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BY RICHARD RICE

Introduction

Some issues are persistent because they are inescapable. And the relation between faith and reason is undoubtedly one of them. Whether we are motivated by religious devotion or scientific integrity, we cannot avoid the responsibility of taking responsibility for our beliefs—of applying standards of rationality to everything we believe. As a theologian, one of my major concerns has always been to show that reason is essential to faith—that reason provides answers to the questions that faith poses. In the following discussion, however, I want to reverse this priority, and argue that reason poses questions for which faith, or religion, provides answers. So, instead of arguing that faith alone is not enough, we must have reason, too; my thesis is that reason alone is not enough, we must have faith as well.

Now, how shall we approach our topic? There are different ways to experience the Grand Canyon. You can

take a day and hike from the rim to the bottom and back out. I've done that, twice. You really get to know the terrain that way. Or you can look down from 30,000 feet on a cross-country flight, and for a few minutes make out the deep scars carved by the Colorado River far below. Most

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of us have done that, perhaps several times. Or you can take a helicopter from Las Vegas and survey the canyon's features in an hour and a half without having to climb into it. I've never done

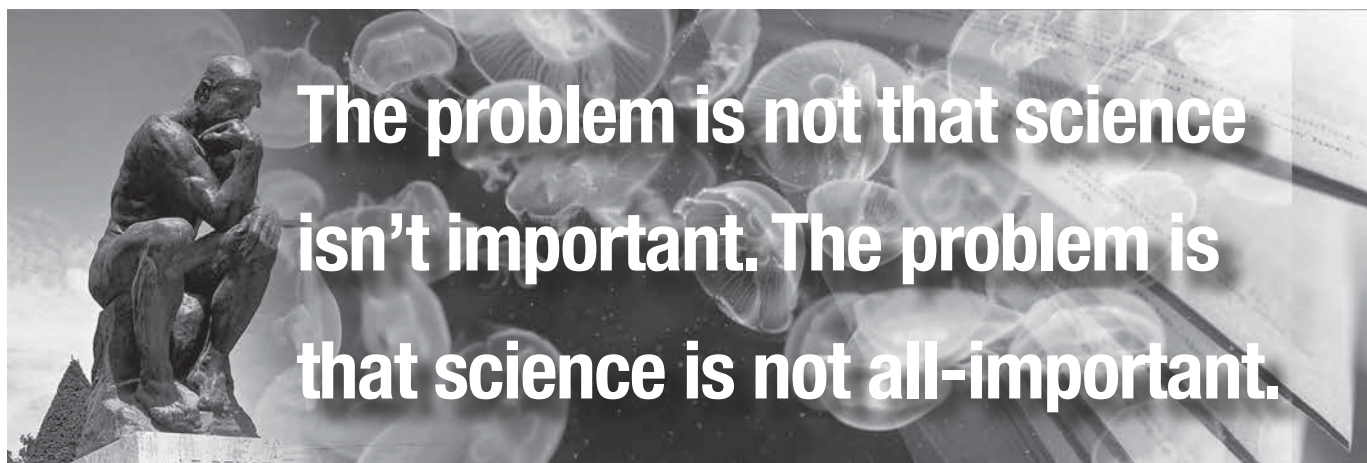
that, but some of you probably have. In certain ways my approach here will be more like the helicopter tour than either a down-and-out hike or a sky-high fly-over.

There are risks in doing this. Scholars of any stripe—from laboratory scientists to philosophers—typically focus their attention on a very specific question, define it with extreme precision, move from premise to conclusion, step by careful step, and end by defining the boundaries of their

limited achievement. That's how you remain in the comfort zone of scholarly discussion. Whatever you do, don't try to say too much. That's always been my goal. But in this discussion I want to be more expansive than usual and cover a lot of territory. The downside of this approach? You can't avoid making claims that are open to criticism and second guessing at every turn. The upside is the prospect of saying something that's thought-provoking, whether or not it's persuasive. So, I'm going to risk a lack of precision and probative security for the sake of greater interest. Instead of a tightly constructed argument, what follows is a single, sweeping proposal. I think reason really needs religion... for lots of different reasons.

points to the expectation that knowledge will increase, and the most obvious form of increasing knowledge is knowledge of a scientific nature. In fact, there are those who argue that the only area of demonstrable human progress has been in the area of science. By comparison, some argue, there is no evidence of anything similar in other areas of human endeavor, such as art, music, literature, social relations, or morality.

In today's world, the suggestion that there is something worth knowing that science can't tell us has proven to be controversial. So impressive are the results of scientific investigation that many now believe that all real knowledge is scientific knowledge. Only claims capable of empirical verification (or falsification) are cognitively significant, and therefore worthy of belief. Everything else someone believes



For starters, let's take science as the clearest example of human reason—OK, as *the* manifestation of reason in its most vivid and impressive form. Once people realized that the world was humanly understandable—a conviction that goes all the way back to the Greeks of the sixth century BC—and once people combined that belief with empirical investigation as they did in the sixteenth century AD and thereafter—the progress of human knowledge has been breathtaking.

