

What is the Proper Relationship Between Faith and Reason?

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Last revision: February 22, 2022

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Introduction

A chimpanzee waddles into a bar, swings himself up onto a stool, holds out a twenty-dollar bill in one hand, and gestures towards a picture of a Strawberry-Banana Margarita with the other. Unsure of what else to do, the surprised bartender prepares the drink, slides it towards the chimp, and takes his money. Returning from the cash register with his change, the bartender mischievously gives the chimp a single one-dollar bill in return. The chimp pockets it, finishes the last gulp of his drink, and gives himself a satisfied pat on his hairy belly.

"You know, we don't get many customers like you in here," muses the bartender.

"Well, I'm not at all surprised to hear that," replies the chimp. "Nineteen dollars for a drink is overpriced by anyone's standards! I mean, it was pretty good, but not *that* good!"

This story of a chimp bantering at a bar happens to be untrue. It never happened. Somehow you already knew that. And just *how* did you come to know that? The voice of reason whispered something to you—something like, "*Every story that starts with anything walking into a bar and is set in the present tense should not be believed to be a true story. This story begins with a chimp walking into a bar and uses all present tense verbs. Therefore...*" Or perhaps it whispered something else. Regardless of what it whispered, this is an example of how we are constantly using our reason to evaluate objects, ideas, and people in the attempt to decide if they are worth investing any faith in.

Thesis

The normal relationship between reason and faith is simple: reason leads either towards or away from faith in some idea or object (R→F). This is true of all of life's decisions regardless of how mundane or profound, simple or complex. For any idea we believe, we can ask what reasons we have for believing that idea. The fact that there are always reasons underlying our beliefs indicates that *some kind of reasoning* helped establish those beliefs. Of course, some reasons are better than others.

After reason leads us to a reasonable faith, reason should *not* be abandoned. Faith should proceed to inform reason (F→R). Reason should continue to understand, systematize, test,

refine, and improve the mental models we believe correspond to reality (faith). So long as reason remains faithful and faith remains reasonable, both reason and faith should be held in high regard and encouraged to cooperate ($R \rightleftharpoons F$). While there are times when reason should take priority over faith and other times when faith should be given priority over reason, we ultimately must reject both of the more extreme views that insist we should attempt to operate either on reason alone or on faith alone.

R	Reason Alone (extreme antagonism towards Faith)
F	Faith Alone (extreme antagonism towards Reason)
R>F	Reason over Faith (mild antagonism to Faith)
F>R	Faith over Reason (mild antagonism to R and/or R encouraged only after a foundation of F is established)
$R \rightleftharpoons F$	Reason & Faith (R leads to F, F informs R, R systematizes F, R continually tests and refines F, etc.)

Table 1. The five basic positions in the faith and reason debate.¹

Reasoning about Reason

The Source of Reason

We are called *homo sapiens* (“men of wisdom”) because our reasoning powers vault us far above the beasts. We are the masters of the earth not because of our physical superiority but because of our mental superiority. We reason with one another, cooperate, and dominate all other living things. The next most intelligent animals—chimps, gorillas, pigs, porpoises,

¹ These five positions are adapted from Chapter 17 (“The Relationship Between Faith and Reason”) of Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980). The authors offer Kant and Spinoza as examples of the “reason only” category, Kierkegaard and Barth as examples of “revelation only” category, liberal Christian thinkers among the ancient Alexandrian school and modern Higher Critical movement as typifying “reason over revelation,” Tertullian and Cornelius Van Til as an example of “revelation over reason,” and Augustine and Aquinas as examples of “revelation and reason.” While they side with the “revelation and reason” position themselves, they also give conditional credence to the other positions. Compare with Mark Hanna “Faith and Reason” in Joseph M. Holden, ed., *The Harvest Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2018), 51.

elephants, shepherd dogs, parrots and ravens—can barely compete with our three-year-old children in cognitive tests involving symbolic logic.² All these animals are left far behind us by the time our brains reach their adolescent level of maturity. As our brains reach adult maturity in our early twenties, each of our brains contains around 85,000 million neurons. There are actually more connections between those neurons than there are stars in the observable universe!

So, who or what caused the quantum leaps in our cognitive brain-power and wisdom? Some have reasoned that when the conditions are right, forces like random mutation and natural selection are freed to produce such leaps in complexity. Once our more primitive ancestors learned how to cook food with fire, and made a habit of doing so, all that energy we used to spend digesting raw meat could then be routed to building bigger and better brains. And by gathering shellfish on beaches during low tide, the fatty-acids and other raw materials that are needed for the building of bigger brains became available. But how can mindless forces—forces that are totally devoid of intention and intelligence—create any minds with intention and intelligence?³ Streams don't rise above their sources. And one

² To explore some of the differences between apes and humans, see John W. Oller Jr. and John L. Omdahl, "Origin of the Human Language Capacity: In Whose Image?" in J.P. Moreland, ed., *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 257-262. Also see Fazale Rana, *Who was Adam? A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Humanity* (Covina, California: RTB Press, 2015). The extinct hominids known as Neanderthals did have a noteworthy layer of cerebral cortex but the shape of their skulls suggests that they were designed for interpreting visual data in low light conditions (in the occipital lobe, which is in the back of the head) and not optimized for logic, language, art, social intelligence, and the other cerebral operations (in the frontal, temporal, and parietal lobes) that we "modern humans" seem to have been optimized for.

³ Although we are using the words "brain" and "mind" interchangeably in this section of the chapter, we actually do not consider the two to be identical. There is a tremendous overlap and interplay between them but mind is more than mere brain activity. The two regions of the brain known as the *rostralateral prefrontal cortex* (RLPFC) and the *inferior parietal lobule* (IPL) are very energetic while we are performing higher reasoning. But that activity is still a total mystery to neuroscientists at this time. We cannot be sure that reasoning is nothing more than brain activity in and around those brain regions. Even if it is—which we are open to—the prospect for creating a persuasive theory based purely on electro-chemical explanation for even more mysterious things like perception, consciousness, qualia, intention, and personality seems like a fool's errand. This author holds that some immaterial part of us outlives the body which dies (Eccl. 3:18-22; 12:6-7) and will someday be replaced with a physical, resurrected body. There is a very strong unity between our material bodies and our immaterial selves. I lean heavily towards a hylomorphic (or "thomistic substance dualism") view of the relationship between our bodies and souls, our brains and our minds. See Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume III: Sin and Salvation*. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2004) 52, 66-69; Edward Feser, *Philosophy of Mind: A*

cannot give what one hasn't got. Today it takes a well-funded team of the most brilliant electronic engineers and computer scientists in the world to build massive AI super-computer systems that can out-calculate us on mathematically-rich games like chess, poker, or Go.⁴ But our brains, which weigh a mere 2.8 lbs (1.27 kg), can do countless things that massive super-computers cannot do. We can learn languages, for example, without even being told how.

Here is the explanation Moses gave to explain our greatness:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:26-30.)

Beginner's Guide (London, England: Oneworld, 2005); Edward Feser, *Aristotle's Revenge: The Metaphysical Foundations of Physical and Biological Science* (Neunkirchen-Seelscheid, Germany: Editiones Scholasticae, 2019) 20-27; J.P. Moreland, *The Soul: How We Know It's Real and Why it Matters* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014); Walter J. Freeman, "Nonlinear Brain Dynamics and Intention According to Aquinas" in *Mind and Matter*, Vol. 6(2), pp. 207-234. Putting the reasonableness of hylomorphism aside, every author in this book would be quick to agree with Behe's summation:

... in the absence of any good answer and in the light of the success of physical science, [Cartesian] dualism was discredited, hylomorphism was forgotten... the mind was assumed to be just another physical phenomenon, no different in kind than digestion. Frankly, that's crazy. I have no answer to the problem of how the mind affects the body or the reverse, but denying your mind because you can't solve a problem is like cutting off your head to cure a headache. Whatever difficulties dualism, hylomorphism, or some other proposed explanation may have, they pale in comparison to denying mind. When you make that move, no more arguments are left, because—to the extent you are consistent—there is no more mind to reason about them.

Michael Behe, *Darwin Devolves: The New Science about DNA that Challenges Evolution* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2019) 276-277.

⁴ The game known in English as Go is also known as Igo in Japanese, Wei-chi in Chinese, and Baduk in Korean. It is played by two opponents on a 19x19 grid with 181 black pebbles and 180 white pebbles. In 2016 and 2017, Google's artificial intelligence supercomputer, aptly named AlphaGo, defeated several of the world's top Go players. Go contains far more possible move permutations than chess, making the victory for AI more impressive than the 1987 victories of IBM's super computer over the world's greatest chess champions. This helps confirm the conclusion that cognitive computing can be "smarter" than human minds in applications involving math and strategy. Perhaps real-world warfare in the 21st century will be dominated by whoever has the best AI systems and the most robotic drones. Interestingly, some military strategists have suggested that one of the reasons for the French and American defeats in the Indo-China Wars was that the oriental strategy of war was more conditioned by the game Go while the occidental strategy was more conditioned by chess.

Which is more reasonable: Mindless forces, cooking, and shellfish creating spectacular minds, or an even greater Mind creating minds? A purposeful God with an infinitely intelligent mind would surely be able to design and create finite beings with somewhat similar (but far less powerful) versions of mind to his. To those who object that we are prematurely filling in gaps in our scientific knowledge with the God-of-the-gaps hypothesis, we respond that our hypothesis is adequate to explain the observable facts, that the burden of the proof is on them to find another adequate theory to fill the gap, that and an equation of shellfish, cooking fires, and genetic mutations doesn't fill this gap at all, and that we'll gladly stick with the best answer we have for now.

Genesis indicates that being "made in the image of God" is chiefly about our ability to govern the earth and rule over its animals. Ruling involves reasoning through complex problems, evaluating the possible solutions, and setting into motion the changes required to solve problems and optimize complex systems. If Moses is right, there is something very noble about reasoning. The more we exercise our higher reasoning capabilities, the more we become like God intended us to be. And, in a limited way, the more like God we are. Conversely, the more we fail to exercise our reason as God intended, the more like the mindless beasts we become.

