of all effects*. This is the ontological question, the question of Being itself, and the notion of reason Rice is suggesting does not and cannot deal with this question.

One historical answer to the ontological question is the God of classical theism. If the "reasonable" is what is capable of rational explanation in the sense of "causes," then the theistic concept of God is not reasonable, since there are no causes for God in theism. I'm sure Rice would not want to affirm that.

It seems to me that the concept of reason most adequate to the concerns of theology and philosophy is the one which sees the rational as the "intelligible," the "structured," the "coherent." Therefore, while the God of theism cannot be rationally explained in the sense of causes, one can show that the concept of God is a rational one in the sense that it is intelligible and coherent with our best thinking about experience. Some thinkers see the ontological argument, for example, as an explication of the intelligibility of the theistic concept of God.

It is because Rice begins with this definition of reason that he is forced into a view of religious faith as "self-authenticating" knowledge. Rice claims that all knowledge, ultimately, rests on some self-authenticating experiences. They are the starting point for epistemology. The major difficulty with this position is that not all agree on which experiences are self-authenticating, particularly in religion. "Faith," he says, "provides the basis which reason may subsequently explore and expound." Does that mean that faith has *no* basis *in* reason? If so, what enables the Christian to recommend his faith to a Moslem who also appeals to self-authenticating experiences? Doesn't faith need critical support from reason? If it does not, what is the difference between faith and an arbitrary, private opinion? Can one be honest, for example, and believe a revelation that violates established truth in the natural sciences? Does one have any basis for believing a revelation that would command one to enslave other human beings? The notion that faith "authenticates" itself is viable only if one means by it that the revelation accepted by faith, proves, on critical reflection, to be intelligible and coherent in relation to the rest of our experience and knowledge. Reason does not originate the revelations that awaken faith, but reason has the sacred responsibility to veto any alleged revelation that is confused and nonsensical. Furthermore, the revelation should find increasing critical support as it is subjected to examination.

Rice recognizes that if faith is self-authenticating it must involve cognitive elements that are immediately known. Usually, "immediate" knowledge is based on "immediate" experience. All knowledge of reason is "mediate," he says, while the knowledge of faith is "immediate." He mentions the experience of seeing red as a paradigm of immediate knowledge based on immediate experience. If one sees red, he *knows* he sees red. "My knowledge requires no other proof than the perception of the visual field bearing that color. My knowledge in this case is immediate; there are no 'reasons' for it. Again, when I feel pain, I know that I feel pain. I need no further evidence or justification or reason to account for the knowledge beyond the sensation itself. Such knowledge is immediate."

This illustration hurts Rice more than it helps him. He is using the term "knowledge" to describe feeling-states and perceptual-states of his own body. What is really known? Can he claim to "know" anything more than the fact that he is having certain experiences? Does he *know* that there is a red object independent of his perception? People often hallucinate the color red when there is no object independent of them causing the experience.

The point is that the moment one asks about the significance of his experiences — that is, whether there is something "out there" or not — one can only find out by judgment and critical reflection. One *tests* the experience. Can he touch an object he *thinks* he sees, etc. He "knows" there is a red *object* only after reasoning about his experience. He knows he has a red "experience" immediately. Therefore, any knowledge about an *other* has to be mediate. This Rice is unwilling to grant. Yet faith is not knowledge about my feeling-states or perceptual-states; it is knowledge of an other. (I use the term "knowledge" in relation to faith only because Rice uses it that way.) Therefore, as I see it, even the knowledge Rice attributes to faith must be mediate. The only way one can get around this is to presuppose a unity between the subject and object that makes immediate knowledge possible. Suffice it to say that Rice's illustration does *not* make his point.

II

There is an advantage to a theory of immediate knowledge, if it is true. If immediate knowledge actually exists, then some of the things we claim to know we cannot be mistaken about. Mistakes are only possible when knowledge is mediate, when one has made judgments and inferences. If there are knowing situations that are immediate, error is ruled out *ab initio*. Proponents of such a view have the problem, however, of explaining how peo-

ple who make claims to immediate knowledge can contradict each other. Even those who claim that *faith* is a form of immediate knowledge contradict each other. On Rice's view, there is no way to settle the dispute. One has made an appeal to the final epistemological court.

Rice then points out — correctly I think — that the ability to discern the evidence for faith grows out of “a desire to know the truth.” He calls this desire “more fundamental than reason. . . . One cannot establish the existence of this desire on a basis of rational evidence, for it is this desire which accounts for there being any such evidence.” This account of the matter perplexes me. This is a version of the familiar question “Why should I be rational?” One cannot answer such a question by giving reasons, because it is the value of reasons that is being challenged. The only possible answer is to say that a man is irrational and (in some respects, at least) insane, if he does not see the intrinsic value of being reasonable.