There are several things that account for this. The claims of science are open to public investigation; they are cumulative—the more we know, the more we can know; they are subject to revision—science is self-correcting; and the results of scientific inquiry have been enormously beneficial. To cite the motto of the University of Chicago, my alma mater, *cre-scat scientia vita excolatur*, the official translation of which is “Let knowledge grow from more to more; and so be human life enriched.” (As mottos go, I have always preferred Harvard's one-word motto, *veritas*, meaning truth.) Chicago's motto

boils down to the product of social conditioning, an expression of wishful thinking, or merely a matter of personal preference. In such an environment, obviously, religious ideas do not find a receptive audience. So, the connection between religion and reason in the form of scientific knowledge suggested in our title is highly problematic.

To quote Ian Barbour:

The first major challenge to religion in an age of science is the success of the methods of science.... Many people view science as objective, universal, rational, and based on solid observational evidence. Religion, by contrast, seems to be subjective parochial, emotional, and based on traditions or authorities that disagree with each other.¹

Writer Jon Krakauer speaks for many when he describes faith as “the very antithesis of reason,” “impervious

to ... argument or ... criticism.” And when religion enters the picture, anything can happen. “Common sense is no match for the voice of God....”²

In such an environment, religion is obviously on the defensive. The authority of reason is a given; the value of religion is questionable.

This represents a dramatic shift in their historic relationship. For millennia, the authority of religion was taken for granted; the reliability of reason was problematic. There was a point, however, when the burden of proof shifted. As one of Tom Stoppard’s characters puts it, “there is presumably a calendar date—a *moment*—when the onus of proof passed from the atheist to the believer, when, quite suddenly secretly, the noes had it.”³ Ever since, the claims of religion are regarded with suspicion, while the conclusions of science are warmly embraced.

Today I’m taking a different tack. I want to put the shoe on the other foot and argue that religion has important things to offer that science can’t provide. Science isn’t everything some people think it’s cracked up to be. It isn’t the solution to every human problem, the answer to every question. It does not account for the full range of human experience.

I have no desire to denigrate the value of science. Science benefits us all and we should be grateful for its blessings. That is a given.

(No one wants to live in a pre-scientific age.) The problem is not that science isn’t important. The problem is that science is not all-important. A close look at science itself gives us a more realistic picture of its role. And a careful look at human experience reveals dimensions and values inaccessible to scientific inquiry.

Some of the people who stress the limits of science are scientists themselves. Scientists often display admirable modesty when it comes to assessing what we actually know.⁴ Science doesn’t know everything, and the clearest evidence of that is the fact that scientific knowledge is constantly growing. And the more science enlarges the scope of human knowledge, the more it reveals the vast scope of our ignorance. So, the more we learn, the more we realize how much we don’t know.

This is how Marcelo Gleiser puts it in his book, *The Island of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning*: “As the Island of Knowledge grows, so do the shores of our ignorance—the boundary between the known and

the unknown....” Indeed, “science advances because of our ignorance and not because of our knowledge.”⁵

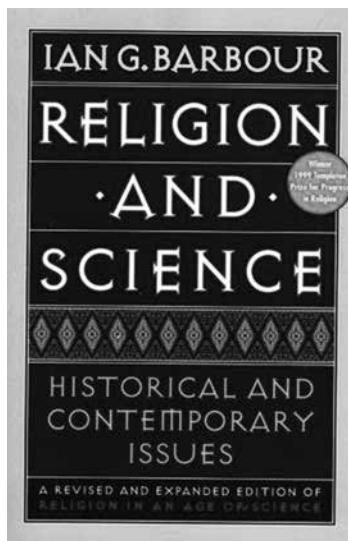
Not only do scientific advances reveal how little we know, says Gleiser, there is more to human life than science can account for. Indeed, there is more to science than science can account for. Although reason is the tool we use in science, it is not its motivation. Its motivation is what makes us human—the urge to know, the joy of discovery, the disturbing sense that we know so little.⁶ So, even if science is “the best tool we have for describing the world,” it is “deeply misguided” to hope that science will answer all our questions. To assume this would “shrink the human spirit, clip its wings, rob its multifaceted existence.”⁷

