

CHAPTER THREE

IN DEFENSE OF REASON

A Dialogue

ALEXANDER: You've tricked me somehow, Peter. I can't see anything wrong with your reasoning, but what you are saying is not true. I just know it.

PETER: But, Alexander...if my reasoning is sound, how can you say my conclusion is false?

ALEXANDER: You're a magician, Peter. You always spin fancy logical arguments and make them seem like they're leading to the truth. But I refuse to be bewitched by you and your logic. I'm not going to be swayed from what I know is true no matter how apparently illogical I may seem.

PETER: Let me get this straight, Alexander. Don't reason and logic, rightly done, lead us to truth?

ALEXANDER: Some truth, Peter. Perhaps even most truth. But not all truth. You value reason too highly. You worship it. It's your idol. That's where you go wrong. You think that all truth is accessible to reason. But it's not. Some truth is mysterious and above rationality.

PETER: You mean some truth is not reasonable, not rational, and not logical?

ALEXANDER: Yes. Some truth. Not all truth, mind you. Just some truth.

PETER: But this "mysterious" truth, it's ultimately unreasonable, irrational, and illogical?

ALEXANDER: Yes.

PETER: Then you can't trust your reason to guide you when it comes to this "mysterious" truth?

ALEXANDER: No.

PETER: And I take it that the matter we were discussing just now involves one of these "mysterious" truths?

ALEXANDER: Yep! That's right.

PETER: If you don't trust reason on this matter, what then do you trust? What compels you to the opposite conclusion so strongly that you can remain unpersuaded by the logical arguments I laid out for you?

ALEXANDER: Well, my intuition, of course. I simply know intuitively that you are mistaken. If reason can show me why and how my intuition knows what it knows, fine and good. But sometimes it can't. Then I just have to trust my intuition anyway—even if reason can't prove it.

PETER: And if reason and logic contradict your intuition and prove that it is wrong?

ALEXANDER: Then so much the worse for reason and logic. I would never believe logic over my intuition.

PETER: And how, pray tell, do you know when the matter at hand is a "mysterious" truth rather than just an ordinary rational one? Is that by intuition too?

ALEXANDER: Absolutely!

PETER: Then I'm afraid I'm no match for you, Alexander. I can't possibly win this debate. My only weapon is reason. Since you are able to stay so unmoved by reason, I will never be able to persuade you. I'll have to go try to work my spell on someone weaker and more foolish than you. I don't see how anyone could ever persuade you of anything, Alexander. Your power of conviction is astounding. How secure and comfortable you must feel!

Western culture and the Christian church are in a strange place today. We mistrust reason. We trust feelings and intuitions, but not the conclusions of sound rational argument. When a belief is new and different, in conflict with familiar intuitions, the fact that it follows from a perfectly sound line of reasoning is of little consequence to us. We are not inclined to accept it. And the fact that it is based on something contained in biblical revelation makes little or no difference. If the logical result of any line of reasoning contradicts what we have always “known” to be true, it is false. In and of itself, sound reasoning has little weight with the typical modern Christian. The fact that a doctrine or belief is rationally compelling can never overcome the suspicion that is engendered by its being unfamiliar.

This is the most difficult obstacle that divine determinism faces today. Divine determinism is decidedly not intuitive to modern man. Indeed, his intuitions are decidedly against it. In the light of modern intuitions, divine determinism seems positively weird. Everything we believe about life and reality makes it an alien way of thinking. In the current climate, therefore, to present a soundly reasoned case for divine determinism is not likely to be sufficiently persuasive. A sound rational argument will not be trusted enough to be convincing. When limited determinism feels comfortable and divine determinism feels so strange, we are not about to abandon the former for the latter—even if it could be shown to be more logical. This is tragic, but it is the status quo.¹⁹

In this defense of divine determinism, my arguments are rational ones. I presuppose that reason and logic are trustworthy guides to truth and that it is foolish to ignore the conclusions to which they lead. But I cannot assume that the modern reader shares my assumptions. If I want my arguments to be persuasive to this day and age, I must first persuade the reader