Reason is a Many-Splendored Thing

The immediate challenge to this rather self-evident and simple $\mathbf{R} \Rightarrow \mathbf{F}$ theory is that our reasoning often becomes messy. For example, even in those moments where we manage to reason very logically, we can still be led away from truth by incorrect premises, deceptive statistics, incomplete data, and misinformation.

Brain Regions and Reason

Although our brains do not have parts like machines and computers do, an attempt to make some logical division of the brain into layers, lobes, halves, and regions can be helpful for beginning to grasp the complexity involved in reason and faith. The top layer, the cerebral cortex, seems to be the layer that really sets humans apart from animals. It contains about 16 billion neurons and handles functions like reasoning, language use, learning, emotions, and the interpretation of data from our five senses. The left half tends to do more processing of logic and language while the right half tends to focus more on creative, artistic,

imaginative, and musical tasks. The two halves are intimately connected, interact with one another constantly, and can even take over functions for the other side when certain specializing areas are damaged. The cerebrum can also be logically divided into four lobes and into dozens of regions that specialize in various computations. Brain imaging studies have shown that two such regions—the rostralateral prefrontal cortex (RLPFC) and the inferior parietal lobule (IPL)—are particularly chatty while we are reasoning. But it also depends on the coordinated activity of a few other cerebral regions in unison as well. Even when we think we're being singularly logical, there are, in fact, several brain regions (not all of which specialize in logical thinking) working together and influencing one another. Our minds have so many different facets and faculties working together in a mysterious and holistic unity, it may be impossible for us to be purely logical. On the other hand, logic is involved in every thought we think.

Brainwave Ranges and Reason

When we are in our deepest sleeps or trances, our brain waves are pulsing very slowly along in the so-called **delta wave** range. While reasoning does not occur in this phase, mystical experiences may. In the **theta wave** state, associated with daydreaming or light sleeping, the mind can do some freestyle reasoning and come up with creative, inventive, and intuitive answers to problems. Occasionally those answers prove to be profound and reasonable. In the **alpha wave** state, we're relaxed, calm, humming along, and not consciously reasoning. The flashes of insight associated with abductive logic may occur most frequently in this range. This range, however, may also be the state of mind where reason is bypassed enough to make us susceptible to hypnotic suggestions and emotional appeals. In **beta wave** range, we're in our normal state of mind, fully conscious and not putting much strain on our brains. We frequently reason in this state of mind but with a nimbler variety of reasoning that serves well for solving familiar problems. In **gamma wave** range, we are concentrating and straining our highest faculties of reason on solving some challenging and unfamiliar problems. Complicating matters more, our cerebrums operate on all five of these frequency ranges at the same time; one range is just more dominant than the others at any given time.

Reasoning with Fast and Slow Thinking Systems

For better and for worse, most of our reasoning happens in a tier of the thinking mind that is instinctive, reflexive, nimble, fast, subconscious, mixed heavily with emotion, prone to stereotyping and to making hasty conclusions. This level of reasoning is ideal for judging whether a story about a chimp in a bar is fact or fiction. But problems which are less familiar, more challenging, and more serious need to be escalated to a higher tier of thinking that reasons slowly, more consciously, and laboriously, is less distracted by emotion, more able to overcome biases, and is more suited for complex reasoning.⁵

The Argumentative Theory of Reasoning

Even when doing higher reason, reasoning as an individual in isolation, or reasoning among a group that shares a bias, reason tends to serve the bias. The results of several experiments performed by psychologists in recent years have helped shift thinking about the mind further away from Cartesian dualism. In an attempt to make sense of the data, cognitive scientists Dan Sperber and Hugo Mercier advanced the “argumentative theory of reasoning.”⁶ The first part of their theory is very pessimistic about the value of reason. It insists that the use of reason as individuals in isolation typically creates arguments to meant to determine truth but to us justify what we already wanted to believe is true. The second part of Sperber and Mercier’s theory is more optimistic about reason, however. It argues that our use of reason in argumentative debate in communities of humans does tend to lead towards truer positions and better decisions. If so, our reason faculties seem designed to reason, argue, and debate in community. Reason enables us to solve our disagreements and cooperate in groups because reasoning’s main purpose seems to be to convince others. Reason is good for

⁵ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

⁶ Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber, *The Enigma of Reason* (Harvard University Press, 2017). A condensed summary by Hugo Mercier titled *The Argumentative Theory of Reasoning* was self-published at <https://sites.google.com/site/hugomercier/theargumentativetheoryofreasoning>. (Last accessed 4/11/2019.) Hugo Mercier & Dan Sperber “Why do humans reason? Arguments for an argumentative theory.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (2011) 34(2), 57-111. http://www.dan.sperber.fr/wp-content/uploads/2011_mercier_why-do-humans-reason.pdf. (Accessed 4/11/2019.) Even though Mercier and Sperber are committed to a naturalistic and evolutionary viewpoint, they are using abductive logic to attempt to address the question of what reason was designed to do. Interestingly, in addition to fitting data from several studies, some of the main points in their theory seems to harmonize well with several points in the ancient Hebrew wisdom tradition. Examples: Pr. 15:22; Pr. 18:17; Pr. 24:6; Is.1:18; Jer. 17:9; Acts 5:33-42; Acts 15:6-22; 1 Cor. 3:6; 1 Cor.14:29; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Thess. 5:21.

evaluating other people's arguments and deciding which argument is stronger than another. We are not good at finding the flaws in our own reasoning and our own beliefs. As a result, we need to get out of our "echo chambers" and be willing to open our views up for input from and testing by others. Interestingly, their research also shows that reasoning works best when fewer than seven people are reasoning together. Larger groups tend to hinder reason and lead towards "group think" and the not-so-rational herd mentality. Another encouraging insight they report is that reasoning does always tend to have some impact on the dynamic of faith and doubt, even if that impact is slight.

Three Types of Logic

Deductive and Inductive Reasoning

We are most obviously reasoning when we think slowly, carefully, and consciously about some question, problem, equation, or idea. We use the knowledge we have to try to understand it deeply, evaluate reasons for and against it, draw conclusions about it, explain it, and/or make predictions. We are performing *deductive reasoning* when we reason from general and known truths to a specific conclusion. For example, if A is greater than B and B is greater than C, then A must be greater than C. Mathematics and philosophical reasoning tend to be of this type. Assuming its premises are true, and the structure of the argument is valid, deductive logic produces conclusions that are certain.

Reasoning from specific facts and data to general truths is called *inductive reasoning*. Scientific research involving experiments tends to be of the inductive variety—as is the inference from multiple observations that multiple chimpanzees were not able to reason on par with humans and, therefore, it is highly improbable (and therefore reasonably unbelievable) that the next chimp we test will also prove unable to reason at human levels. Inductive logic produces probable conclusions (not absolute certainty) and is useful for making reasonable predictions about the future.⁷

⁷ Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *Come, Let us Reason: An Introduction to Logical Thinking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990). This book is an excellent introductory text for deductive and inductive logic. While it does not cover abductive reasoning at all, Norman Geisler has expressed some appreciation for abductive logic in other public lectures and private conversations.

Abductive Reasoning

Although it is a little more controversial and “fuzzy,” there is at least one more type of reasoning we routinely perform which has gained acceptance with many logicians. *Abductive reasoning* processes ideas in our subconscious minds and its hypotheses surface into our conscious minds as a flash of insight or intuition. These insights tend to occur with the so-called “fast thinking” system, or the theta- or alpha- dominant brainwave pattern) and, as a result, should then be subjected to subsequent testing by the “slow-thinking” system. The one having the insight may not even be able to articulate how he or she came to the idea, but, regardless, it was done so logically.⁸ It makes theories that fit observations. Some extend it to what happens when we simply have to make our best guess with limited and incomplete information. Like jurors who hear arguments from the prosecution and the defense lawyers, realize that they don’t have all the information they’d prefer to have, and still have to make their decision on their “gut instinct,” making an “educated guess” when evidence is scarce, faith is weak, and certainty impossible. Some of our most brilliant insights may have been produced by abductive reasoning. This may be, for example, how Stephen Hawking realized that Roger Penrose’s ideas about black holes might be applicable to the creation event of our universe. Also, some of Albert Einstein’s most brilliant, creative, and enduring insights and theories seem to have come from light reasoning in a theta wave state before being

⁸ Charles Peirce, a brilliant logician and philosopher of language, popularized the idea of “abductive inference,” which he also called “hypothetic inference” and “retroduction.” He describes it as an insight which should be framed as a question (hypothesis) for further testing rather than as a final conclusion. C.S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955),150. However, he also points out that sometimes it is untestable. The way the insight is reached is inexplicable, involves some guesswork, and ends up explaining the facts well (Ibid, 55-56). Peirce explains, “Abductive inference shades into perceptual judgment without any sharp line of demarcation between them; or, in other words, our first premises, the perceptual judgements, are to be regarded as an extreme case of abductive inferences, from which they differ in being absolutely beyond criticism. The abductive suggestion comes to us like a flash. It is an act of *insight*, although of extremely fallible insight. It is true that the different elements of the hypothesis were in our minds before; but it is the idea of putting together what we had never before dreamed of putting together which flashes the new suggestion before our contemplation. ... The form of the perceptual abduction is: A well-recognized kind of object, M, has for its ordinary predicates P1, P2, P3, etc., indistinctly recognized. The suggesting object, S, has these same predicates, P1, P2, P3, etc. Hence, S is the kind of M. The first premise is not actually thought, though it is in the mind habitually. This, of itself, would not make the inference unconscious. But it is so because it is not recognized as an inference; the conclusion is accepted without our knowing how” (Ibid, 304-305).

scrutinized in the gamma wave state.⁹ So, while abductive reasoning should warrant additional caution, it is not necessarily irrational or anti-scientific. Looking at an “abduction” (meaning here an act of the mind to abduce a theory rather than deduce a conclusion) in the framework of the scientific method¹⁰ may be helpful. It would be important to view an abduction as a hypothesis rather than a tested, validated conclusion.