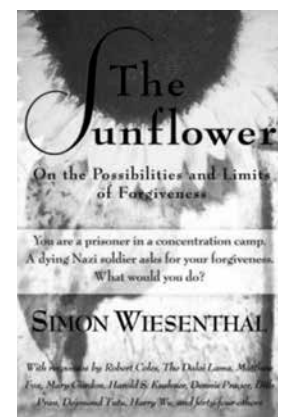
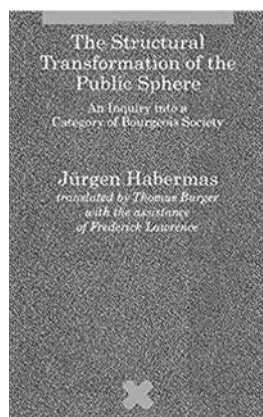
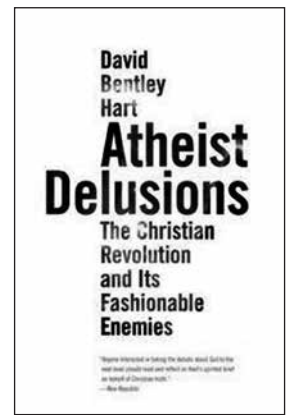
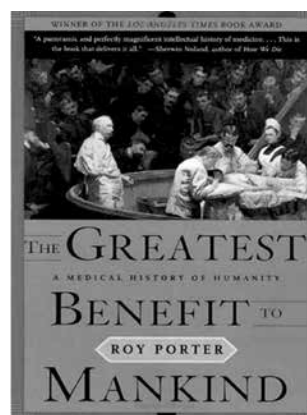
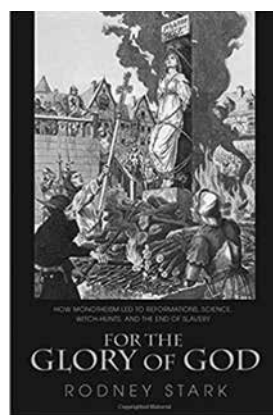
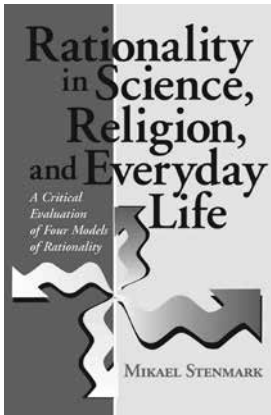
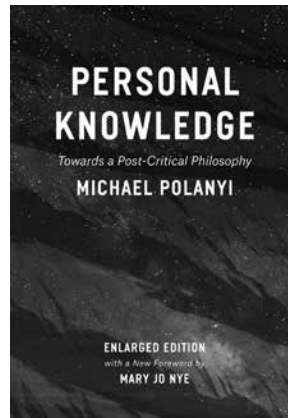
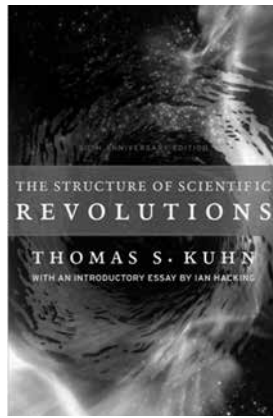
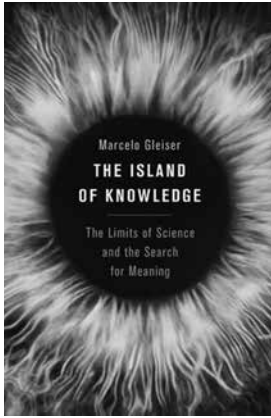
No one expresses the thought that there is more to the human spirit than science can account for with more urgency than Huston Smith.⁸ The author of a widely read textbook on world religions, Smith served on the faculties of a number of prestigious institutions, including MIT, where he was professor of philosophy for fifteen years (1958–1973). Smith died in 2016 at the age of 97.

Born to dedicated missionary parents in China, Smith lived there until he came to America to go to college. He brought his faith with him, he says, but “the rest of my life has been a struggle to keep it intact in the face of modern winds of doctrine that assail it.”⁹ Chief among these assailing

winds is the vaunted place that science occupies in the modern world. Preoccupied with material concerns and dazzled by the miracles of technology which fulfill them, modern Westerners have given science a “blank check.” In the popular mind, science alone provides reliable knowledge and justified belief.¹⁰ And with this perspective people have become blind to the realities of which previous peoples have all been aware, unable to appreciate the longings of the human heart for something more than this world.

The real culprit for this truncated perspective, this loss of the Big Picture, Smith argues, is not science per se, but “our misconstrual of it,” in a word, “scientism,” the unwarranted exaggeration of what science involves and what it can provide.¹¹ Scientism not only embraces science, it holds that the scientific method is the most, if not the only, reliable method to getting at the truth and that the things science deals with, material things, are the most fundamental things that exist.¹²





Instead of living in the great outdoors, open to the Big Picture—the “Single, wonderously clear and inspiring worldview ... distilled in the world’s great, enduring religions.”¹³—we have wondered unwittingly into “The Tunnel,” the impoverished worldview of modernity. The religious world is a world filled with meaning, in which people feel at home. The world of scientism, in short, is a world without meaning, in which we will never feel at home. As Steven Weinberg memorably put it, “the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless.”¹⁴

This, then, is “the great problem the human spirit faces in our time”: “having to live in the procrustean, scientific worldview that dominates our culture.”¹⁵ Despite the tunnel we moderns have stumbled into, there is light at the end. It consists of embracing the insights that religion—indeed, that only religion—provides. Effective and impressive as science is, there are aspects of reality that its methods cannot access. And this, to quote the title of Smith’s book, is *Why Religion Still Matters*.

There may be several ways out of the tunnel that Smith describes. When we look at the actual practice of science, the behavior of scientists, and perhaps most revealing, the history of science, we see that there is much more involved than the familiar picture that science consists of drawing conclusions from the accumulation of empirical data.

