

IS CIRCULAR REASONING ANY USE?

Some people argue that God exists for he wrote the Bible and we know that the Bible is right for God wrote it. Obviously this kind of thinking looks very dangerous. You could argue that John murdered Katie for he was insane and you know he was insane for he murdered Katie but is better now and should not go to jail.

FANS OF CIRCULARITY

Many important philosophers assert that a circular argument is not necessarily illogical or bad. The form of such is A is B for B is A. It just repeats itself to prove itself and a repeat is not a proof for it hangs in the air and no proof is given for it.

It is believed by some that to believe in what the senses tell us, and therefore in science (reason is the tool of science) and in ethics we cannot offer proof but only a circular argument. "What my senses tell me is true and I trust my senses because they are right". They say that without this circular argument we can know and believe nothing. They say we believe in the existence of other people and that how nature behaves now is how it always will behave without evidence.

We see with our eyes and hear that nature does not change so we do have evidence for we see no reason why some being or demon would deceive all the time and even have us thinking that other people exist when they do not. Even if we are deceived it is still reasonable to believe in what they tell us for believing something does not necessarily mean it is probably true but it does necessarily mean you think it is probably true. That is the answer to those who say our belief in everything is based on the blind belief that we are awake and logged into reality and not dreaming now. When the senses are reasonably trusted so are science and ethics which spring from our sense-knowledge.

Bill McGrath said that science is based on circular reasoning and this is rational though he believes that circular reasoning is sometimes irrational and a mistake (Believing in God, page 29). Science presupposes that the laws of nature do not change. It has no evidence for this yet it says that anything it discovers is true. The result is a circular argument. It is certainly true that you have to assume order in order to function in the world at all. If you believed there was a miracle-working power, not necessarily a God but say a superhuman ghost, that would mean that if you stab somebody and they die that you did not commit murder. You only stabbed them and the ghost let them die and didn't do a miracle to save them. So it is the ghost's fault. Miracles speak of this ghost for they do not clearly speak of God so belief in miracle is evil and completely attacks science. A religion will say that it is God doing the miracles though many even within that religion will have doubts about that. Science cannot say what it is but will consider the ghost to be a more likely idea than God for it is easier for ghosts to exist than for God to exist. But science will develop theories about what is doing the miracles and will not consider it a duty to agree with religion that it is God that is doing the miracles unless evidence comes up. Science bases dogma on facts and evidence while religion does the opposite. So you have to make assumptions that some things do not change in order to investigate anything at all.

So McGrath says we believe in science because we believe nature does not change and nature does not change for we believe in science. But if so then why not simply assume that nature is always the same instead of arguing that nature is the same because science works and science works for nature is always the same? That is, why not say nature does not change so we can do science and leave it at that? That is more rational.

When you use a circular argument you are assuming anyway. So why not omit the circle and just make an assumption? Suppose you want to believe x. It is better to just assume that x is true. It is foolish to say that x is shown to be true by y and y is true for x is true for that is just repeating yourself in a different way and calling it an argument.

Think of it this way, "Science tells me about reality through sense-experience and sense-experience should be heeded so nature does not change for that is what I learn through sense experience". That removes the circularity altogether and grounds it in evidence. In other words, you are not saying what you see or hear is real but you are merely saying that it bears witness to you so you are entitled to believe it for you see no proof that it is wrong or lying. It is just the same way as believing a friend. What they say when you know them is sufficient evidence that what they say should be accepted as true. You could be wrong and they could be wrong but that is not the point. The point is believability and belief is not certainty.

McGrath said that ethics has no justification either so ethical judgements are in the same boat as science. This is wrong for he has obviously only studied the popular theories of right and wrong which are certainly full of error. Experience tells us what should be right and wrong.

McGrath would surely agree that a needless circular argument, needless in the sense that it does not give us belief or knowledge, would be irrational. So to say science is true because my blind faith in the senses says so and my blind faith is

right because science is true would be a rational blind belief but to believe that cats are demons because a witch said so and the witch is right for cats are demons is irrational. But we can practice science and ethics and logic without believing in them so that fails completely. If a circular argument is a mistake then even if you need it, it is still wrong. Needing a doctrine does not make it true or likely to be true. And you don't need it for you can believe that you can neither believe or disbelieve anything and still live a normal life in case what you experience is real and in case it's not some kind of a dream. If we can survive without knowledge then knowledge does not matter.

