

The Infinite Gap Between Rationalism and Rationality

It is especially common in academia that the words “*reason*” and “*religion*” are held to be opposites that consequently cannot be conceptually harmonized. Yet assessing the truth of that charge rests entirely on the specific religion under consideration. The naïve common suggestion that all religions are the same is obviously false, as a survey of any text on world religions will clarify. Judeo-Christian theology (JCT) for example **stands apart from** religions that have arisen out of Asia because of the subject-object distinction it makes between ourselves on the one hand and the other people and things around us. JCT also holds to both moral distinctions between right and wrong and conceptual distinctions between the creator and the creature, the self-existent and the dependent, and the eternal and the temporal. These categories are all related to each other in that they are all grounded on the conviction that God is the creator of absolutely everything while we by contrast are His created beings (Psalm 100:3). This then places us in the second half of each of the three above couplets. For these same reasons, JCT demonstrably affirms rationality as a valid mode of thinking in general.¹

The noun “*rationality*” describes one aspect of our human capacity to employ logic and reason in our perception of external reality. “*Rationalism*,” on the other hand, describes not so much our possession of reason, but rather our relationship to reason specifically as a master/servant relationship. Whenever the suffix “*ism*” is attached to any word, its root is reoriented into an over-arching ideological world-view. For example, *communism* means more than just that the adherent happens to live in a commune; but instead that society as a whole **must be** shaped into one **all-reaching commune**. Back then, to the concept of *rationalism*, that term holds that autonomous human reason, that is, apart from revealed religion, is entirely sufficient to think of and correctly assess, not merely scientific problems, but also the biggest challenges of life. Philosopher David Hume, for example, notoriously concluded his treatise, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* with the following directive, “*If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.*”² Yet notice that renowned 20th Century Philosopher of Science, Karl Popper commented, “*Thus Hume...condemned his own Enquiry on its last page...*”³

Rationality therefore consists not just of scientific facts, but also of correctly ordering that data into meaningful and effective principles. JCT however doesn’t settle for a natural order that is merely *accidentally* meaningful and intelligible. It insists that those terms apply to nature precisely because its Creator is Himself purposeful, intelligible, and the very source of rationality (John 1:1). Although Scripture decries the intellectually-disintegrative effects of sin on humanity (Romans 1:18-32); by virtue of being made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), the *liberating* gift of rationality brings us blessing if, but only if, we live a faith relationship with His Son Jesus Christ (John 8:58). Yet to defy that purpose is to commit the idolatry of *rationalism*.

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¹ While Aristotle is rightly praised for clarifying and categorizing principles of logic, no indications in Scripture exist which defy these rules.

² <https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/hume/enquiry.pdf>, XII, p. 114.

³ The Logic of Scientific Discovery. (Harper & Row, 1968), note. 3, p. 35.