The most famous book on the philosophy of science to appear in the last century was *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. When he carefully examined the actual course of scientific development, Thomas Kuhn suddenly realized that the most significant breakthroughs involved dramatic leaps of imagination, leaps that catapulted their discoverers far beyond the accepted conclusions of their time. Indeed, what we typically think of as scientific investigation doesn’t begin to account for the remarkable insights of figures like Copernicus, Newton, and Einstein.

“Normal science,” as Kuhn describes it, involves a progressive accumulation of data within an established framework. In contrast, a scientific revolution involves the formulation of a new “paradigm”; it dramatically recasts our perspective on an entire range of scientific inquiry. It refashions the world we live in.

On their most fundamental levels, then, religion and science have important similarities. Neither would be possible without trust, or faith.

While accumulating data may eventually corroborate or confirm such revolutionary discoveries, it doesn’t account for them. Evidently, it takes more than science, as we typically think of it, to account for the history of science.

If the history of science complicates our picture of science so does the very structure of scientific knowledge. In his influential book, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Karl Popper argues that a scientific theory makes sense only if it is conceivably falsifiable.¹⁶ To put it another way, a theory is scientifically meaningful only if it is possible to specify the doubts it must overcome.

This may be helpful up to a point, counters Michael Polanyi, but this approach to truth has serious limitations. In *Personal Knowledge*, another famous discussion of our topic, Polanyi argues that doubt is not the path to all knowledge, not even knowledge of a scientific nature.

If we exalt what we can know and prove, while covering up “with ambiguous utterance” all that we know and cannot prove, he argues, we have a false conception of truth. Why? Because what we know and *cannot* prove is basic to everything we can prove. “In trying to restrict our minds to the few things that are demonstrable,” the way of doubt, says Polanyi, leads us to overlook “the a-critical choices which determine the whole being of our minds.”

To put it bluntly, if we didn’t know things that aren’t “scientific,” we wouldn’t be able to know the things that are. True, “the prolonged attacks made by rationalists on religion” have forced “us to renew the grounds of the Christian faith.” But this does not remotely justify the view that doubt is “the universal solvent of error which will leave truth untouched behind.... [To] destroy all belief would be to deny all truth.”¹⁷ So, important as doubt may be, trust, or belief, is even more important, and science would be impossible without it. Religious beliefs and the premisses of natural science belong to the same class of statements, and they perform similar functions. On their most fundamental levels, then, religion and science have important similarities. Neither would be possible without trust, or faith.

It seems, then, that science is not as “scientific” as many people think. Dramatic advances in science depend on imagination, not just reason. And science ultimately rests on convictions that reason alone could never establish.

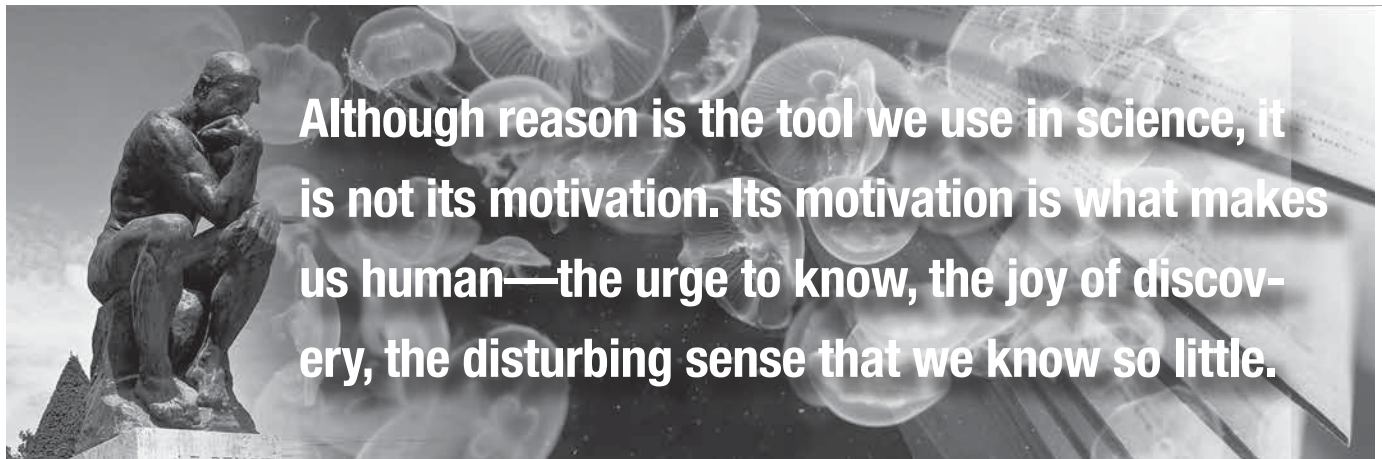
There are other considerations that call into question the tendency to view science as the paragon of reason. Swedish philosopher Mikael Stenmark argues that there are different forms of rationality and the scientific version is not the only one there is.