This is not an attempt to champion one type of reason over another. It’s good to keep more than one tool sharp in our tool boxes. Keeping in mind their strengths and limitations, we respect and benefit from the understanding given by all types of reasoning. While scientific experimentation is associated with inductive reason, there are times, especially when the option for experimentation is not available, where scientists use deductive reasoning. Archaeologists, for example, routinely analyze artifacts and ruins left behind by ancient peoples, are unable to duplicate the scenarios in experiments, but can still use deductive reason and abductive hunches based on prior knowledge to make sense of the

⁹ Albert Einstein, a man such brilliance that very few on earth today can understand his theories on a deep level, had a reputation for using his “theta wave” state of mind to find solutions. He supposedly kept paper and pencil near his bed because his mind was working on mathematical problems in his sleep and breakthrough insights occasionally surfaced into consciousness upon waking. Some of his scientific peers had disdain for this method of reasoning. But rigorous testing in subsequent decades would prove that they were profound and could withstand testing. Perhaps this sheds light on two of the quotes Einstein is famous for: “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them,” and “imagination is more important than knowledge.” Inventor Thomas Edison, painter Salvador Dali, fiction author Marry Shelly, chemist August Kekule (of benzene-ring fame), and film-director James Cameron also exploited the creative state of their brains while they were in the state of “hypnagogia,” the state between waking (alpha wave) and sleeping (theta wave). While reasoning at its purest happens on the highest ranges of neuro-oscillation (gamma and beta), it seems some significant reasoning (perhaps that which fits under the umbrella of abductive) can also occur in the, alpha, and perhaps even theta ranges as well.

¹⁰ One fairly standard way to express the scientific method is the P-R-H-E-O-C-C pattern:

1. Problem – what question are you trying to answer?
2. Research – find out what is already known and unknown about it
3. Hypothesis – make your educated guess using abductive logic. Make a prediction that you expect the experimentation will show.
4. Experiment – put that hypothesis to the test. Test it rigorously and cautiously. Test it multiple times in multiple controlled sets of circumstances.
5. Observation – collect the data observed during the experiment(s)
6. Conclusions – determine if the hypothesis is correct or not
7. Communicate – present your findings in a talk or paper

puzzle pieces. Such reasoning is neither strictly inductive nor necessarily anti-scientific. And where would science be without mathematical reasoning? When cosmologists and theoretical physicists attempt to reason about the time immediately before, during, or immediately after the moment our universe began its expansion, they're switching from scientific reasoning to philosophical reasoning and abductive guesswork.¹¹

There are also less rational types of reasoning at work—emotional, social, and cultural reasoning, for example. When a member of a society that holds their cultural and religious traditions tightly hears intellectually appealing reasons to become a believer in Christ, he or she may reason towards doubt as follows:

- (1) If I accept Jesus in faith, my parents and family will be shamed and I will be ostracized.
- (2) Shaming my family and being ostracized is not a good thing for me and my community.
- (3) Therefore, my accepting Jesus is not a good thing for me and my community.

¹¹ Motz and Weaver set the limit for scientific inquiry to the time when the universe was 10^{-35} second old: “As one goes back to these very early epochs [of the beginning of the universe], to almost 1 trillionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a second after the initial moment (after the universe’s radius R was 0), the cosmological equations tell us that the temperature and density of the universe will keep on growing without limit as we approach the zero moment, finally becoming infinite. This state is known as the ‘initial singularity,’ which has no physical meaning; the equations break down, and so we have no way, with the theory as it is, of understanding the ‘birth of the universe.’ Owing to this breakdown, theoreticians begin their cosmological studies when the universe was 10^{-35} second old and its temperature was of the order of 10 thousand trillion trillion degrees Kelvin [and] smaller than its present size by a factor of 10^{28} .” Lloyd Motz and Jefferson Weaver, *The Story of Physics* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1989), 381-382. In 1983, Stephen Hawking and James Hartle argued that since scientists cannot determine conditions of the universe before 10^{-43} second after its origin and therefore, in that moment of uncertainty, perhaps some unknown phenomenon interfered with general relativity in a way that allowed the universe to create itself. Astrophysicist Hugh Ross responds, “Amazingly, astrophysicists have a reasonably good understanding of the universe’s development back to when it was only 10^{-35} second old. We may see some very limited probing back to 10^{-43} second, but that represents the practical limit of research. ... Richard Gott has taken advantage of its infinitesimal period about which we know nothing. He has proposed an infinite loss of information about events before 10^{-43} second. ... With this total loss of information, he says, anything becomes possible, including the ability to make an infinite number of universes. ... If the universe had zero information before 10^{-43} second, how did it acquire its subsequent high information state without the input of an intelligent, personal Creator? ... What we see here is another case of the ‘no-God of the gaps.’ It seems that the many non-theistic scientists (and others) are relying on gaps, and in this case a very minute one, to provide a way around the theistic implications of scientifically established facts.” Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Greatest Scientific Discoveries of the Century Reveal God*. (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1993), 92-93.

Despite the somewhat messy complexities of reasoning and faith, the simple $R \rightleftharpoons F$ relationship remains defensible. While we should not blindly trust all of our attempts to reason, we can rely upon it and hold reason in high esteem.

The Controversy is not between Faith and Reason

The “faith versus reason” tension ultimately centers around two crucial questions: **Is there a supernatural God who created us and our world? And, if so, who or what best speaks for him today?** Some have been convinced by their own set of reasons into a position of faith that there is no room for God (or anything supernatural) in our world. Others have become convinced by a different set of reasons that our world can best be explained by a supernatural being who designed and created it. Both camps have their reasons and believe they are being reasonable. Both camps have invested their faith in a conclusion. Even those devoted to scientism have faith in several foundational presuppositions which cannot themselves be proved by science. Philosopher of Science, J.P. Moreland, points out that science presupposes several philosophical things: the existence of the external world, the orderly nature of the external world and its knowability, the uniformity of nature and induction, the laws of logic, the correspondence theory of truth, the reliability of our senses and our minds, the adequacy of language to describe the world, the existence of numbers and that usefulness of mathematics, the concept of formal ontology, the existence of values, singularities, ultimate boundary conditions, and brute givens.¹² With these presuppositions

¹² J.P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018) 55-69; J.P. Moreland, *Christianity and the Nature of Science: A Philosophical Investigation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989) 108-133. Agreeing with Moreland that scientific reasoning is predicated upon philosophical reasoning, analytic-thomistic philosopher Edward Feser begins his case against scientism positing “Aristotelian metaphysics is not only compatible with modern science, but is implicitly presupposed by modern science,” and concludes it saying, “Thus does Aristotle have his revenge against those who claim to have overthrown him in the name of modern science. But he is a magnanimous victor, providing as he does the true metaphysical foundations for the very possibility of that science.” Edward Feser, *Aristotle’s Revenge: The Metaphysical Foundations of Physical and Biological Science* (Neunkirchen-Seelscheid, Germany: Editiones Scholasticae, 2019) 1, 546. Biochemist Michael Behe adds that the divorce of holistic reasoning from strictly scientific reasoning provides one of the failures among scientists who fail to be reasonable: “The Enlightenment separation of science and purpose seemed like a good idea at the time, but it wasn’t. Reason is a unity, and arbitrary divisions of reason can lead to cognitive disaster ... If it weren’t for mathematical reasoning, modern science wouldn’t be possible. The same can be said for even more basic modes of thinking, such as simple logic. Deduction, induction, syllogism, the principle of sufficient

in mind, the controversy is not between people of faith and people of reason—it is ultimately between the natural-only and the natural-plus-supernatural positions.

Those who believe in a God tend to reason deductively (philosophically) from effects to their ultimate cause: from codes to Coder, from creation to Creator, from the dependent to the Dependable, from design to Designer, from information to Informer, from law to Legislator, from artwork to Artist, from engineering to Engineer, from fine-tuning to Fine-Tuner, from sustenance to Sustainer, from meaning to Meaner, from minds to Mind, etc.¹³ While inductive (or scientific) logic is limited to drawing conclusions based on observations that our five senses (and our technologies) can give about this natural world, and not about anything supernatural, it can produce conclusions which can be used as premises for deductive logic to use that posit God as the logical conclusion.

Those who doubt the existence of a God also use deductive reason to arrive at and defend their faith. The existence of evil, suffering, and imperfections, for example, are effects that may seem to some better explained by the lack of an all-powerful, all-good God than by his presence. Their logic may be delineated as follows:

- (1) A God who is all-powerful he must have the power to end suffering.
- (2) A God who is all-good he must desire to end suffering.
- (3) Suffering and evil exist today.
- (4) Therefore, no all-powerful, all-good God exists today.

The error in this deductive chain is that it is too short-sighted. It ignores and is closed off to the future. Just because God has not solved the problem of evil yet doesn't mean that he is

reason, and more—none of those were independently demonstrated by experiment. All of them are more basic than science, and science depends on them to in order to do its work.” Michael Behe, *Darwin Devolves: The New Science about DNA that Challenges Evolution* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2019) 267-270.

¹³ For good introductions to the arguments for the existence of God, see chapters 12 and 13 of Joseph M. Holden, ed., *The Comprehensive Handbook of Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2022) and chapter three of Norman Geisler, *The Twelve Points that Show Christianity is True* (Charlotte, NC: NGIM, 2016). For advanced readings consider Edward Feser, *Five Proofs for the Existence of God* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2017); Norman Geisler *Philosophy of Religion*; Norman Geisler *Christian Apologetics*; Norman Geisler, *God: A Philosophical Argument from Being* (Matthews, NC: Bastion Books, 2015), and John F. X. Knasas *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

not already in the process of solving it or that he may not completely solve it in the future. If it is possible that God has any purpose for temporarily allowing evil and suffering to continue in the present, and has any plan to solve it anytime in the future, this argument against God from evil loses its power. The corrected sorites could be stated as follows:

- (1) Since God is all-powerful he can end suffering.
- (2) Since God is all-good, his will is to end suffering.
- (3) Suffering and evil exist today.
- (4) Therefore, God can and will solve the problem of evil sometime after today.