19. Current attitudes toward reason are ultimately pathological. The culture that turns its back on reason turns its back on truth. The culture that turns its back on truth turns its back on God. And the culture that turns its back on God turns its back on life. The early writings of Dr. Francis Schaeffer (notably, *The God Who is There*, *Escape from Reason*, and *He is There and He is Not Silent*) and the thought of Gordon H. Clark (notably, *Religion, Reason and Revelation*) were important reminders of these truths. In the current climate, we allow our intuitions to rule our beliefs, unchallenged. This must stop. Instead we must learn to allow reason to tutor and discipline our intuitions. If reason does not rule our beliefs, then God does not rule them and we are in rebellion against him. We need to rediscover the biblical perspective wherein obedience to God includes courageously following reason wherever it might lead. In saying this, I am not unappreciative of the contribution made by Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* to our understanding of human knowing. The “intuitive” or “tacit” dimension is a foundational aspect of all knowledge. Be that as it may, the conscious and willing subjection of our tacit intuitions to conscious rational scrutiny is vital in the quest for truth—especially in the quest for theological truth.

that reason is a reliable guide to truth. In another age, I could take this view for granted. In the current age I cannot.

This chapter is necessarily incomplete. A thorough discussion of truth and reason would be too great a detour. My purpose here is only to give the reader pause before he totally dismisses my arguments as “too rational.”

The Point at Issue

This chapter focuses on what will be a likely objection to the arguments of this book:

“I grant you that your arguments are logically sound. But you forget one thing: some beliefs (particularly beliefs about God and ultimate reality) are perfectly true even while failing to be strictly rational. Indeed, some beliefs about ultimate reality are true even while being contradictory or rationally inconsistent. So when an argument establishes that a belief is rationally superior, it has not necessarily established it as more likely to be true. Sometimes, a true belief can be logically inferior to a false belief.”

This objection expresses a view of reason directly contrary to mine. The conclusions I reach in this book rest squarely on two critical assumptions about the role of reason: (1) whatever is logically contradictory or rationally unsound cannot possibly be true, and (2) a belief that is rationally superior is more likely to be true than a rationally inferior one. In other words, I assume from the outset that reason—and reason alone—is the only reliable guide to truth.²⁰ If I am wrong in this assumption, then the whole book can be immediately disregarded. But, then, so can everything else we claim to know. For if reason is no guide to truth, then truth is not knowable, for all knowledge is ultimately founded on reason.

Understanding Rationality

Critics and proponents of the reliability of reason often talk past each

20. I am not, by this, rejecting the absolute authority of the Bible nor discounting its usefulness as an infallible guide to truth. The authority of the Bible is utterly dependent upon the reliability of reason. If reason is not reliable, then biblical authority becomes totally irrelevant; for reason is the avenue through which we attain knowledge and understanding of the Bible—just as it is our avenue for attaining knowledge of anything else.

other, for they have very different conceptions of what reason is. Before we can profitably discuss whether reason is a reliable guide to truth, we must be clear about what we mean by ‘reason’. When I employ the term ‘reason’ and related terms, I use them in a significantly broader sense than many do.²¹ Therefore, it is important to highlight what is *not* a part of my definition of RATIONAL and what, by my definition, is not excluded from rationality.

RATIONAL, as I define it, does not require a conscious act of reasoning. The product of unconscious thought can be eminently rational. Furthermore, thinking does not have to be characterized by rigor and formal structure (like mathematical reasoning) in order to be rational. Neither must one be able to articulate the thought processes that lead to a belief in order for it to be rational. If RATIONAL were limited in these ways—namely, so that it pertained only to conscious, rigorous reasoning that could be verbalized—then the beliefs discussed below would all be defined as irrational. But, by my definition, the following need *not* be irrational:

1. Intuitive beliefs—Human rationality functions at two levels: the conscious and the subconscious. Most of our beliefs are formulated at a subconscious level. For example, the five-year-old boy learning how to ride a bicycle is not consciously formulating beliefs about the laws of gravity and angular momentum. But, subconsciously, that is exactly what he is doing. His rationality constructs subconscious, RATIONAL beliefs that accurately reflect truths about the physical universe. Intuitively, he grasps laws of physics about which he has no conscious beliefs. Much of our knowledge is intuitive in this way. It would be foolish, therefore, to define rationality in a manner that excluded beliefs formulated through subconscious reasonings. So, *RATIONAL is not limited to beliefs formed through conscious thinking processes.*

Intuitive (subconscious) beliefs may be either rational or irrational. My subconscious is not guaranteed to produce only rational beliefs any more than my conscious reasoning is. The only way an intuition can be evaluated is by raising it from the level of the subconscious to the conscious. Then, and only then, can we examine whether it and the reasoning behind it conforms to logic. An intuition that remains merely

21. Rather than subject the uninterested reader to a string of tedious definitions here in the main text, I have included as appendix K a brief discussion of my definitions of some key terms pertaining to rationality. The reader who is sufficiently interested can refer to appendix K for more information with regard to my conception of reason and its role in knowing.

an intuition remains necessarily an unexamined belief.