The reason so many question the rationality of religion is the fact that “one of the deepest and most widely shared convictions among philosophers and theologians” has been “that science is the paradigm example of rationality.” Consequently, when people ask whether or not religious beliefs are rational, they are asking if these beliefs meet scientific standards of rationality,¹⁸ in other words, the standard of “formal evidentialism.” And for most people, the answer is “probably not.” But, suppose there are different modes of

position that we are only entitled to believe something when all relevant doubts have been overcome. Instead, he argues, our basic epistemic posture should be one he calls “presumptionist,” the idea that we are entitled to our beliefs unless we encounter something that requires us to reconsider them.

It appears then, that science and religion are not as different as many people assume, let alone incompatible. If, as Polanyi argues, both ultimately rests on unprovable assumptions, and if as Stenmark argues, both exhibit legitimate, though distinctive, forms of rationality, there seems to be no good reason why they can’t get along.

To show that reason needs religion, however, we need something more. It’s not enough that there’s room in the world for both science and religion. A more important question is



rationality appropriate to different areas of life. In that case, the rational criteria incumbent upon scientific investigation should not be uncritically applied to other areas, particularly the area of religion.

Stenmark argues that different beliefs play different roles in our lives, and we need to take into account “the practice the beliefs belong to,” before we can evaluate their rationality. We also need to remember that whether or not someone is rational is also “person-relative.”¹⁹ It is unrealistic to require someone to subject every belief to rigorous examination. Not even scientists are “scientific” in the sense that they base everything they believe directly on empirical investigation. And this is doubly true when it comes to religion and everyday experience. We simply don’t have the time and resources to measure all our beliefs against a standard of conclusive rationality.

Like Polanyi, Stenmark also questions the idea that our basic epistemic posture should be one of skepticism—the

this: Are they related in some way? Is there a connection between them?

For one historian, the answer is Yes, a resounding Yes! In *For the Glory of God*, Rodney Stark takes issue with the familiar view that religion historically stood in the way of science, and science could only get underway when the theological and philosophical authorities of the past were discarded. In his provocative account, Stark asserts that this is not just an exaggeration, it’s a complete misrepresentation. Far from inhibiting the development of modern science, religion is responsible for it. The fact is, science owes its existence to religion. “Science,” he says, “could only arise in a culture dominated by belief in a conscious, rational, all-powerful Creator.”²⁰

We generally think of science as “an organized . . . empirically oriented effort to explain natural phenomena—a cumulative process of theory construction and theory testing.” When did this enterprise begin? “In the 17th century,” says

Stark, “in Western Europe and nowhere else.” Why then and there? Because “Christianity depicted God as a rational, responsive, dependable, and omnipotent being and the universe as [God’s] personal creation, [with] a rational, lawful, stable structure, awaiting human comprehension.”²¹

The importance of religion to science is further demonstrated when we look at the “great figures involved in the 16th- and 17th-century blossoming of science—including Descartes, Galileo, Newton, and Kepler.” They confessed

an absolute faith in a Creator God, whose work incorporated rational rules awaiting discovery; the rise of science was . . . the natural outgrowth of the Christian doctrine of creation. The world exists because God created it. To love and honor God, we must fully appreciate . . . his handiwork. And because God is perfect, his handiwork functions in accord with *immutable principle*. By the full use of our God-given powers of reason and observation, we ought to be able to discover these principles.²²

Long before the rise of modern science, however, Christianity contributed something even more important to the world—the conviction that human life has great value. A conspicuous feature of Christianity from its beginning was an emphasis on charity as the paramount Christian virtue and the corresponding affirmation that every human being has unique dignity and unqualified value, whatever his or her social status or physical condition. Following the example of Jesus’ life of self-sacrificing service, early Christians, too, were open to people of all classes and cultures. And there were members of the community who devoted themselves to the welfare of others, including the diseased and the destitute. This contribution to human values was revolutionary. Nothing in the world of late antiquity, nothing in classical culture, compared to the willingness of Christians to jeopardize their own well-being in serving others. Greek and Roman paganism had acknowledged no such duties.²³

Christians not only cared for people individually, they established institutions to provide for care—hospitals for the

sick and welfare centers for the needy. Indeed, according to an authoritative history of medicine, “Christianity planted the hospital.”

By 250 the Church in Rome had developed an elaborate charitable outreach, with wealthy converts providing food and shelter for the poor. After Constantine officially recognized Christianity, Christians established hospitals throughout the empire. By the mid sixth century Jerusalem had one with 200 beds, and another in Constantinople was bigger still. . . . By 650, Constantinople had a hierarchy of physicians and even teaching facilities, a home for the elderly and, beyond the walls, a leper house.²⁴

The revolution in values that Christianity brought about was profound because it eventually, dramatically, and permanently transformed the prevailing perspective on the human in Western civilization: *eventually*, because it took a long time for its ramifications to develop in the form of laws and institutions—the abolition of slavery was not achieved until the nineteenth century, the establishment of equal rights in the US only in the mid-twentieth century; *dramatically*, because it involved such a novel perspective of the human; and *permanently*, because even those who reject everything else in religion generally, and Christianity in particular—at least most of them—accept the values that stem from the revolution. Instead of following Nietzsche, who bemoaned Christianity’s cultivation of charity and compassion, most atheists accept the conventional morality that stems from it.