Once the reasoning is corrected to include the future aspect, the reasonable argument that has helped lead many people away from the theistic God of the Bible becomes an argument that should incline people to invest their hope and faith into the God of the Bible.

The non-theists also may use inductive reasoning. It seems generally true to them that scientific discovery has provided superior and natural explanations many times in the past for many of the mysterious phenomena in nature that were formerly (and wrongly) ascribed to supernatural beings. Assuming that is true, all particular mysteries of our universe that we explain as being caused by a supernatural agent will eventually be explained with purely natural causes by future scientific discoveries. We should then invest our hope and faith in naturalistic science rather than supernatural philosophizing.

There many possible answers to this objection to faith in supernatural explanations. First, since inductive logic offers only probability and not certainty, their conclusion is only probable at best. Second, they fail to explain why we shouldn't adopt the most reasonable answer possible (such as supernatural agency) while waiting for science to come up with a supposedly better answer to questions that seem to defy natural explanations. Third, they neglect to mention the fact that science has limits to what it can explore and can never provide explanations for some things in nature—such as the moments before, during, or immediately after the creation of the time, space, matter, and energy of our universe. As the galaxies continue to move away from one another, science will become more and more unable to observe other galaxies and answer intergalactic questions. Perhaps science is not far from reaching more of its limits. Theoretical physicists seem to be able to come up with

brilliant theories (such as string-theory or multiple universe theory) that may not be verifiable by science. Fourth, in limiting themselves to naturalistic presuppositions and naturalistic answers, they are being unreasonable by taking away some of the possible reasons and trying to forbid reasoning about those possible reasons. Fifth, they refuse to be reasonable about the naturalistic explanations, like neo-Darwinian theories of evolution, that have failed miserably in explaining some mysteries—such as the origin of life and the evolution of a single protein, much less of a new organism. Over a thousand scientists from all over the world have so far signed the “Scientific Dissent from Darwinism Statement” (<https://dissentfromdarwin.org>) in the attempt to raise awareness that Darwinian evolution cannot account for the development of life.

Regarding the second question in focus, the question of who or what best speaks for God today, many who believe in God reason along these lines:

(1) It is only reasonable to have faith in the message of messengers who are well authenticated by God by supernatural miracles, signs, and wonders, which no mere human can perform by himself.

(2) The main prophets and apostles who wrote the Bible were amply authenticated by God with miracles, signs, wonders, and fulfilled prophecies.

(3) Therefore, it is only reasonable to have faith in the message of the Bible as being a collection of messages from God.

(4) Conversely, since none of the other prophets of any other known religious or philosophical tradition were authenticated by signs and wonders, it is not reasonable to invest any faith in them as God’s messengers.¹⁴

Again it becomes evident here that the controversy is not between reason and faith. Nor it is between those with reason and those with faith. It is between reasons for one position and reasons for an opposing position. It is between faith in one position or another. The real question then is which faith is the most reasonable.

¹⁴ The argument for the reasonableness of a messenger of God being contingent upon his being authenticated by acts of God is elaborated best in chapters 4, 5, 8, and 9 of Norman Geisler, *The Twelve Points that Show Christianity is True*. Also see “Jesus’s Apologetic Use of Miracles” (Chapter 2) in *The Apologetics of Jesus*. Norman Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009).

Everyone has faith. For example, Sam Harris, one of the greatest modern enemies of faith in the idea of a theistic God, argues in his book *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2004) that religions based on holy books and revealed religion (with a particular focus on the factions of Islam but with plenty of disdain to spare for factions of Christianity and Judaism) are the greatest threat to the survival of the human race. He then dismisses the secular, anti-theistic, anti-supernatural, unpardonably-bloody humanism of “Stalin and Mao” as “little more than a political religion” (79). Next, he proceeds quite ironically to argue that the plan of salvation needing to be adopted in the world today is a secular, anti-theistic, anti-supernatural, humanistic, authoritarian, global political solution: “We can say it even more simply: we need a world government. ... It would require a degree of economic, cultural, and moral integration ... World government does seem a long way off—so long that we may not survive the trip” (151). Regardless of whether his Marx-inspired political religion will somehow manage to be less murderous and inhumane than the Marx-inspired political religion of Stalin and Mao, he fails to realize that the gospel he preaches is also “little more than a political religion.” Incidentally, one of Sam’s premises is misguided. While Sam’s argument against aggressive civilization-building religions (as less desirable to secular and enlightened civilization-building religions) makes several good points, it has no applicability whatsoever to the early Christian attitudes about civilization. Before the so-called “Constantinian shift” in the fourth century A.D., and before the influential Augustine of Hippo switched his view of Christ’s kingdom from premillennialism to amillennialism soon after, the early Christians were not intent upon building a geo-political kingdom to cover the earth. They instead believed Jesus would create his own geo-political kingdom in his own way and in his own timing at his second coming. The last and greatest kingdom would not be created by men, as indicated by the phrase “uncut by human hands” in Daniel 2:34-35, 45. The mission to preach Jesus to everyone, make disciples of Jesus everywhere, and plant churches all over the world would help every geo-political kingdom on earth and not create a geo-political kingdom of Christendom before Christ returns. As Napoleon Bonaparte put it, “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him.” By his own line of reasoning, Sam should have no objection to this type of premillennial Christian faith.

Moses’s View of Reason and Faith

Moses begins the Bible with the assertion that “God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). He doesn’t argue this point. He simply states it. Then he proceeds to give a matter-of-fact overview of how God terraformed the earth and placed plants, animals, and humans upon it. He makes it clear that God is the cause and everything else is an effect. But he doesn’t appeal to the reasoning faculties of his readers with persuasive arguments that

show why his explanation is more reasonable, for example, than the Egyptian or Babylonian creation myths. There is room to wonder about this. Was he was expecting his readers to simply presuppose with him, in some irrational leap of blind faith, that there is a God and that God spoke through Moses? Did he think reason is not applicable to God? Did he just not have any good reasons at all? Or were his readers already acutely aware of powerful reasons?

As recorded in the book of Genesis, God appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob rather privately. This explains why they had persuasive reasons to place their faith in him. Those private appearances don't carry much persuasive power for the rest of us. That all changed when something big happened after the Genesis account ended. God intruded into human history in a very public way around 3,400 years ago.¹⁵ Moses wrote about it in the second book of the Bible, *Exodus*. Moses and his original audience, the tribesmen of Jacob, were all eyewitnesses of God's powerful disruption of Egyptian, Israelite, and Canaanite history. With miraculous signs and wonders, God demonstrated his superiority over the forces of nature, human rulers, armies, and pagan gods. These evidences include the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the drowning of the Egyptian army, the appearance of God in a fiery manifestation on Mount Horeb/Sinai, the pillar of fire and smoke, and the subduing of city-states like Jericho and Ai. These signs signified that Moses was God's messenger and the message he delivered was the message of God. In some of his last words to the Israelites, Moses made it clear that God's unprecedented activity on earth during their days warranted

¹⁵ While mainstream scholarship dates the Exodus to 1,250 B.C., good arguments have also been made that the Exodus happened around 1,450 B.C. and 1,600 B.C. Approximating 3,400 years ago is not our attempt to set an exact time. It is just our way of taking a median date between the three main theories. It is true that based on the evidence we have so far seen that we lean towards an earlier rather than later date. But the necessary data is not all in yet for firm dating. While we hold firmly to the fact of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, we do not hold or recommend any specific date of the exodus dogmatically. The art and science of dating events in ancient Egyptian and Near-Eastern history is complex and not fully settled. Three of the best introductory works on the evidence for miraculous events of the exodus are Joseph M. Holden and Norman L. Geisler, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013); Timothy Mahoney, *Patterns of Evidence: Exodus, A Filmmaker's Journey* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015); David M. Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015). Also, Steven Collins, "Does Archaeology Confirm the Historical Reliability of the Old Testament?" in Joseph M. Holden, ed., *The Harvest Handbook of Christian Apologetics*.

a very strong faith (Deut. 4:32-39). They had already moved beyond good reasons for faith and into undeniable facts and certainty.

Throughout the early pages of the Bible, it is made clear that God understood that faith should be proportional to reason. One of the many objections Moses gave to God was that Pharaoh and the Egyptians “will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you’” (Ex. 4:1). This is what any reasonable person would say about other reasonable people. So the Lord, also being quite reasonable, proved to Moses that he would perform miraculous signs for them and said, “If they will not believe you or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, [show them a third and more powerful sign]” (Ex. 4:8-9). Great claims require great signs. And faith requires reasonable reasons. Moses knew this. God knows this. The Bible is based upon it.

The Israelites did not need to ponder abstract reasons for the existence of God; they had concrete reasons. They had seen God manifest his power and his presence on earth. The creation of the nation of Israel and of biblical Judaism some 3,300 years ago makes no sense without these reasonable evidences of signs, wonders, miracles. Moses and the God he wrote about both understood that powerful reasons naturally lead to strong faith in those who are reasonable. The theme of “that you may know” was repeated multiple times throughout Moses’s account of the Exodus as well. The power God exerted on earth during the time of the exodus seems to push reason-to-faith into undeniable-facts-to-certainty level. While “know” and “believe” can be synonymous, the use of “know” in Exodus seems to suggest certain knowledge more than confident belief. Examples:

- Exodus 6: “**you shall know;**”
- Ex. 7: “**the Egyptians shall know. . . By this you shall know...**”
- Ex. 8: “**so that you may know;**”
- Ex. 9 “**so that you may know** that there is none like me in all the earth. ... **so that you may know** that the earth is the LORD's;”
- Ex. 10: “**that you may know;**”
- Ex. 14: “**the Egyptians shall know;**”

- Ex. 33 “**how shall it be known.**”

Similarly, Joshua, who took over as Israel’s leader when Moses died, erected stone monuments as reminders of what God had done for Israel in causing the Jordan river to stop flowing. The knowledge of the ramifications of these miraculous signs were expected to extend to “all the peoples of the earth” (Joshua 4:19-24). One of the more famous instances of that knowledge producing faith may be found in the story of Rahab hiding the Hebrew spies in Jericho. Rahab told the spies:

I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. (Joshua 2 ESV)

This is a rather astounding verbal confession of faith. Assuming the account to be true,¹⁶ Rahab’s faith was based on oral testimony of events that had happened forty years earlier. She had not seen these events with her own eyes. But so memorable and beyond dispute were the events and so obvious were their implications that Rahab and many others in the city had faith. Fear was the initial response. Faith in the idea that the God of Jacob was unstoppable led to her faith in the God of Jacob in a personal and existential sense. She chose the God of Jacob as her God. That faith was demonstrated by actions (she hid and protected the spies) and by a verbal expression. And ultimately to a switch of allegiance from the king and gods of Jericho to the Most High God—the God who stands sovereign every other god, Pharaoh, king, army, and over the forces of nature.