It is true that rational arguments cannot create the desire to be rational, to see the evidence, to embrace the truth. But, not to desire these things is to commit oneself to irrationality and dogmatism. There are no other alternatives. It seems to me that a case can be made for claiming that the desire to be honest with the evidence is an outgrowth of a commitment to the truth made by the will — a moral decision. This may be prerational in one sense, but in another sense it is the zenith of rationality, because it is the fundamental condition for being reasonable. Does Rice want this *desire* to be faith? If so, then he is using the term “faith” equivocally. If “faith” precedes reason in the sense that one must desire the truth before he is able to see the evidence, that is one thing. But if faith precedes reason in the sense one must adopt a perspective of faith before he can see the evidence, that is another thing. Rice, it seems to me, tries to say both things and thus confuses the issues.

To go on — I agree that giving reasons for faith does not necessarily lead to faith. Faith is more than mental assent. It involves the commitment of the whole person. But it must be a commitment that the person finds rationally persuasive. If one cannot cite good reasons for believing, reasons that impress the nonbeliever as well as the believer, how can one demonstrate that his faith was not hastily and ignorantly born? The skeptic may not agree, but at least he can understand the intelligibility of the believer's faith. When Rice says that “faith justifies itself,” I am at a loss to understand what he means. Does he mean that the believer's thinking and experience can in *no way* demonstrate the rationality of faith to the nonbeliever?

I sense Rice's confusion in his romantic analogy. “Are my wife's eyes

beautiful because I love her or do I love her because they are beautiful? Are my reasons for loving her the cause or the result of love?" The latter seems to be Rice's position. As he sees it, "the dozens of reasons someone else has for loving his wife will almost certainly fall short of persuading me that I should love her." His evidence is only "evidence for him, not me." Besides the fact that a man's love for a woman involves elements that are not present in a man's love for God (such as sense-impressions, sexuality, etc.), this analogy confuses more than it clarifies. What the devoted husband has shown by giving reasons for his love is that his wife is *worth* loving, and even a man who does not love her can agree. Who would claim that he fell in love with a woman *first* and then sat down and tried to find reasons for what happened? Most of us, it seems to me, observe qualities in a person (or needs) that draw us out of ourselves to them. Our love commitment is made because we have reasons, not vice versa. (This is *not*, of course, agape love we speak about.)

God is to be loved and trusted because he is *worth* loving and because he is *trustworthy*. I can give good reasons why God deserves to be loved, even to nonbelievers. The issue is not whether my reasons would cause the skeptic to love God, but whether my reasons would show it makes sense for *me* to love God — makes sense even to the skeptic. Love in the absence of reasons that make sense to others is hardly distinguishable from infatuation.

This is not to say there is *no* difference in the ability of the believer and the unbeliever to see the evidence. I agree that there often is a difference. The difference can be explained, however, in relation to the implications of the Christian life for one who does see the evidence. Research in the behavioral sciences has shown that the self can avoid seeing a great deal of evidence when that evidence is inimical to its own interests. (I would *not* say, though, that *all* unbelievers are thereby intellectually dishonest.) What I do not accept is Rice's contention that there is no objective evidence available to both the believer and the unbeliever.

III

Finally, I want to comment on Rice's claim that relative certainty is not good enough in religious epistemology. Reason, he says, can produce no more than probability in knowledge and contrasts probability or relative certainty with "maximal conviction" (or, as in the original draft of his article, "absolute certainty"). "Would a man die for a probability?" he rhetorically asks. My answer is *yes*. What is tricky here is the word *certainty*, or the phrase *maximal conviction* (whatever that is). I am certain my wife

loves me, and I would stake my life on it. But I would not say that it is impossible for me to be wrong. There are very few claims I would make which I would argue *cannot* be wrong. When one sets out to doubt as much as he can, as the Cartesian methodology recommends, one realizes there is very little that is undeniably certain. My "certainty" about my wife is primarily a psychological state based on very good evidence. But the most I can claim for the evidence is that it yields a high degree of probability that I am right. Nevertheless, I am "certain" I am right.

I want to support Rice when he says that faith does not depend on the ability to come to certain conclusions on the basis of a rational investigation of the evidence. I am with him also when he says that the quality of one's faith is not directly proportional to his ability to provide rational proofs for its contents. If this were the case, he says, we would have to place a low estimate on the quality of faith in the uneducated and the young.

In one sense, this is undeniably true. But there is a sense in which an ignorant faith *is* of poorer quality than an educated one. And it is not elitist to say so. When a man believes in God because of his skirmish with death, God accepts that as a man's best, given his condition at the time. But if that same man prefers to remain in ignorance, fearing the consequences that critical investigation might have for his faith, that man is no longer a good Christian nor does he possess genuine faith. Genuine faith has confidence in the truth, enough confidence to put it to the test. "The best Christian is an intellectual Christian," Ellen White says. That applies to machinists and farmers and children as well as to theologians. Even children can think carefully about their faith; and when they do, their questions are frighteningly rational. Knowledge is a virtue. A faith that steers a wide circle around reason ultimately becomes presumption.