Consider the respective advantages and disadvantages of conscious and subconscious reasoning. Subconscious reasoning is very fast and efficient. That is its chief advantage. The corresponding disadvantage is that it does not permit validation. It produces beliefs and hunches whose rational justification and derivation are completely invisible to us. Its derivation may be sound. The hunch may be justified. But we cannot know, for we are unaware of the line of reasoning by which it was formulated. This, on the other hand, is the chief advantage of conscious reasoning. Conscious reasoning is relatively transparent and available for evaluation. We can literally slow the reasoning process down and evaluate its logical validity a step at a time. But here, of course, lies its chief disadvantage: conscious reasoning is cumbersome and painfully slow.

2. Inarticulable beliefs—We are not always able to articulate beliefs we clearly hold and utilize. And, even if we can articulate the belief, we may not be able to adequately articulate our reasons for holding it. Why such beliefs exist is understandable. They are intuitive beliefs, and beliefs produced by our subconscious reasoning processes are not readily put into words. Beliefs that can readily be verbalized are those produced by our conscious reasoning processes or those that have been consciously reconstructed from an initial intuition.

As in the case of intuitive beliefs, it would be inappropriate to define ‘rational’ in such a way that inarticulable beliefs were ruled irrational by definition. Many such intuitions are utterly rational. We must not discount them merely because they are not readily verbalized.

3. Vague beliefs—When we go through a rigorous logical proof of something, we are forced—by the nature of the exercise—to clearly define the belief in question. Furthermore, we are forced to spell out the line of reasoning that leads us to embrace it. But in the absence of such a rigorous logical proof, our beliefs often remain vague. Either the belief’s content remains vague, or the reasoning that leads us to embrace it remains vague.

Is a vague belief (which has not been rigorously proved through a process of formal proof) irrational? Not necessarily. Granted, it may be. But many of the vague beliefs we hold are utterly rational—they conform to the principles of logic. In principle, a rigorous formal proof could be given. But the fact that no proof has ever actually been formulated is not a legitimate indictment against a belief’s

rational validity. While rational beliefs are formally provable in principle, not all truly rational beliefs have been—or ever will be—formally proved in practice.

Note, then, what can be included within the scope of beliefs that are rational by my definition. Vague beliefs, inarticulable beliefs, and intuitive beliefs all fall within the range of what can be rational.

Many who maintain that reason is not the only access to truth mean merely that “conscious, formal, structured reasoning is not the only avenue to truth.” And they are right about that—of course. But claiming that REASON is not the only access to truth is an unfortunate way to express it. REASON, as I have defined it, is the only access to truth. But I do not mean that conscious reasoning is the only access to truth. It is not—it isn’t even the primary access. Subconscious reasoning is a vital part of our ability to know. Subjective hunches, intuitions, feelings—all of these things can be valid avenues to knowledge. But these are not irrational avenues to knowledge. To the extent that they lead to knowledge, they are completely and utterly RATIONAL.

My point is simple: when an intuition does lead to truth, it is due to its being a RATIONAL intuition. In principle, such an intuition could be raised to the level of consciousness, clearly defined, and formally and systematically proved. In practice, this can be so difficult as to be practically impossible. But it will always be possible, in theory if not in practice, to give a sound logical proof for every true belief. God could do it, even if we cannot.

Clarification of the Point at Issue

My foundational assumption is that reason is the only reliable guide to truth. Given that, all of the following are implied: (1) whatever is logically contradictory or inconsistent cannot possibly be true, (2) if one belief is logically superior to a second belief, the first belief is more likely than the second to be true, and (3) whatever is *perfectly* logical is necessarily true.

In view of our definition of reason above, we need to keep the following points in mind:

1. Assuming that reason alone is the only reliable guide to truth is not to assume that the only reliable guide to truth consists of consciously con-

structed, formal proofs. I fully acknowledge that vague intuitions shoved into consciousness by our subconscious powers of reasoning also serve as a valuable access to truth, and they constitute an aspect of human reason.

2. Any belief that is known to be logically inconsistent or contradictory is thereby known to be false. A belief whose logical consistency or inconsistency cannot be determined should not be assumed to be false. Not all true beliefs can be determined to be logically cogent. Some true beliefs have not been clearly shown to be rational. Hence, if a belief—or the reasoning behind it—is too vague for one to discern whether it is rationally valid, it would be a mistake to assume that it is false. For a belief may be rationally valid even when we cannot discern that it is. In other words, not all vague intuitive beliefs are false. Only discernibly irrational beliefs are necessarily false.