¹⁶ Was the story of Rahab’s conversion just a fictitious story made up by a Hebraic propagandist who was giving justification for the conquest and genocide of the Hebrews over the Canaanites? If one follows the mainstream views of archeology of tel Jericho today, the tone for which was set by work done in the 1950s under the guidance of Kathleen Kenyon and sponsored by not-so-impartial Rockefeller Foundation, the answer is yes. But if one considers other interpretations of other data at Jericho, Joshua’s account of Jericho’s walls—and Rahab’s section of that wall—seems vindicated. The fall of the walls of Jericho, just as Joshua recorded it, prove to be another example of God intervening in human history. See, for example, Bryant G. Wood, “Conquest of Canaan under Joshua & the Inception of the Period of the Judges 1406-1371 BC,” June 9th, 2008. <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/conquest-of-canaan/3625-the-walls-of-jericho>. Accessed Feb. 22, 2022. Regardless of whether Bryant Wood is right or not, there may be ample reason to seek better interpretations of the data than Kenyon’s team offered.

Of course, we have not had the benefit of seeing God act in history as they did. Many who do not believe in a God who acts would agree that if we could just see God intervene in human history today like he did back then, it would become reasonable to believe in him. Seeing is believing, after all. So, yes, reasons to believe may be significantly more challenging for us to come by today. And perhaps we cannot enjoy the same degree of certainty that they did. But we can still be reasonable, consider many good reasons, and have a high degree of confidence that there is a God who acts and speaks. These same evidences were recorded by eyewitnesses in the books of Moses. And they were referred to frequently throughout the rest of the biblical books. The first alphabet ever invented in human history—the same 22-letter alphabetic system that led to the rise of the 26-letter alphabetic system that this book is written with—was used to record these amazing events for the sake of the consideration of our reason.

We need to reconsider the question of when the first alphabet was created. The standard answer today is that the first alphabet was developed by the ancient Phoenicians and was spread to Greece and Rome from there. They inherited some semitic script from the Canaanitic ancestors. This seems like a good start. But it may not go far back enough. A compelling theory with increasing support is that the Canaanite-Phoenician alphabet was developed from the Hebrew alphabet which before ever entering the Levant was incubated amongst the Hebrew population in Avaris, Egypt. The debate over whether Moses could have written the Torah in Hebrew (or proto-Hebrew script rather) is introduced in the film by Timothy Mahoney, *Patterns of Evidence: The Moses Controversy*. Mahoney draws heavily from the work of Douglas Petrovitch and David Rohl, two scholars who don't have perfect agreement with one another in every detail but agree that Moses did write with a "proto-Hebrew" alphabet.¹⁷ Mahoney, Petrovitch, and Rohl make the case that Moses was able to use an alphabet that was created by the biblical Joseph, or someone like him who was familiar with the cumbersome Egyptian hieroglyphic system of writing and took some of its characters to make a far more efficient,

¹⁷ Douglas Petrovitch, *The World's Oldest Alphabet: Hebrew as the Language of the Proto-consonantal Script* (Jerusalem, Israel: Carta Jerusalem, 2017). David M. Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015) 216-231. David M. Rohl, *The Lost Testament* (Century, 2002). Timothy Mahoney, *Patterns of Evidence: The Moses Controversy* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2019)

flexible, and universal way of writing words. In *The World's Oldest Alphabet*, Petrovitch argues that Manasseh and Ephraim, grandsons of Joseph that were adopted as sons of Joseph and lived in Joseph's Egyptian mansion after Joseph died, created this alphabet around 1842 B.C. That alphabet was not invented by the Canaanites or Phoenicians around 1050 BC, as is commonly assumed in history textbooks today. Rather it was used by Moses before 1400 BC (possibly 1800 BC) and was carried with Moses and the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan when the Israelites invaded Canaan. From there it spread from the Israelites to the Canaanites and Phoenicians. And from there it spread to the Greeks, Romans, and eventually even the barbarians of Europe and England. While we are not necessarily endorsing their theories with full confidence here, we do at least think they deserve to be heard, and are very possibly are making progress towards a factually correspondent theory of the evolution of alphabetic scripts.

If this theory is correct, Moses was able to write down an account of the amazing events of his days not in a Mesopotamian cuneiform, not in an Egyptian hieroglyph, but in the first real, working, alphabet. Cuneiform and hieroglyphs were not portable and universal like alphabetic writing was. Perhaps it was no accident that the time the Lord did unprecedented signs in world history came soon after the proto-Hebrew alphabet was devised to record it. In addition to the written records, we also have the testimony of archaeology on our side to corroborate that witness. While it is true that many of the pre-eminent historians and archaeologists today believe there is no evidence for any of the amazing events surrounding the Israelites journey from Egypt to Canaan, we reason that they are mistaken because their historical dating system is at least slightly off and, as a result, causes them to look in the wrong layers of dirt and in the wrong time periods. Significant archaeological and historical evidences for the exodus from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, and many of the other things once thought to be mythical in Genesis and Exodus are accumulating. The use of the first alphabet in the five books of Moses allows us to have a reliable witness—an eye-witness, first hand reporting—of the amazing events surrounding the Exodus. It also serves as a crucial time for capturing the oral traditions that Abraham and Sarah passed onto Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Jacob.

Moses is typically recognized as the greatest prophet of the ancient world for good reason. No other prophet was validated with such an overwhelming quantity and quality of

signs. Also, he is the only prophet who “spoke with God as if face to face.” There were several other prophets who continued in the tradition of Moses and whom the Lord authenticated with fulfilled prophecies and signs. God always gave people reasons to believe his messengers. But none of them were quite on the same level as Moses. However, before Moses died, he told the Israelites to expect another prophet like himself (Deut.18:15-22; c.f., Acts 3:22). This leads us to “Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know...” (Acts 2:22.)

Jesus’s View of Reason and Faith

Miraculous Signs as Reasons for Faith

It’s one thing to claim to be a messenger of God. It’s quite another thing to provide reasons for people to believe such a great claim. What convinced people to invest their faith into Jesus? He certainly didn’t say the words they wanted to hear. He made no promises of liberation from the oppression of the Roman yoke. He didn’t raise an army to force others to accept his prophetic supremacy at sword point. While he was on earth, several thousand Israelites became intrigued by him but only a few came to believe in him so deeply that they would leave everything behind to follow him and risk dying for his sake. Soon after his resurrection from the dead, 5,000 Israelites would come to believe in him. Was their faith based on evidence and reason?

Much like Moses, Jesus was authenticated as God’s messenger by several supernatural signs, wonders, and miracles. Jesus also made predictions about the future which came true—predictions which no mere man could know about in advance or accomplish as a mere man. He also spoke to people with such authority, insight, and brilliance that some recognized that his words could only be the words of God. He constantly amazed people with his works and his words. He had been doing so since the age of twelve, when he was found “in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers” (Luke 2:46-52). He

lived such a blameless life that many could see that he wasn't an imperfect man like Moses had been. These are four main reasons—very reasonable reasons—that caused some very reasonable people to believe.¹⁸ The fact that Jesus performed several miraculous signs indicates that he assumed the normalcy of the need for reason lead to faith.

As people pondered the significance of the signs, their reason led them in different directions. Some reasoned to a strong faith. Most reasoned to a weak faith. Some reasoned their way to a position of no faith in Jesus. The signs convinced everyone that he had to be taken seriously. His words and his works made him very popular with the common people of Israel who were reasonable enough to accept him as a medium-level prophet on par with Elijah, John the Baptist, or Jeremiah. (Mt. 16:13-20; Mk. 8:27-30; Lk. 9:18-21. Cf., Mt. 21:46.) But most did not accept him as a prophet on par with Moses, much less the promised Messiah—the ultimate prophet, priest, king. Some of them were reasoning with faulty premises when it came to their decision of no faith. John 7:25-27 records the faulty reasoning of some who rejected Jesus. "... is this the Christ? But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from." Expressed in syllogistic form, the logic of their argument seems to have flowed as follows:

- (1) No one will know the hometown of the Messiah.
- (2) We know Jesus's hometown.
- (3) Therefore, we know Jesus cannot be the Messiah.

If their logic followed as such, the form of their logic was technically valid, but the major premise was incorrect, and, as a result, the conclusion was false. The prophet Micah had said that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem Ephrathah (Micah 5:2). This in fact where Jesus was born. Perhaps they assumed, quite understandably, that Jesus had been born either in Nazareth of the Galilee region or in a diaspora Jewish community in Egypt. It is unclear to me whether they could have accessed the genealogical archives in the Jewish Temple to determine Jesus's true birthplace and his Davidic lineage. It is also unclear whether they could, if so inclined, petition the Roman government to give some insight into

¹⁸ All but one of these points are elaborated upon in chapters 8 and 9 of Norman Geisler, *The Twelve Points that Show Christianity is True*.

the census that was made soon after Joseph, Jesus's legal father, returned to Bethlehem. Regardless, in this narrative there doesn't seem to be any hint of interest on digging beneath the surface appearance and verifying the truth.