According to David Bentley Hart, “The Christian account of reality introduced into our world an understanding of the divine, the cosmic, and the human that had no . . . equivalent elsewhere and [it] made possible a moral vision of the human person that has haunted us ever since, century upon century.”²⁵ The doctrine of the Incarnation shows that “a person is not merely a fragment of some larger cosmic or spiritual category . . . but an irreducible mystery.” “This immense dignity—this infinite capacity—inheres in every person, no matter what circumstances might for now seem

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to limit him or her to one destiny or another.”²⁶ “The rise of Christianity produced consequences so immense that it can almost be said to have begun the world anew: to have ‘invented’ the human.”²⁷

OK. Hart’s a Christian theologian, and we might expect him to say something like that. But there are other scholars who trace the values by which we measure civilized behavior today directly to religious convictions. One is Jurgen Habermas, an eminent critical theorist of the Frankfurt School. “[M]odern notions of equality and fairness,” says Habermas,

are secular distillations of time-honored Judeo-Christian precepts.... Our modern conception of ‘government by consent of the governed’ ... would be difficult to conceive apart from the Old Testament covenants. Similarly, our idea of the intrinsic worth of all persons, which underlies human rights, stems directly from the Christian ideal of the equality of all men and women in the eyes of God.” “[T]he ideals of freedom ... the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, [are] the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love.”²⁸

To summarize, we wouldn’t have the life we have today—life in a society that affirms individual human freedom and dignity—without religion. It provides the very basis for a life worth living.

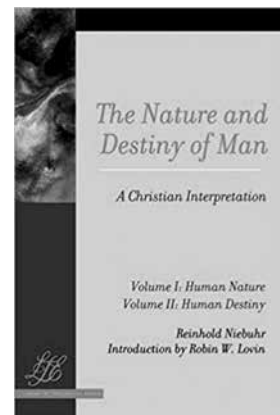
Well and good, someone may say, suppose religion was an important factor in getting us where we are. But now that we are here, can’t we leave religion behind and just keep on going—a little like young adults who acknowledge what they owe their parents, but then go on and make their own way in the world?

There are obviously many in today’s world who embrace the standards of civilized society without buying into all the “religious mythology” that traditionally goes with it. As they see it, we can take the values and leave the religion behind. Even if we grant that Christianity was the matrix of modern ethical values, why can’t enlightened people dispense with the religious veneer and cling to the ethical core? Isn’t this possible?

The answer—not likely! At least not according to one careful student of modern culture—after a painstaking study of how we got to where we are today. According to Charles Taylor, the basic values by which we live, the central values that characterize civilized existence, are inextricably connected

to, and ultimately dependent on, a religious worldview. Eliminate religion, and the values we see as essential to the flourishing of human life, will, in all likelihood, go with it. Not immediately, perhaps ... but eventually.

The notion that we can keep our central values and dispense with their religious sources is essentially what Taylor calls a “subtraction story” in his magisterial tome, *A Secular Age*. As he describes it, the story arises from the Enlightenment idea that reason unfettered by traditional religion can arrive at a core of ethical values entirely on its own, and human beings can be ethical without any reference to something higher.²⁹ We always had these intuitions, the story goes, “only they were over-ridden and sidelined by various illusory ... religious doctrines.”³⁰



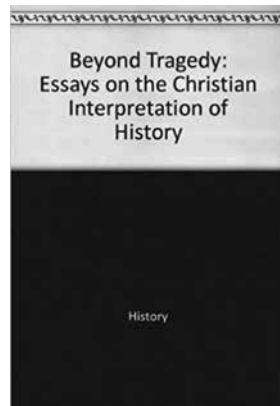
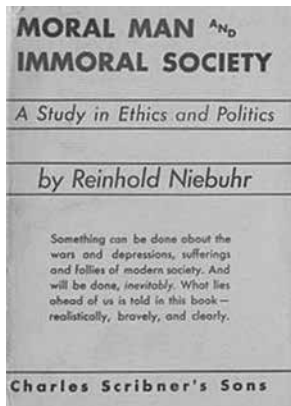
So, along with the subtraction story goes “the narrative of self-authorization,”³¹ the idea that we have always been capable of identifying and embracing these values on our own. In his account, however, Taylor insists that this is not at all what actually happened. People only think it is. In spite of the high regard people have for them, the fact is, these “narratives of self-authorization” are far from self-evident. They survive because they escape examination, but as proofs, “they don’t make the grade.”³²

Get rid of God, abandon religion, Taylor says in effect, and values that we all embrace as essential to human life lose their footing. To put it in terms of our title, reason alone did not give us the values we all endorse as essential to a viable and vibrant society. We got them from religion, and religion is essential to their survival. Get rid of religion, and eventually we lose the values as well. It may take a while, and it may not be obvious, but it is virtually inevitable. Maybe it’s like global warming: people in general may not notice it until it’s too late.

