

DO WE NEED TO BELIEVE IN GOD TO BELIEVE IN REASON?

The popular idea about God claims that to believe you have to forsake your reason.

Page 5 of Mere Theology by Alister McGrath says that as the word of God in the Bible commands us to love God with all our minds we are being asked to think about God. McGrath says that loving God and wanting to understand him better go together. McGrath also says that we cannot let Christ - and by implication God - rule over our hearts unless we let him guide us in our thinking. He says the command shows that Christianity is not against the use of the intellect and not against free inquiry to check the religion out for veracity and correctness.

The point of the commandment is that we are to let God do the thinking for us. It says nothing about thinking for ourselves. Indeed, in those days there was no science. The command was given to the Jews - this faith was an umbrella for many different Judaisms. They couldn't even agree if there was a life after death. The people didn't have the means or the time to think. They had only short lives as well. The thinking people could do for themselves had to be very limited because of the times they were in. To read the commandment as saying we can think for ourselves as long as we let God enlighten us is anachronistic. Those people did not have much time for the notion of a God putting thoughts in their minds.

And if you use your head and get stuck and God has to fill in the blanks then why will your filled blanks differ from the next person? No two religious people agree on everything and there are fundamental differences between many of them. If God puts thoughts in your mind that is not you thinking for yourself but you not thinking for yourself. In reality what Christianity has is letting you think a bit and that is all.

We need reason as a tool to help in the search for truth and to avoid the perils of self-contradiction which include how errors can lead you over the cliffedge.

Reason must be connected to what your senses and the evidence says. You get the information from them and think out the meaning and the implications. Reason must not be a bubble. A symphony is ruined by one wrong note. In a math's exam, you are punished once for one mistake. After that though the logic is right the information is wrong. That is why you must be firmly grounded in information and process it with logic. Reason that is like the math's exam is worse than being irrational.

Religious people say that faith in the God who is using their religion as his instrument on earth is reasonable.

But if faith in God or any particular religion is wrong then it contradicts reason in ways we do not know. We may never know.

So for that reason alone religion needs to try to make sense.

C S Lewis said that those who say we are made by pure chance are saying our reason may be defective and cannot be trusted. What does he want us to do? He wants us to decide that there is a God who gave us our reason and God is reliable so we can trust our reason. But it makes no sense to say that reason is reliable for you have reasoned that God is reliable. You are trusting reason by itself so what are you doing trying to bring God in for? You are trusting in reason to trust in God so how can you say your faith in God is the reason you trust your reason? That is lying.

God means the ultimate good - the only thing that matters. Thus Lewis as a Christian has to use trickery in case we see that God cannot be the ultimate good for reason does not depend on faith in him. Reason is independent.

According to Lewis, to say God didn't make us and chance started off the process of evolution which made us and that those beliefs are rational is self-refuting. He thought that if we are programmed and do not really have any free will then we cannot be sure we know what we think we know. It would be as silly as saying a calculator programmed by chance could be relied upon. He argued that unless there is a reasonable God who gives us the gift of reason then reason is a waste of energy. He argued that if the value of reason is in doubt then you cannot establish its value by reasoning. If thinking then is no good then thinking is never any good. Or is it?

* If there are reasons to distrust reason, it follows that it cannot be always wrong. Nobody argues that a liar must be disbelieved all the time.

* Reason can be understood as a sense - it senses what is contradictory or what make sense. If it is the product of chance, it is the same as our sense of sight, our eyesight. That would be the product of chance too but it keeps us reasonably informed about what is going on around us. So why can't reason be the same?

* If there are reasons to not always trust reason then we should not trust it if it tells us there is an all-good God who must get all our devotion ultimately. Or most of it. It would not be trustworthy enough to justify such a big doctrine. It is a doctrine even bigger than the doctrine that surgery can help cancer for both surgery and cancer supposedly depend on God. It is a bigger doctrine than they are if without God they cannot happen.

Interestingly if reason cannot be trusted and I trust it then what I care about is what I think and not the truth. That would provide a proof that I care about me and nobody else. Caring for others is really just using them to get what I want. And if reason cannot be trusted and I go along with it as opposed to trust it then I am even worse.

