

Belief: The Contemporary Issue

If I may presume that I am permitted the customary simplifications, I will say that there are three positions concerning belief at the present time. The first is not to believe at all. The second is to believe, indeed, but to believe someone, not to believe something. The third is to believe someone ^{about} something.

The first position -- not to believe at all -- has become increasingly widespread since the Enlightenment. How widespread it is at the present time may, perhaps, be suggested by the New Yorker cartoon portraying a very small boy wearing a very large button bearing the advice, Trust nobody over ten. However, originally the rejection of belief was based, not on the hostility of children to grown-ups, but on the conviction that while belief was quite appropriate for children, for the backward, for the under-privileged, it was quite out of place for anyone acquainted with modern science. The scientist and, with him, the philosopher that ^{takes his stand on} ~~stands with~~ science do not believe. They know. They have purged their minds of all myths, legends, superstitions, in a word, of all beliefs. They have had the courage to ~~take~~ be content with what man knows. Belief may be necessary for children. It may have been necessary for the childhood of mankind. But modern man is man come of age.

~~Now, of course, it is true that it is only by belief that men come to accept myths, legends, and superstitions. But it is not true that belief consists simply and solely in just a synonym for the acceptance of myths, legends, and~~

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Now this view of belief is somewhat one-sided. Myths, legends, superstitions, when they are passed on from one person to another, are matters of belief. But in the first instance they are originated by the human mind's capacity, not for belief, but for error. Moreover, belief and error are not two names for one and the same thing. For instance, when an engineer whips out his slide-rule and makes a rapid calculation, his conclusion rests largely on belief. He himself has not worked out the logarithmic and trigonometric calculations on which the slide-rule is based, and so he does not know that those tables are correct; he just believes that they are. Again, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ he himself has not checked the accuracy of his slide-rule against a set of logarithmic and trigonometric tables, and so he does not know that his slide-rule is accurate; he just believes that too.

In brief, there are two ways in which we arrive at truth. The first and basic way is knowledge, and we know when we reach a judgement on the basis of our own personal experience, our own personal understanding, our own personal reflection. The second and by far the ^{more} ~~very~~ common way is by belief. Then we affirm or deny, not because of immanently generated knowledge, but because we ^{have taken} ~~take~~ someone else's word for it. In so far as a scientist makes an original contribution to his subject, in that measure he knows. In so far as a scientist repeats another's experiments and works out for himself the theorems on which ~~another's~~ another's discovery depends, in that measure he knows. But the rest of his subject a scientist does not know. He takes other people's

word for it. He believes. It is precisely belief that constitutes by far the greater part of any scientist's mastery of his own subject.

In stating this, of course, I am in no way impugning the value of science. I am merely presenting a more accurate account of the basis for that value. When I say that most of any scientist's mastery of his own subject ~~is a matter of~~ rests on belief, I am not denying the real excellence of science. This consists in two elements: the first is that every part of every science is or was known by ~~some~~ at least some scientist; the second is that, while other scientists do not know but believe such parts, still they control their beliefs in an extremely efficacious fashion. Thus, while scientists do not fritter away their lives repeating all the experiments made by other scientists, still there is not no experiment that cannot be repeated; ~~and~~ there is no experiment that is not repeated as soon as anyone's suspicions are aroused; and any faulty experiment will arouse someone's suspicions sooner or later, for the new experiments performed by today's scientists in one way or another presuppose the results obtained in earlier experiments and so can ~~arouse~~ arouse suspicions about those results.

Now if mastering a science is largely a matter of believing, however controlled that believing may be, it is quite manifest that there exists a far larger role for belief and far less control over it in the rest of human living. Each of us lives in a far larger world than that narrow strip of space-time that falls under our immediate ~~per~~ observation. Some [↓] of us may have travelled far and wide, ^{none of us have} but ~~nowhere~~ ^{has} been permanently everywhere, always seeing

xx with our own eyes whatever there is to be seen, always hearing at first hand whatever there is to be heard, always understanding every event exactly, and so quite well informed about everything by means not of belief but of knowledge. We may or may not believe what we read in newspapers, magazines, periodicals, books; we may or may not consider movie and TV documentaries to present things fairly; we may be very skeptical about taking anyone's word for anything. But the plain fact is that, unless we are ready to do a great deal of believing, we have no real notion of what is going on in the world.