On the grass-roots level, however, many Jews did believe in Jesus. John records, "many of the people believed in him" because they reasoned "when the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?" (Jn. 7:31). This group of "many" practiced good reasoning, were reasonable, and, as a result, arrived at a good and reasonable faith in a good and reasonable object of faith.

The twelve disciples who were the closest to Jesus witnessed more miraculous signs than any other group. After Jesus's execution, the faith of the twelve was understandably shaken and decreased. Even though Jesus had attempted on more than one occasion to explain to them that he was going to be executed, it somehow didn't register with them until after the event. Their reasoning towards doubt in Jesus may have flowed along these lines:

- 1) The Messiah is primarily the King of Kings who will restore the kingdom of Israel, break the yoke of Roman rule, and exalt Israel to first rank among all the nations.
- 2) Jesus has been crucified by the Romans
- 3) All of our hopes of Jesus being that Messiah died with him

Only the resurrection of Jesus and the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples could revive that hope and faith. The disciple known as Thomas was not impressed that the other disciples had supposedly seen the risen Jesus. He famously said, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (Jn. 20:25). Later, when Thomas did see the resurrected Jesus, his reason immediately led him back to faith. His faith in Jesus was instantly rebuilt and he confessed Jesus as both "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 28.) All of this is in keeping with the idea that reason quite naturally leads us either to or away from a position of faith. Jesus seems to have operated consistently with this understanding. Jesus's response to Thomas was interesting: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn. 20:29). Jesus is not expressing frustration with the idea that "seeing is believing" in general. This may have been a mild rebuke addressed specifically

to Thomas for not having a faith that was proportional to the evidence Thomas had already seen—including, for example, the testimony he heard from the other disciples who had seen him. The flow between John’s talk (and therefore Jesus’s talk) about an unbeliever *seeing* miraculous signs and believing (empirical validation with the five senses) being the natural, obvious, and easy form of belief (Jn. 20:24-28), the possibility of believing without seeing being a less easy but still quite legitimate form of belief (20:29), and the direct connection between the many miraculous signs Jesus performed being *written* in John’s account so that

Jesus and Thomas
²⁴ Now ^o Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, ⁴ was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, ^p “Unless I **see** in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never **believe**.”
²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. ^q Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ^r “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, ^r “Put your finger here, and **see** my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. **Do not disbelieve, but believe.**” ²⁸ Thomas answered him, ^s “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you **believed** because you have **seen** me? ^t Blessed are those who have **not seen** and yet **have believed.**”
The Purpose of This Book
³⁰ ^u Now Jesus did many other signs ^v in the presence of the disciples, **which are not written in this book;** ³¹ ^w **but these are written so that you may ^x believe** that Jesus is the Christ, ^y the Son of God, and that by believing ^z you may have life ^a in his name.

the reader may believe in Jesus (20:30-31) forms a natural logical flow. Both Jesus and his beloved disciple John clearly share the ideas that (1) belief is quite naturally contingent up on human reasoning over persuasive reasons for belief and (2) belief is also expected—although more difficult to achieve—when reason is applied to credible testimony ¹⁹ of persuasive reasons for

belief.

The religious leaders of the day could not deny that he was doing great miracles. They rejected his claim after reasoning that he performed them by the power of Satan rather than by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. Mt. 12:22-37; Mark 3:20-30. The “unpardonable sin” then seems to be the misuse of reason to lead to a position of doubt despite the evidence. They were using reason not to find reasons for true propositions but to find reasons for propositions they wanted to continue believing. Their logic may have been flowing along these lines:

- (1) Satan (the leader of the demons) has the authority to cast out demons.

¹⁹ In John 20, the “credible testimony” is that of the historical reporting of eye-witness testimony of the words and works of Jesus. In our case, we have the advantage of four eye-witness accounts—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. “Every matter established by two or three witnesses.”

(2) Jesus exhibited the authority to cast out demons.

(3) Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Satan.

If so, their major premise was wrong. God, who created angels and demons, has the ultimate authority over demons. Jesus gave a counter-argument to them that reasoned the demonic kingdom would not prosper by a policy of demons casting out demons.

Another way that some of these leaders were reasoning in a faulty way about Jesus (per John 7:52) was: (1) No prophets ever come from the region of the Galilee. (2) Jesus came from the region of the Galilee. (3) Therefore, Jesus is not a prophet. Jesus spent his teenage years and twenties in Galilee, but wasn't born there. They didn't bother to investigate the matter thoroughly. Their logical form was technically valid logic but their incorrect premise resulted in an incorrect conclusion—and an incorrect faith.

But not all of the wise men of the Sanhedrin rejected Jesus. Only one of them said in secret to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with you” (Jn 3:2). The Apostle who wrote the most about belief was also the keenest on recording the reasoning laying behind people's beliefs. Regarding the sign of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, he wrote:

Many of the Jews therefore, who had ... seen what [Jesus] did, believed in him ... So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, [argued], “... it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” ... Jesus would die for the nation... So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.” (Jn. 11:45-53, c.f., Jn. 18:12-14)

It's not that the leaders were being totally unreasonable. The sacrifice of one troublemaker for the many is, in a sense, quite reasonable. Crucifying the Messiah after he has been authenticated by many signs isn't, however. The Jewish leaders provide several examples of unreasonable reason leading to unreasonable doubt and one example of reasonable reason leading to reasonable faith.

Jesus the Master Logician

There may be an even more convincing reason to believe that Jesus held reason (and its role in leading to faith) in very high regard. On several occasions, Jesus's enemies—the Scribes, Chief Priests, Sanhedrin elders, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians—attempted to use reason to discredit Jesus in the court of public opinion. They built logical traps for him. Some were meant to make him look foolish among the crowds who were fascinated by his words. Others were meant to get him arrested and, if possible, executed.

Jesus, who had done most of his ministry and miracles outside of Jerusalem, rode on a colt into Jerusalem, just as the prophet Zechariah had predicted their King would do (Zech. 9:9). With Zechariah's prophecy in mind, everyone in Jerusalem knew that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah. Many cheered him on. Many Jews from many countries were in Jerusalem for the Passover festival and many eyes were on Jesus. Jesus had entered the stronghold of the territory of his enemies as if he were the new King of Israel. The seventy elders of the Jewish Sanhedrin—the heart of the theocracy—was being challenged. The power of King Herod and the Herodians was also being challenged. Even the right of the Roman Caesar and Pontius Pilate in nearby Caesarea to rule over Jerusalem and Judea were being challenged by this controversial man on a young donkey. Jesus entered the city, walked into the temple, turned over the tables of the money lenders, and sat down in the temple courts to teach the people. This was the last chance for the leaders to challenge him. Unable to challenge Jesus over his miracles, they challenged his reasonability.

The representatives of the Sanhedrin, the religious rulers of Israel, challenged him to explain who authorized him to do what he was doing. But, in a move that sprung their trap, he would only give them a straight answer if they first gave him a straight answer about the authority of John, his forerunner. For fear of the people, they refused to answer, looked foolish before the people, and were put on the defensive. Jesus then told a brilliant parable which indirectly answered their question. Using a landowner as a symbol of God and his vineyard tenants as symbols of the rulers, he said, in effect, they were guilty of killing the prophets that God had sent, that they were going to be guilty of killing the landowner's son (who in that culture had the full authority of the landowner per Mk. 12:1-7), and that the landowner would respond by destroying them. Jesus escaped their trap and was still able to

say affirm his own deity and their condemnation. They had to look for another way to arrest him (Matthew 21:23-22:14; Mark 11:27-12:12; Luke 20:1-19).²⁰

In the second attempt to “entangle him in his words,” the Pharisees and Herodians gave Jesus one question: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” They put Jesus between the two horns of a logical dilemma. If he said no, he could be arrested by the temple guard and handed over to the Roman justice system as an insurgent. If he said yes, the people, who hated the oppressive yoke that Rome had fastened around their national neck, would despise him as a Roman sympathizer and reject him as the Messiah who was supposed to send the Romans back to Rome on stretchers and restore Israel to its former greatness. It was a no-win situation. But Jesus, the master logician, gave an answer that sprang their trap, amazed them, and silenced them (Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26).

The Sadducees took the third attempt to triumph over Jesus with the most lethal logical problem in their arsenal: If a woman were married to seven different brothers, whose wife will she be when the dead are resurrected? They had probably used this before to humble more than one of most promising Pharisees in their high-stakes games of Stump-the-Chump. The trap seems designed to funnel the chump into resolving the problem by denying the premise about the dead being resurrected. But if the chump chose to risk being impaled on that horn of the dilemma, he would undermine much of his own teaching and would look extremely foolish to the crowds. If he tackled the horn of multiple marriages, he would be unable to solve the problem convincingly. It seemed like a no-win scenario for Jesus. But Jesus was no chump. He surfaced a third premise to attack. He was probably the first to exploit that weak point. Having sprung their trap, he then gave them a logical argument of his own that humbled them. As a result, the crowd was “astonished at his teaching,” some of the scribes admitted he had answered well, and “they no longer dared to ask him any question” (Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40). The argument had concluded decisively. The war of wits had been won. Jesus’s counter argument may be hard for gentiles

²⁰ For insight into the cultural, religious, and logical facets of these encounters, see Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), chapter 32. Also J. Dwight Pentecost *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 382-392.

to appreciate but it would have been very powerful to all Jewish ears, regardless of whether they were of Sadducee or Pharisaic presuppositions. His logic seems to flow along these lines:

- (1) Yahweh (“I AM”) is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- (2) Yahweh is the God of the living, not of the dead.
- (3) Therefore Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be resurrected (alive and not dead)

In a fourth test of logical and theological supremacy, the Pharisees sent one of their top experts in the Mosaic law “to test him.” The question was simple: “Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” With 613 laws to choose from, the test was difficult. This must have been a question that had been debated by countless scribes, lawyers, elders and rabbis for the previous thousand years. No matter which one Jesus chose, there would be room to argue. Jesus gave a three-part answer that was in one sense very simple and perfect summary of the entire Mosaic legal code, but in another sense was sophisticated enough to pass what was probably a tough test. Jesus had answered well and everyone knew it. As a result, “from then on no one asked him any more questions” (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34).