He cannot say that if the arguments for the validity of the senses and science and ethics are circular reasoning then it is illogical to believe in them. McGrath says that the circles he approves are right but other ones, ones that are not the basis of the power to know and believe, like, "The Bible is true for God has spoken and God has spoken for the Bible is true," or, "John killed my cat because Mary said so and Mary said so because John killed the cat", are not needed and are illogical. The only thing good I can say about this is that it shows that the less you need your vicious circle the more irrational it is. The ones that are not basic are worse than the circles for science and ethics. Also, you can't logically argue what you like about science and the rational ethic but you can with the non-basic circle. For example, if the example we used is rational so is this one to the same extent, "I am God for I say so and I say so for I am God". It would be arbitrary and bigoted for religion to say you shouldn't say that. Circular arguments would be undesirable things so if they are needed we should use as few of them as possible. That is what needing them would imply, that we should have only as few as possible.

McGrath does not realise that it is not the consequences of circular reasoning that determine if it is sensible or not but the nature of the argument and its nature is invariably irrational. This is true of the circular arguments he accepts as valid as well as of the invalid ones. You cannot see the consequences unless you reason in the first place so consequences have nothing to do with it for they have no validity apart from reasoning. Circular reasoning says reason is wrong and so how could you base reason on an illogical foundation? It is like trying to see the forests of Bavaria while wearing a blindfold.

If we know reason is true then it follows that science and ethics can't be circular when they are based on reason. So, what he should be writing is that we accept reason only by circular reasoning. But if we assume reason is true then we are saying, "I assume reason is true and science is true and that I should do good for reason says so and reason is right for I assume it to be true".

Perhaps we can't expect to find a ground for knowledge that is completely rational but just have to use the best we can come up with and it might be a vicious circle with evidence for itself. We would however be thinking fully rationally with it though the content is partly irrational. I mean in the way it is rational to think the best logic you can.

It is an error to say that A is true because A is true because that is not giving a reason but repeating yourself. It is all right if you know that A is true but A is not made true by you saying it is true because it is true. To say that is to pretend you know that it is true.

It is rational to say that "A is true because A is true because I know it", and not to say, "A is true because A is true", because the first is more accurate and says what you mean by true, that you know it to be true. The second is a circular argument. The person using circular reasoning can never say she knows she is right.

It is better to believe a circular argument that you need to believe in science and maths and in the world. But religion does not need belief in God or in Jesus coming back from the dead or in an afterlife like it might need a circular argument for the correctness of right reason. Yet it puts the belief before all things. It says God comes first so that it is better for people and reason and the whole universe to disappear than for God not to be honoured and believed in.

If you don't have a belief that what you sense is real you will be able to learn nothing. So believing in the validity of the senses is a basic belief, you need that before you can believe in anything else. Its basic to your knowledge.

MCGRATH AND RELIGIOUS CIRCULAR BELIEFS

McGrath originally believed that religious belief might be reasonable if it was circular for if you prove something with X then you have to prove that X is proven by Y and that Y is proven by Z and so on ad infinitum. This can't be done so you need the circle. He believed that the foundations of knowledge depended on circles which verified this. But he said that his reader must decide if it is reasonable in the sense that it has evidence. Beliefs that are assumptions so that we can have knowledge, for example, if we didn't assume our eyes could see they would be no good to us and we wouldn't absorb or know the fact that we are about to step over the cliff are called basic beliefs. A basic belief is a belief we need so that we can based knowledge and other beliefs on it.

Later he repudiated the idea that religious circles might be reasonable. He rejected it for only circles that had to do with knowledge could be accepted and religious belief has nothing to do with becoming a basis for knowledge. Some religionists would say that belief in God is a basic belief for if we believe in God we can trust in what the senses and our

thinking tell us for he made them. But it is only necessary to believe that the senses and reason are right. It is easier to believe that they are just right than it is to believe that they are right because of a God. It is also more dignified and more self-confident.