Belief, then, is a broad and indubitable fact in human science and in human living. It is not as good as knowledge. Without some knowledge we cannot control it at all. But neither human science nor human living have ever got along without it and, consequently, the widespread view that we can get along ~~we~~ without believing and that we should try to do so is, in my considered opinion, just charlatanism.

Having said this, however, I must hasten to add that modern culture has little capacity for explaining the nature and justifying the fact of belief. For modern culture takes its stand on modern science. It conceives science in terms of observation and experiment, hypothesis and verification. The large amount of believing done by each individual scientist is overlooked, and so a justification of belief from science is not forthcoming.

Moreover, before any justification could be forthcoming, the foundations of science would have to be dug far more deeply than at present is common. For the justification of belief turns on such notions as value and truth, and these notions

are not within easy reach of scientific mentality. Thus, a science is a value and the pursuit of science is the pursuit of a value. But scientists are so unfamiliar with the notion of value that a Max Weber could proclaim that science should be wertfrei, value-free, and it ~~has taken~~ took some time for his disciples to acknowledge that, if science were value-free, it also would be valueless, ^{worthless.} Again, scientists are devoted to truth, but they think of it as an ultimate goal indefinitely removed from actual attainment. For a modern science is not certain but probable. It does its utmost to verify its hypotheses, theories, systems. But verification is not demonstration. It settles, not what is so, but just the best available scientific opinion at the present time.

What, then, is the justification of belief? Let us return to the engineer with his slide-rule. Is there any reason on earth why he should take a year off to work out for himself the ~~log~~ logarithmic and trigonometric tables and to calibrate the markings on his rule? After all, he has no reasonable grounds for entertaining the slightest doubt, and he has a very large number of confirmations that the slide-rule was properly made. What on earth difference does it make who does the calculating as long as the calculating has been done correctly? That question brings us to the whole point to believing. In knowing, one finds out for oneself. In believing, one takes some one else's word for it. The necessity of belief is that one cannot find out everything for oneself. The justification of belief is that what counts is, not who does the knowing, but the fact of knowing. As long as someone knows, as long as the knower can be trusted not to affirm what he does

therefore
 be a different theology. As medieval theology differed from
 that of the patristic period, as renaissance theology differed
 from both, so modern theology will differ from its predecessors
 as much but ^{perhaps} no more than they did from theirs.

Fourthly, the task before us is, I would maintain,
 just ignored by those

Fourthly, this view of our situation differs very
 profoundly from the simplifications that are frequently
 repeated. The problem is not The root trouble
 repeated. The root trouble will be left untouched if
 people imagine that the

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therefore be a different theology. As medieval theology differed from the theology of the patristic period, as renaissance theology differed from both, its predecessors, so modern theology will differ from its as much but perhaps no more than they did from theirs.

Fourthly, the developments in theology that I am envisaging are extremely technical. They are concerned with its underpinning in cognitional theory, with the relations between value-judgements and an academic discipline, with the nature of interpretation and of historical inquiry and of the dialectical techniques to be employed to surmount oppositions between the experts, with the transition from exegesis and history to theological doctrines and systems, with the relation of religious conversion to theological foundations, with the various types of meaning, its variables, and its invariants, with the various dimensions of the task of communications.

Again, when I speak of a transition of theology from a classical to a modern context, I mean a transition in which emphasis shifts from logic to method, from Aristotle's Posterior Analytics to the modern scientific ideal, from an apprehension of man in terms of human nature to an apprehension in terms of human history, from a metaphysical apprehension in terms of soul to a psychological apprehension in terms of subject, from foundations in terms of logically first principles to foundations in terms of transcendental method.