Having defended himself multiple times, Jesus shifted to the offence. He began to test them in front of the public audience. He confronted them with a strange fact: King David, speaking prophetically about his son, the Messiah, referred to him the Lord, a title reserved only for God. He asked them to apply their reason to the questions of “whose son is [the Christ]” and, “if David calls him Lord, how is he is son?” They didn’t even try to solve his riddle. “No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.” Meanwhile, the listeners in the crowd were amazed and delighted (Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44). There is a lot of complex reasoning going on behind the scenes here. And a bit of mystery too. The answer lies in what Christian theologians today call the hypostatic union of Christ. Before his incarnation, Jesus was with God, was the Son of God, and was God. He had a divine nature. When he was born as a man, as the Son of David, to be more precise, he took on a human nature. Jesus was the answer to

the riddle. He was fully divine, fully human, and he was the son and Lord that David was referring to.

This masterful use of reasoning by Jesus has great bearing on the faith of his hearers.²¹ If his opponents had triumphed in their logical attacks against Jesus, people would naturally have lost faith in Jesus. Even when they chose the ground to fight on and ambushed him, he didn't retreat. He took their logical arguments seriously, dismantled them, tackled faulty premises, exposed fallacies, ran circles around them, gave counter arguments, and invariably left them silenced. He himself exhibited zeniths of both reason and faith.

The Apostles' View of Reason and Faith

Jesus chose a few of his disciples to be his apostles. The mission he sent them to accomplish was to convince people to invest their faith into the Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the book of Acts, the eye-witness history book of the first-century church, we find that the apostles reasoned with unbelievers using facts, logical argumentation, and evidence in all of their attempts to get people to believe in Jesus.

Peter Reasoning Towards Faith

The miracle of the apostles speaking in several languages had attracted the attention of several thousand Jews. Peter based a compelling argument upon a prophecy made by King David and the fact of Jesus's resurrection from the dead, which had happened fifty days earlier. The logical conclusion was, "let all the house of Israel therefore **know for certain**

²¹ See Norman Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009). Their fourth chapter catalogues some of the times Jesus used the laws of logic (the law of identity, the law of noncontradiction, and the law of excluded middle), deductive syllogisms, hypothetical syllogisms, disjunctive syllogisms, categorical syllogisms, *reduction ad absurdum* and *a fortiori* arguments. Also, according to Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), Jesus interacted heavily with the rabbinic scholarship that was prominent in the Second-Temple era and the rules of logic and patterns for parables used by rabbis. His masterful use of parables to communicate truths about God from the known to the unknown for audiences of farmers and scholars alike was a highly logical (and analogical) artform.

that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (2:36). So persuasive was his reasoning that three thousand Israelites placed their faith in Jesus (2:41).

Later, Peter healed a paraplegic man in the name of Jesus. To the crowd that gathered over this “notable sign ... evident to all” (4:16), Peter reasoned that he was an eyewitness of the fact that the same God who had healed the man had also raised Jesus from the dead and that Jesus’s death fulfilled various prophecies. The conclusion was that they should receive Jesus in faith as their Messiah. The number of people who had “heard the word [and] believed” increased to 5,000 (4:4). “And with great power the apostles were giving their **testimony** to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (4:33). The same apostle who challenges us to “**make a defense** to anyone who asks you for a **reason** for the hope that is in you” (1 Pe. 3:15) gave reasons, evidences, and testimony to bring many to faith.

Luke records, “They did not cease **teaching and preaching** that the Christ is Jesus” (5:42). There seems to be a noteworthy difference between the two. Whereas teaching is presenting facts and making others understand them, preaching seems to attempt to convince people that the message was reasonable, true, and worthy of acting upon. It’s not that Peter and the other apostles were brilliant logicians and persuasive speakers. They weren’t. But Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit to speak through them:

- “do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” Mt. 10:12-20
- “do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” Mk. 13:11-12 & Lk. 12:11-12.
- “But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.” Lk. 21:14-15
- One can hear an echo in the earlier promise of Isa. 54:17: “...and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord.”

And just as Jesus was able to use reason to silence his opponents, the Spirit enabled the apostles to silence their opponents in debate. This winning of debates, which is ultimately about persuading the minds of the hearers with logic, has everything to do with bringing people out of a position of faith in some idea and into faith in a different idea.

Stephen, a man who had received the Spirit from the Apostles, “was doing great wonders and signs among the people” (6:8). As a result, he started getting harassed by members of a specific synagogue. They “rose up and **disputed** with Stephen but they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.” (6:9-10). Unable to win any arguments with him, they bribed people to accuse him of offenses and took him to trial. When Stephen was allowed to speak in his own defense, he gave defended Jesus and put them on trial. His first line of argument contained two premises:

(1) Moses performed “wonders and signs.”

(2) Moses prophesied that God would raise up a prophet like Moses. (7:36-37).

Although not explicitly stated, he seems to set them up for the conclusion that since Jesus performed wonders and signs like Moses did that Jesus was therefore the promised prophet like Moses. Stephen also gave a second line of argumentation which went something like this:

(1) Israelite leaders historically turned away from God and persecuted all of the prophets God sent to them (:52).

(2) They had murdered John the Baptist.

(3) They had murdered Jesus (:52).

(4) Therefore, they had murdered a prophet and turned from God.

The fact that Stephen’s audience became enraged and proceeded to murder Stephen suggests that his speech was persuasive in a way. Unable to refute his logic, they attempted to silence his voice.

Paul Reasoning Towards Faith Among the Jews

According to Acts 9, Jesus wanted Saul of Tarsus, better known by his Roman name Paul, to move from a position of doubt to one of faith. He appeared to Saul with an overwhelming glory that Saul knew could only belong to God himself. Saul asked, “Who are you Lord?” Jesus answered, “I am Jesus, the one whom you are persecuting.” Jesus was not asking Saul to make an irrational leap of faith into the dark. He was nudging him to take a reasonable step into the light. Saul’s reason realized:

- (1) Only the Lord himself appears in the shekinah glory.
- (2) This person who appeared to him in the shekinah glory was Jesus.
- (3) Therefore, Jesus is Lord.

This is an example of $R \rightarrow F$ followed quickly by $F \rightarrow R$. This one key realization that Jesus is Lord revolutionized his faith and his reasoning. A few days later, Saul “**proclaimed** Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God,’ ... Saul increased all the more in strength, and **confounded** the Jews who lived in Damascus by **proving** that Jesus was the Christ” (9:20,22). Proclaiming, confounding, and proving are all indicative of argumentative reasoning. As a lawyer and a rabbi, Paul had almost certainly been trained in a sophisticated system of rabbinic logic. It is likely that he continued to use at least some of that training. According to Acts 22:3, Paul was trained under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Gamaliel was his PhD advisor, so to speak. We get a glimpse of Gamaliel’s sage reasoning in the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:34-39. Gamaliel was the grandson of the famous Jewish Rabbi Hillel and did the most to establish the preeminence of the Hillel school in Rabbinic Judaism. One of the things Hillel was famous for was the *middoth*, his seven rules (and multiple sub-rules) for logical interpretation of the scriptures. These rules seem harmonious with many of the laws of logic and principles for interpreting texts that Aristotle is famous for. In good Pharisee fashion, the *middoth* were expanded to 32 rules over time. Paul would have almost surely been familiar with at least the original seven. Whether he kept all of them, kept some and abandoned others, or added a few of his own lays beyond the current scope of this study. It does seem that both Paul and Jesus both seemed favorable to many of these laws of logical reasoning in their persuasive argumentation. It also is important to note that many of these rules for logical interpretation of texts fit very well with the rules of logic that Aristotle, the Greco-Macedonian philosopher, came up with in his book *On Interpretation*. There seems to be a lot of harmony between “Hebrew logic” and “Western logic.”²²

As Paul was a lawyer trained in the Laws of Moses and in the rabbinical hedge laws that had accreted around the Mosaic Law, it may be no stretch to understand all of Paul’s proving,

²² This seems to be contrary to the position of Marvin R. Wilson’s positing of “Block Logic” as a “contour of Hebrew thought” that was different than Greek logic. *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) p.150. This may be worth exploring further.

persuading, arguing, and reasoning mentioned in the book of the Acts of the Apostles in the sense of a litigator arguing a legal case. But note that the phrase “increased in strength” may suggest that the Spirit himself may have been the one strengthening his power of reason and strengthening the logical persuasiveness and reasonability of his arguments. All of this was aimed at bringing many to faith in Jesus Christ.

In the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, Paul spoke with logical arguments based on the eyewitness testimony of the resurrection of Jesus and on the prophecies fulfilled by Jesus, and “many ... followed Paul and Barnabas” (13:43). In the synagogue at Iconium, Paul and Barnabas “**spoke in such a way** that a great number of both Jews and Greeks **believed**. ... speaking boldly for the Lord who bore **witness** to the word of his grace, granting **signs and wonders** to be done by their hands” (14:1-5). In Thessalonica, “Paul went [into the synagogue], as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he **reasoned** with them from the Scriptures, **explaining and proving** that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim/preach to you, is the Christ.’ And some of them were **persuaded**...” (17:1). In Berea, “the word of God was **proclaimed** by Paul” (17:13) and “they received the word with all eagerness, **examining** the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed” (17:11-12). In Corinth, Paul “**reasoned** in the synagogue every Sabbath, and **tried to persuade** Jews and Greeks ... **persuading** people to worship God” and “many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed” (18:4,13,18). The Lord even told Paul to “keep on speaking, do not be silent ... because I have many people in this city,” (18:10) indicating that bringing people to faith in God necessarily involves speaking persuasively to them. In Ephesus, Paul “went into the synagogue and **reasoned** with the Jews” (18:19) and “did not shrink from declaring to you..., teaching you..., **testifying** both to Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (20:21) and “**testified** to the gospel of the grace of God” (20:24). Similarly, Apollos, “spoke boldly in the synagogue . . . he powerfully **refuted** the Jews in public, **showing** by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus” (18:24-28).