Can individuals behave ethically without being religious? Of course. (One can be an anarchist and still observe

the speed limit.) But that's different from asking what the long-range effect might be if the religious foundation of ethical convictions fades away. What Hart and Taylor say about the historical origins and intimate connection between religion and ethics strongly suggests that the values that arose directly from a religious vision of humanity cannot survive indefinitely if that vision is lost. Basic to the concept of charity, the source of our central social values, lies a Christian understanding of the world, of God, and ourselves.

It is instructive to see what happens when a society loses, or eliminates, religion. A chilling example appears in one of the contributions to the second edition of Simon Wiesenthal's book, *The Sunflower*. Harry Wu was imprisoned in Communist China for nineteen years. After his release he



looked up the woman who was largely responsible for his years of torture and deprivation. She dismissed the past as a time when the whole country suffered and offered nothing in the way of apology for what she had put him through. Her attitude, Wu asserted, was typical of the Communists in China. They had “no regard for an individual’s well-being,” because “the leaders of the country placed no value on human life.”³³ Wu’s reflection is instructive. When a system eliminates religion, the value of human life goes with it.

There is another reason that reason needs religion, and it may be the most important of all. Without religion, reason can be used to justify just about any course of action. In order to avoid its misuse, we need a perspective on human behavior, a principle of criticism or evaluation, that only religion can provide.

Langdon Gilkey, for many years professor of theology at UC Divinity School, describes this in a memorable way. After graduating from Harvard University in 1939 with a major in philosophy, Gilkey went to China to teach English. When World War II broke out, he was arrested by the Japanese and

interned for two and a half years, along with 2,000 other people of Western origin, on the grounds of a former mission station. He recounts their experiences in the book, *Shantung Compound: The Story of Men and Women Under Pressure*, published some twenty years later.

Gilkey grew up in a liberal Protestant home—his father was Dean of Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago—and accepted the basic tenets of his parents’ religion. While in college, however, he became a convinced humanist. People can live decent moral lives, he decided without the trappings of religion.

His early camp experience confirmed the humanism of his college years. Left on their own to organize things, the internees managed to develop a viable society, thanks primarily

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to those who had the practical skills to get things done—people who knew how to cook, how to care for the sick, educate children—people, that is, who knew how to analyze a problem and find the resources to fix it. He was impressed at the power of human ingenuity to meet the multiple challenges they faced. There seemed to be nothing that bright people couldn’t do when they put their minds to it. Reason was the solution to all their problems.

As time went by, however, one thing after another tore holes in Gilkey’s confident humanism. There were obstacles that reason couldn’t overcome. It wasn’t that there weren’t reasonable solutions to the problems. It was that people repeatedly refused to accept a solution when it cost them something personally. When it came to human relationships, to human behavior, he realized, something other than reason was at work. Whether it was allocating rooms to individuals and families or distributing Red Cross boxes, people instinctively placed their own interests first and then looked for ways to justify getting more benefits than others did.

Gilkey was forced to conclude that our ability to be reasonable is limited. Reason is indispensable for meeting

life's challenges, by itself it isn't enough. To treat our fellow human beings humanely, equitably, we need more than the rational capacity to solve our problems; we need the moral capacity to appreciate and value one another.

Viewed by itself, reason can give us an unrealistic view of our humanity. We have impressive mental gifts. We can solve problems of enormous complexity. And we can be sensitive to others' needs and find satisfaction in helping to meet them ... up to a point. (Just think of the moving stories of people who risk their lives to pull people from burning houses or overturned cars.) As long as there is more than enough to go around—plenty of space, plenty of food, plenty of time, plenty of opportunity—we are perfectly willing to share. But when these resources are restricted, and sharing means giving up something that we need or think we need, then another factor kicks in, namely, a powerful loyalty to our own interests.

But when this happens, reason doesn't take a holiday. We don't become baldly, conspicuously selfish. If anything, we become more rational than ever. We can be creative, even ingenious, in finding reasons to justify actions whose real motive is self-interest. To counter this pervasive tendency, we need something more than reason. We need a principle of evaluation or criticism, a lens as it were, through which to see our motives in their true light. And for this, religion is indispensable. Only religion provides a sufficiently complex view of the human to account for both the majesty and tragedy of which we are capable—the ingenuity, the generosity, and the self-interest evident in human behavior. In its simplest form, what religion provides that reason can't is the doctrine of sin.

To suggest that reason needs a concept of sin may sound excessively negative. But the idea of sin does not deny the goodness and value of human life. To the contrary, it presupposes it. It is based on the conviction that human beings possess enormous intellectual and moral potential. But it expresses the realization that there is a pervasive contradiction, a fundamental disparity, between what human beings are capable of and what they actually do, between what we are meant to be and what we are—a paradox summarized this way by Reinhold Niebuhr, "Christianity measures the stature

of man more highly and his virtue more severely than any alternative view."³⁴

To do justice to the complexities of human life we need a principle of understanding that comes from beyond our understanding. Only from such a vantage point can we encompass the full range of our complex reality—from the breathtaking heights to the heartbreaking depths of human existence. It illuminates both our essential possibilities, and the truth that we never perfectly realize, and often betray, these ideals.