We all have doubts about the validity of reason for we are imperfect. We have difficulties with it too. Difficulties are not doubts but put you at risk of developing doubts. Difficulties about reason itself are different from difficulties about the truth and facts. Catholics say they may have difficulties about matters of faith but that a thousand difficulties do not add up to one doubt.

Lewis follows an out-of-date philosophy of mind. Beliefs and actions and reactions all go together. Lewis argues that if our reason is the product of chance it is no use so it can lead you doing strange things. For example, you might boil water in an empty pot. Or you might try to light a fire with ice. Our experience shows that he is wrong. He is stressing theory over reality. Reason itself says that even if the mind is just thrown together that in itself does not prove it has no capacity to discern truth. In theory a calculator can be made by chance and give $1 + 1 = 2$.

Those who say that our reason is no good if we are products of chance, do not argue that our perception is no good if we are the products of chance. They are dishonest in this. If you see a fire there is probably a fire there. Even if there isn't you still see it. Reason is trying to conform to reality. Evolution may have started off by chance but that does not mean the entities produced by evolution cannot conform to reality. A framework can start off by chance. It does not mean you are at the mercy of chance all the time - the framework reduces the chances. If we evolve lungs it is because the reality is that we need them to breathe. Lewis seems to think that if chance is behind all things that it means chance has it that your lungs stop breathing one minute and work the next and look for smoke one minute and decent air the next. Chance started off the framework and the structure - not a series of more and more chances.

Evolution has stopped belief formation that can destroy us. For example, the belief that life is not worth living so we must commit suicide. Being too divorced from reality will destroy us so evolution keeps us reasonably in touch with reality most of the time. It gives us beliefs such as the need for community. So evolution coming by chance does not mean that our beliefs are suspect for they came from chance. It means they might be true despite having come from chance. So it is rational for a person who denies the existence of free will or the supernatural to hold that our beliefs can be and often are correct.

Here is a variation of Lewis's argument, "I have a spiritual experience of God. God lovingly has given me free will and reason. I can trust them for I can trust this loving God whom I experience." Others may say that they have that experience too. But the fact remains that the experience is your experience and nobody else's. Many feel they have an experience of the absence as in non-existence of God. Using the scientific method to justify beliefs is better than resting on experience. Anybody can verify the scientific method. Science may have errors but it is better to start with doubt and use the scientific method to get out of it than to depend on anything else such as a religious or spiritual experience. With those you repudiate the reality check. So you end up diluting reason not serving it. You stop yourself trusting it properly.

If an experience of God is so great that it can support reason, why not just sense that reason supports itself? Why not have an experience of the power of reason? By bringing God in to justify reason you are doing that anyway but in a roundabout awkward and confused way. Why not just do it and leave God out?

Evolution does not always lead to entities forming reliable beliefs. To survive, we evolved a habit of lazy reasoning because of the better safe than sorry tendency we all have. It does us more good than harm. We think lightning is out to get us so we hide from it though if we reasoned carefully we would see it is very unlikely to hurt us. We tend to see inanimate objects and things as free agents who could endanger us. The way we use reason shows that it evolved and that God is not needed to explain it. Denying it evolved would be irrational.

Some strangely argue that if you reason that there is a God, then you fall into idolatry and end up worshipping a product of your logic and not God. This is nonsense. If God uses reason as a tool to bring you to him then it is not idolatry. You are not worshipping how you think but somebody who your reason tells you is there. Even if this were idolatry, it is still better than worshipping anything you have little or no evidence for and something you apply no logic to.

Lewis was wrong to think that belief in reason necessarily goes with belief in God. In fact trying to make reason depend on God destroys reason. Better to enjoy the reason we have even if we have doubts about it than to destroy it totally with belief

in God. Belief in God should not be encouraged as it poses a risk to reason.

Religion says that God gave us the gift of reason to work out what the moral standard is. Religion usually teaches that God somehow IS the moral standard. So this is reason learning about God through learning about what God wants people to do.

People talk about the meaning of life. By that phrase you would expect to mean being fully alive and feeling fully alive. As reason is a part of you and of life then reason has a role to play in allowing you to have meaning and giving you meaning.

Without reason even a God is no good! If we were more rational and careful our lives would grow. If reason and so on says there is no God then we will get meaning by denying him. By caring about and following reason and evidence and thus ourselves we go on a path that might lead to God being abandoned as a superstition and a crutch. They are fundamentally non-religious tools.