When Paul was under arrest at Caesarea and defending himself, Felix “sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he **reasoned** about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed ...” (24:24-25). Making his defense

before Festus and King Agrippa, Paul “testified” (26:22) in ways that included the evidence of what he had seen with his own eyes and making logical connections between what happened in recent history and what the scriptures had prophesied earlier. When Festus accused him of being insane, Paul said, “I am not out of my mind ... but **I am speaking true and rational words**. . . none of these things has escaped [Agrippa’s] notice, for this has not been done in a corner” (26:25-26). Agrippa responded, “In a short time would you **persuade** me to be a Christian?” (26:29). When Paul reached Rome, he “expounded to them [Jews], **testifying** to the kingdom of God and **trying to convince** them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were **convinced by what he said**, but others disbelieved” (28:23-24). Apparently, Paul was unaware of the misguided maxim, “You can’t reason anyone into the kingdom.”

Paul Reasoning Towards Faith Among Pagan Greeks

While it is true that Paul preferred to reason the case for Christ in the synagogues among Jews and “God-fearing Greeks” who accepted the authority of the Hebrew scriptures, Paul never hesitated to use reason with pagans who had no knowledge of the scriptures. In Lystra, a sign convinced the pagan Greeks that there was something special about Paul. Paul reasoned with them about God. He gave them a logical argument from the effect to cause: “a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ... he did not leave himself without **a witness**, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (14:8-18). This argument obviously aims towards establishing faith in an intelligent and benevolent God from purposeful designs in the world. It is quite possible that Paul is echoing any of the many Psalms (65:9-13; 68:9; 104; 111:1-6; 135:5-7; 136:25; 145:15-16; 147:4-18) he had learned as a child and sung as an adult. He could also be echoing his Lord Jesus who seemed to have the same view of God’s benevolence expressed in the finely tuned design of our world (Mt. 5:45). Paul in turn seems to be echoed by an anonymous 20th century commentator: “Human vanity can best be served by a reminder that, whatever his accomplishments, his sophistication, his artistic pretension, man owes his very existence to a six-inch layer of

topsoil—and the fact that it rains.”²³ Paul offers the seasons and harvests as a proof or evidence that God has left “witnesses” (reminders that are difficult to ignore and effects that should point our minds to their causes) in nature to point our reason, and subsequently our faith, to him.

In Athens, Paul “**reasoned** in the synagogue with the Jews... and in the marketplace every day . . . he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection” (17:17-18). Speaking to the Greeks, Paul reasoned in a way to move them from faith in their finite gods and idols to an infinite creator God. He argued that their gods were too small. The cause of the finite world we live in is an infinite God who doesn’t fit in our world (17:24), living things need a living source but he does not need them (17:25), that rational beings like us need a cause that is also rational (17:29). He reasoned that God has “fixed a day on which he will judge the world ... by a man he has appointed [Jesus]; and of this he has **given assurance** to all by raising him from the dead” (17:31). Some mocked him; others believed.

Paul’s View of His Own Ministry

Paul was sent by Jesus to the Gentiles to “open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light” (Acts 26:17-18). He did this by appealing first and foremost to their minds, emotions, and wills, with persuasive reasoning. Like a lawyer defending the accused in the courtroom, Paul, argued his case. In his own words, “...we **persuade** others ... that one has died for all ... we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his **appeal** through us. We **implore** you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor. 5:11-21). He also described his mission as one that “demolish[es] **arguments** and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:5). This restating of the Great Commission clearly centers around the use of good reasoning against bad ideas and bad reasoning. This is an extension of Paul’s logical sequencing of sending someone to preach, someone preaching to someone, someone hearing, someone believing what was preached, and the believer calling upon the Lord in faith (Rom. 10:9-17).

²³ For a scientific-apologetic expansion of Paul’s agrarian-society-friendly argument design, see Hugh Ross *Improbable Planet: How Earth Became Humanity’s Home* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016).

Reason Among Early Christian Leaders

The Apostles did not reserve reason for nonbelievers. They held reason in high esteem as they tried to refine their own faith (R \Rightarrow F). The first church council in Jerusalem proves that thoughtful reasoning was also the preferred way of deciding which ideas were most worthy of investing faith in. The apostles, elders, and other members of the Jerusalem church met to deliberate over the first big problem that the churches faced. They met to “**consider** this matter” (15:6) and “after there was much **debate**” (15:7), Peter spoke very persuasively, offering, among other things evidence from facts he and they had observed (15:7-11). After Peter spoke, “all the assembly fell silent,” (15:12) suggesting that progress was being made towards faith in a shared conclusion. Next Barnabas and Paul spoke and offered additional evidences they had observed (15:12). Seeing that the argument was mostly settled, James then spoke, agreeing with Peter (15:14), adding an argument of his own from a prophetic book they all agreed with (15:16-17), and offering his final judgment which was also based on the sojourner laws of Leviticus 17-20 (15:19-21). This was an exercise of reasoning based on logical interpretation of facts taken from multiple eyewitnesses and upon logical interpretation of the scriptures they had faith in. “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church,” to act in accordance with the communal reasoning of Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and James (15:22).

Conclusion

Reason naturally leads us towards positions of strong faith or weak faith. That strong faith can be certain knowledge or a high degree of confidence. The weak faith may be a low degree of confidence, doubt, or even the total absence of faith in any given idea. When our reason is faithful and when faith is reasonable, faith and reason are our best companions for life’s journey. Exercising higher reason is what sets us apart from the animals and, in a sense, allows us to be more like the God who bequeathed the ability to reason to us.

The conflict is not between people of faith and people of reason. Everyone has faith. And everyone uses reason. Some reasons are better than others. Some positions of faith are more

reasonable than others. Some people are more reasonable than others. We think that after weighing the evidence, it is most reasonable to believe that we and our world were created by God who has not been silent. He has communicated in an indirect way by placing us onto a planet in a part of a galaxy that allows us to see his creation. We are spectators in an amazing art gallery. In this time and place, we are left to reason in awe from artwork to Artist. The creation of our universe is the greatest miraculous sign for our reason to ponder. The creation of life on earth is the second. The creation of the mysterious human mind which can reason and believe is arguably the third. Although it seems to have been rare, there are times where God has revealed something about his power, wisdom, and purposes through mighty interventions in the history of the earth and even the history of the human race. Whether it is the miracle of the Cambrian Explosion or the miracles surrounding the Exodus event of the Hebrews from Egypt. Scientific inquiry is beginning to bring some of these miracles into a tighter focus and provide additional reasons for our confidence in their validity to grow.

God also spoke intelligibly through a few messengers whom he validated with miraculous signs and fulfilled prophecies. This God—the God of the Bible—is not unreasonable. When he instructed Moses to confront the Pharaoh and lead the Hebrew slaves out to Canaan, he performed miraculous signs through him so that the Hebrews, the Egyptians, and the Pharaoh could reason their way to faith. Moses then wrote it all down as a universal witness so that “the world may know.”

When Jesus of Nazareth presented himself to Israel as their Messiah (the ultimate king, priest, and prophet), he performed several miraculous signs to back his claim. He too understood well that reasons and reasoning are necessary for people to change their minds from doubt to faith. Miracles were almost never enough. He almost always had to give other reasons for faith as well. He proved to be the master logician who took the winning of public battles of reason quite seriously. Many came to faith. Many did not. Some of the eyewitnesses who believed wrote accounts for the rest of us to read. They wrote with an alphabet that was derived from the alphabet Moses used. And they wrote in a language that could be read across the Greco-Roman world. As a result, perhaps as many as 2.2 billion people on earth (about 33% of the world’s population) self-identify as Christian today.

Jesus's first messengers were witnesses who argued the case for Jesus. In Acts, there are fourteen clear instances of early Christians reasoning with non-Christians so that they can come to faith in Jesus as the Christ. This is the overwhelming pattern in Acts. While Acts does mention the work of the Spirit on the heart of the hearer (16:14), the focus is on the need to speak persuasively—preferably with words given by the Holy Spirit. The apostles and their coworkers “preached” in logically persuasive ways. Many people came to faith because of it.

We in the 21st century have the opportunity to do the same. We have a very reasonable faith to share with a world that seems to be turning its back on reason. We need to find ways to reason with them.²⁴ Perhaps the Holy Spirit will still be pleased to give us the right words to say at the right time. It is our high privilege to be used by God today as his agents of reason and faith.

Many will be reasonable and, as a result, many will believe.

²⁴ While we should expect to adapt our reasoning in the context of the anti-reason, post-modern audience or in the selectively pro-reason audience of believers in scientism, we should not abandon reason as Kierkegaard and Myron Penner suggest (Myron Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013]). There is at least one lesson to be learned from the controversial Ted Patrick, the “father of deprogramming.” Ted may have successfully deprogrammed 1,600 brain-washed victims of cults in the 1970s and 1980s. He did it by reasoning with them after they had been deeply programmed to resist reasoning from non-cult leaders. Ted forced the victims to hear reasons why their cult leaders deserved to be discredited. He forced them to come to terms with some of the logical contradictions inherent in their ideology. He asked them questions that forced them to start thinking for themselves again. See Mia Donovan's film *Deprogrammed* (Montreal, Canada: EyeSteelFilm, 2015). While we cannot advocate any of the more extreme and coercive measures Ted used to take to break the cult leader's spells over their minds, there is a lot of good data and at least one important lesson to be learned from Ted. Reason is not the problem; it is still the answer. Reason leads to doubt. That's good when faith has become unreasonable. And then reason leads to a healthier and truer faith. If we have problems in our attempts at reasoning, the problem is not with reason. Either we may be reasoning poorly, giving up too early, or lacking in “boldness” (Acts 4:29, 4:31, 9:28, 13:46, 14:3, 18:26, 19:8, 28:31; Eph. 6:19; 2 Cor. 3:12) in our reasoning with others.

End Notes

This essay began in 2019 as a draft for chapter two of [*The Comprehensive Guide to Science and Faith*](#) (Harvest House, 2021). Since then, this essay has evolved, receiving a few minor and periodic updates and expansions.