

*Faith and Reason: Three Views*

Available July 2014

\$25, 190 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-4040-3

## Three Views on Faith and Reason

Life confronts us with an endless stream of questions. Some are trivial. But some draw us into the deepest dimensions of human inquiry, a place where our decisions have profound implications for life and faith. Is there a God, and if so, how can I know anything about who or what God is? Is the quest for truth an elusive dream? How should I live and what should I value? What happens at the end of my biological existence?

These questions lead people of every creed and belief to consider important existential concepts. But many people wrestle with the relationship between faith and reason as they dig into the roots of this theological and philosophical pursuit. Does a shared interest in a common set of questions indicate that philosophy and theology are close kin and allies, or are they competitors vying for our souls, each requiring a loyalty that excludes the other?

In *Faith and Reason: Three Views* Steve Wilkens edits a debate between three different understandings of the relationship between faith and reason:

**Faith and Philosophy in Tension** proposes faith and reason as exclusive opposites, each dangerous to the integrity of the other.

**Faith Seeking Understanding** suggests that faithful Christians are called to make full use of their rational faculties to aid in the understanding and interpretation of what they believe by faith.

**Thomistic Synthesis** says that natural reason acts as a handmaiden to theology by actively pointing people toward salvation and deeper knowledge of spiritual truths.

Bringing together multiple views on the relationship between faith, philosophy and reason, this introduction to a timeless quandary will help you navigate, with rigor and joy, one of the most significant discussions of the Christian community.

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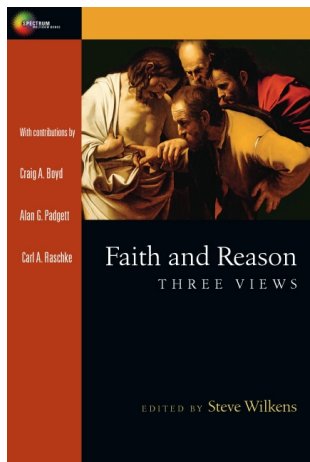
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## The Tension Between Faith and Reason

The differences between faith and reason often lead to the assumption that we are confronted by a binary choice – we must choose one or the other. Indeed, individuals on both sides have come close to declaring war on the other. Many who line up on the “reason” side of the line assert that theology and faith are antithetical to clear thought and are inherently hostile to science (which today is often cited as the paramount expression of rational thought). They argue that reliance on faith and the revelation upon which it rests tangles humanity in hopeless and outmoded superstitions that hinder progress. In this view, faith is not benign but dangerous, and thus should be relegated to the dustbins of history. At the other end of the reason-faith spectrum, Christians have often denigrated reason as “merely human,” identifying it as the archenemy of faith. In this view, our very salvation is at stake, so dependence on any finite human capacity threatens or diminishes the faith upon which our eternal destination depends.

While these binary opposites describe perennial and often-popular impressions of the relationship (or lack thereof) between faith and reason, they do not represent the best thinking of either group. Most philosophers today are more circumspect about reason, moderating the Enlightenment’s confidence that rationality can transcend the influence of culture, personal bias or perspective, religion, social status and other factors. Indeed, while Christopher Hitchens and others who represent the view that science is the antithesis of faith say, “Our principles are not a faith,” those more careful about the manner in which scientific thought proceeds acknowledge that the scientific enterprise relies on principles that themselves cannot be demonstrated by reason. In addition, science itself relies on the regularities of nature, what we often refer to as the *laws* of nature. However, the laws on which science is grounded are not themselves directly open to empirical confirmation, even if their utility provides good reasons to trust (i.e., have faith in) them. In short, faith of some kind is fundamental to scientific investigation itself.

Similarly, Christians who claim to reject reason’s authority inevitably smuggle it back into their considerations in a multitude of ways. They are quite happy to employ the fruits of rational investigation embedded in their cellphone’s technology or give thoughtful consideration to retirement investment strategies. Indeed, they may even give reasons, arguments they expect logical individuals to find convincing, for rejecting the spiritual authority of reason. In reality, we all rely on reason in innumerable ways, from balancing the checkbook to reading a map – or reading this page, for that matter. Thus, to make sense of the discussions in this book, we will need to get beyond the stereotypical either/or binaries mentioned above. Instead, the more specific question with which we will struggle concerns the proper relationship of faith and reason, theology and philosophy.

– Taken from the Introduction

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