Fifthly, the analysis I am offering of our contemporary situation differs notably from simpler views that are more ~~often~~ frequently heard. It is said that the ~~Old~~ Church had become a ghetto, that it had become excessively defensive and excessively rigid, that it had^s to break away from^{its} Byzantine

conclusions concerning the defects of our theological inheritance and the remedies that can be brought to bear. I did not think things wrong because they were classicist; on the contrary, I found a number of things that were wrong and, on putting them together, I found what I have named classicism. Again, I do not think things are right because they are modern, but I did find a number of things that are right and they are modern at ~~at~~ least in the sense that we they were overlooked ⁱⁿ the Catholic nineteenth-century[^] theological tradition.

Sixthly, I wish to stress that our disengagement from classicism and our involvement in modernity must be critical. There is much to be retained from the classicist period. What ^{are} ~~to~~ to be dropped, are its limitations, its short-comings, its weaknesses. There is much evil in modernity, and that we are not to assimilate; we must be generous enough to overcome it, and creative enough to replace it.

Let me illustrate concerey what I mean by ~~this~~ this critical stance. Recently it has been argued that Catholic colleges and universities have to go. In the past their defects were great. In the present they are becoming less and less distinctively Catholic. The future had best dispense with them. But may one not ask whether the defects in the old style Catholic ~~colle~~ college or university are measured by the classicist ideals they recognized or by the modern ideals they had not come to accept? May one not ask whether the present lack of religious significance in Catholic seats of learning is not just a consequence of the more general turmoil involved in the contemporary cultural shift affecting the whole church? ~~Finally, may one not ask~~

~~Whether the future~~

affecting the whole church? Finally, while a classicist type cultural of integration is quite irrelevant for the future, still a modern type of cultural ~~is~~ integration may be the main achievement of the future; and, in that case, may one not ask how a Catholic contribution to that achievement will occur without backing from Catholic institutions?

and medieval trappings, that it has to learn to speak to people of today, and so forth. Now I do not think that such statements are simply false. But I do believe that the truth they contain is expressed more politely and more accurately by saying that the church, to be in the world, has to be involved with in the social and cultural achievements of each time and place, that as the church in the patristic period was involved in Hellenistic culture, as in the medieval^a period it was involved in medieval culture, so too it became involved in classicist culture ~~ix~~ from the renaissance on.

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conclusions concerning the defects of our theological inheritance and the remedies that can be brought to bear. I would not want anyone to think that I think things wrong because they are classicist and I think them right because they are modern. Such a view I consider disastrous. My procedure modern. In fact, my procedure was just the opposite. First, I found things that were wrong and when I put them together I found ~~x~~ what I have come to name classicism. Moreover, I wish to emphasize most strongly that our disengagement from classicism must not be a rejection of everything classicist culture stood for and our involvement in modern culture must not

and medieval trappings, that it has to learn to talk to people of today, and so forth. Now the difficulty I have with such views is, not that they contain no truth, but that they are extremely vague. In virtue of this vagueness ~~that~~ they can be invoked to justify any change, whether good, bad, or indifferent. Again, in virtue of their vagueness they or indifferent. Again, because of their vagueness they make it very likely that the real issues will be missed, that we shall fail to see just what has to be done and so be unable to set to work methodically and get it done.

Big job suddenly thrust upon the person

1

a difficult task

computational theory
experimental design
basic statistics
verbal

in the
in the
in the
communication

2

extent of decision

a week

publicity

Time

virtuous vegetation

3

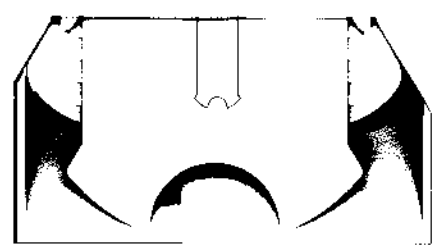
what I can do

4

you

religion - faith
theory

no



destructiveness
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of values

right - Pengan to

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feudalism
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medieval phil
classical culture
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WJH