McGrath decided that if faith in religion was circular in its foundation then one can only appreciate the evidence for a religion if one already believes. For example, if your basic belief is in the Bible and you believe in the Bible because of a circle you can see the evidence but not believe in the Bible because of the evidence for you are not treating the evidence as evidence though you perceive the evidence. The circle interprets the evidence for you and the evidence is not allowed to stand on its own two feet and tell you what is what. This is putting the conclusion before the premises, the belief before the evidence and then looking only at what evidence you want to see and looking at it the way you are biased to see it. You pay lip service to the evidence, pretend you believe because of it when you don't and would "believe" without it. This is what those who tell you to become a Christian without evidence and you will see the evidence are telling you to do. It is an extremely dishonest approach. Any religion could say that you have to join it and you will appreciate the evidence then. There would be no way of telling true from false with that logic. The believer and the unbeliever should be able to equally understand the evidence and see what it says and absorb it.

McGrath believed that when God speaks and one says that one will not believe until God is proved and it is proved that God should be believed then this is not faith or trust but mistrust. He thought that a husband saying that he would only believe in his wife if she proved she was faithful showed that this was not trust in any form. Because of this he argued that proofs for God would not be needed and indeed would be undesirable (page 22). The truth is that you have to prove your wife exists as well as you can before you can love her and then you trust her without looking for proof all the time. The husband always has some proof that he should trust his wife for there can be no trust without evidence – he just does not make her prove everything for he has enough evidence. Also, a man can trust his wife for he knows her as a human being. But God is invisible and out of reach so we can't say the same of him. We don't know his nature to trust him. We don't know if his revelation of himself is himself as he really is. Unlike the husband we have no evidence. God speaking is not enough for many have sworn that God has spoken when he hasn't. The Christian faith has always insisted that faith is a gift from God and is supernatural (Ephesians 2) which means that God causes you to believe by presenting evidence and influence how you see it which he would not be doing if you could do it yourself meaning that the Christian has to believe in God and the religion before they get the evidence! Biblical faith is about being biased and narrow-minded. And God never gives much evidence to the average believer which proves this. The less evidence the more biased and bigoted and arrogant the believer is.

A husband can trust his wife and check up on her not because he thinks she is doing something wrong but because trust is not complete certainty anyway and she should be flattered that he wants to reduce the uncertainty for it will make her look better in his sight. She knows that if she behaves herself that she has nothing to fear. God gives us such poor evidence for his existence and he gives us even worse evidence for what he is like and stands for. The lack of decent evidence indicates that there is no God.

McGrath, like Vatican II, saw faith as God revealing himself to a person now instead of a person learning doctrine and ideas that are supposed to be about showing what God is like or what God is. The doctrines and ideas tell you about God but God works through your thoughts and feelings and perceptions of them to see that what they say about God is true. It is like God revealing the truth in a book or whatever and then working within you to reveal to you that the book is true. He uses the book not to reveal himself but as a tool in which he can be perceived and sensed. Faith is God revealing himself to you. That is faith because to believe in a book that God wrote to reveal himself is not as good as God personally, person to person, revealing himself and perhaps using the book as a tool. It is God indirectly revealing to you and direct is more personal, friendly and intimate. And you are not as sure that it is really God's work unless God is in communion with you. The chief reason for faith having to be a direct revelation to the individual is that this makes faith about a relationship with God instead of just learning about God. But many people have claimed to have had supernatural faith in revelations from God and then discovered that faith was wrong.

McGrath stated that the Catholic tendency to use philosophical proofs for God in preference to proving that God has spoken and shown us thereby that he exists is not a reverent approach. The revelation would come first. And philosophy could lead to atheism.

Anybody who says that to believe in God because of reason is not to believe in God because of God's authority is wrong for we cannot stop thinking or reasoning anyway. We can't trust God at all without thinking and if thinking before trusting him is a bad thing then it is better than the alternative.

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