And this provides a response to the most forceful objection to religion today. In the name of religion, people have done terrible things to each other, throughout history and in our own time, throughout the world and in our own neigh-

borhoods. When people use religion to justify violence and cruelty, it's no wonder that people wonder if the world wouldn't be better off if we got rid of religion entirely.

The paradoxical truth is, we need religion in order

to condemn much of what people have done in the name of religion. The perspective that religion—and only religion—provides exposes the tragic contradiction within us. And it reveals that we fall short of our ideals, not only at our worst, but even at our best. As Niebuhr astutely observes, nothing is more insidious than spiritual pride—the particular failing of overtly religious people. Religion thus provides an account of human ideals that reason could never come up with, and a judgment against any claim to have perfectly achieved these ideals.³⁵

The complexity that Niebuhr articulates is nicely phrased by Ellen White:

Not only intellectual but spiritual power, a perception of right, a desire for goodness, exists in every heart. But against these principles there is struggling an antagonistic power.... There is in [our] nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, [we] cannot resist.³⁶

Conclusion

Our time is up and our helicopter is landing. What have we seen? And where has it brought us? The importance of religion for people dedicated to the life of reason—people

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who know and appreciate what reason can accomplish, people whose lives have been improved and perhaps saved by the technology that scientific reasoning has made available—consists of two things. Religion gives us both a basis for appreciating all the gifts that reason can bring and a caveat against overconfidence in what reason can do. There is more to human experience than reason can account for, and religion is indispensable for perceiving and understanding it. In a word, reason needs religion.

End Notes

1. Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, The Gifford Lectures, Volume I. (HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 3.
2. Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (Doubleday, 2004), xxi–xxiii, 68.
3. Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers*, 25. Quoted in Richard Rice, *Reason and the Contours of Faith* (La Sierra University Press, 1991), 220.
4. Granted, along with this modesty comes the confident expectation that science will make continual progress and provide us with information that grows in scope and accuracy.
5. Marcelo Gleiser, *The Island of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning* (Basic Books, 2014), xxii, xxv. Gleiser devotes much of the book to some of the mysterious features of the world that quantum mechanics exposes.
6. *Ibid.*, 279
7. *Ibid.*, 281
8. Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters: The Faith of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).
9. *Ibid.*, xii.
10. *Ibid.*, 4.
11. *Ibid.*, 4–5.
12. *Ibid.*, 59–60.
13. *Ibid.*, 43.
14. *Ibid.*, 34–37.
15. *Ibid.*, 202.
16. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
17. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago, 1958), 286.
18. Mikael Stenmark, *Rationality in Science, Religion and Everyday Life: A Critical Evaluation of Four Models of Rationality* (Notre Dame, 1995), 4.
19. *Ibid.*, 235.
20. Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 197.
21. *Ibid.*, 146–47.
22. *Ibid.*, 157.
23. St. Fabiola was an affluent fourth-century convert to Christianity. She founded a hospital and dedicated her life to charity among Rome’s sick poor. “She assembled all the sick from the

streets and highways and personally tended the unhappy and impoverished victims of hunger and disease.” She often washed wounds “which others—even men—could hardly bear to look at... She founded a hospital and gathered there the sufferers from the streets, and gave them all the attention of a nurse.... How often she carried home, on her own shoulders, the first and poor who were plagued by epilepsy! How she washed the pus from sores which others could not even behold!”

24. Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity* (W. W. Norton, 1997), 87–88.
25. David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, (Yale University Press, 2009), 203.
26. *Ibid.*, 211.
27. *Ibid.*, 213.
28. Richard Wolin, “Jurgen Habermas and Post-Secular Societies,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (September 23, 2005): B17.
29. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 245; cf. 253, 255, 267, 270, 294.
30. *Ibid.*, 557.
31. *Ibid.*, 587.
32. *Ibid.*, 590.
33. Simon Wiessenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*. With a symposium edited by Harry James Caragas and Bonny V. Fetterman, rev. ed., (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), 273–74.
34. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols. (Scribner’s, 1941, 1943), 2:161.
35. At the same time, it is only by striving for these ideals we may partially achieve them. Though reason alone could never produce the insights that religion provides, once we accept these insights, they become eminently reasonable. Religion [revelation] thus becomes “true wisdom,” says Niebuhr, by “completing the incompleteness, clarifying the obscurities, and correcting the falsifications of human knowledge.” *Ibid.*, 2:67.
36. Full quotation: “Christ is the ‘Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.’ John 1:9. As through Christ every human being has life, so also through Him every soul receives some ray of divine light. Not only intellectual but spiritual power, a perception of right, a desire for goodness, exists in every heart. But against these principles there is struggling an antagonistic power. The result of the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man’s experience. There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist. To withstand this force, to attain that ideal which in his inmost soul he accepts as alone worthy, he can find help in but one power. That power is Christ.” Ellen G. White, *Education*, 29.



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