3. A consciously reasoned belief is not, by virtue of that fact, logically superior to a vague intuition. A belief's superiority must be judged by the rational cogency of the actual reasoning that supports it. It makes no difference at what level that reasoning has occurred—conscious or subconscious. The only way to compare the rational cogency of two beliefs is to raise them both to the level of consciousness, articulate the reasoning that underlies them, and evaluate that. Without doing so, there is no basis for just evaluation.

So here is the bottom line. If two beliefs are both raised to a level of conscious reasoning so that they can be compared at that level, and one of the beliefs is more logically cogent than the other, the one that is more logically cogent is necessarily the one that is more likely true. And a belief that is perfectly logically consistent is necessarily true.

22. By 'sound reasoning' I mean reasoning as it ought to be done—as God would do it. It is the opposite of fallacious reasoning. Fallacious reasoning is reasoning which is flawed and leads to error rather than truth because it is illogical and irrational at some critical point. Much human reasoning is fallacious. For this reason—among others—an inerrant, absolutely authoritative Bible is valuable to us. It is not likely that humans would arrive at all truth simply by reasoning from the data of experience; we are too prone to reason fallaciously. An inerrant, authoritative interpretation of reality can serve as a check on our own wayward reasoning. The teaching contained in Scripture is more reliable than the actual reasonings of foolish, fallen humans. But this is not to say that the teaching of Scripture is more reliable than SOUND reasoning from experience. The Scripture and sound reasoning from experience are equally reliable, equally authoritative, equally inerrant, and equally essential.

But this is exactly the point to which many might object. In their view, to assume that reason will necessarily lead us to truth is wrong—especially when the truth in question concerns God or other ultimate issues. From the critic’s perspective, for a true belief to be less rationally cogent than some false belief is entirely possible. But I must show that this perspective is unbiblical. In the biblical view, sound reasoning (with ‘sound’ being a very important qualifier) is an infallible guide to truth.²²

The Biblical View of Reason

I base my belief in the reliability of reason on two facts: (1) it is the teaching of Scripture, and (2) it is philosophically required.²³ In this chapter, I deal only with the first of these. I will show that the assumption that reason is the only reliable guide to truth underlies all that the Bible teaches.

John 1:1–5 is the most helpful passage in this regard:

In the beginning was the *logos*. Now the *logos* was with God, indeed God was the LOGOS. This *logos* was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence through this *logos*, and not one thing that has ever come into existence came into existence apart from it. Included in this *logos* was Life, and Life was the light of men. Now this light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not extinguished it. (original translation)²⁴

As you will note, I translate John 1:1 differently from most of the standard English translations. The standard English translations all

23. Virtually every ancient Greek philosophy gave the same answer to the question of how knowledge is possible: *The rational structure of the cosmos and the structures of the human mind derive from the same primal rationality. Since this is so, the rationality of the cosmos is discernible to the rationality of the human mind. They correspond; for they have the same source.* No one in the entire history of philosophy ever improved on the essence of this answer. The Bible’s answer is essentially the same. The Bible nominates a different candidate for the primal rationality that functioned as the source of all things. But it explains the possibility of knowledge in fundamentally the same way.

24. A thorough defense of this translation and the interpretation underlying it would be too involved to tackle here. Two considerations are most decisive in my thinking: (1) The argument of John’s prologue is that God’s rational purpose for man from the very beginning was that man have life, that this life be the very essence of human fulfillment, and that this life remains a possibility because of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. In other words, John is suggesting that the gospel story he is about to tell is a story of how the possibility of human fulfillment (i.e., life) has been preserved by God through his Son, Jesus. In the light of this understanding of the prologue, LOGOS as the divine principle of purposive rationality contributes to this

follow the King James Version in translating *logos* with ‘word’. The NIV, for example, renders John 1:1, “In the beginning was *the Word*, and *the Word* was with God, and *the Word* was God” (my emphasis). I consider this translation off the mark. My personal translation of John 1:1–2, if I were to translate *logos* into English, would run like this:

In the beginning was the rationally ordered and purposive script of the whole of cosmic history. Now this pre-existent script was with God, indeed God was the primal rationality who authored this script. This pre-existent script was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence in conformity with this script, and not one thing that has ever come into existence came into existence apart from it. Included in the script was Life, and the way to Life was the light of men. Now this light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not extinguished it.

THE MEANING OF *LOGOS*

If you were to consult a beginner’s text on New Testament Greek, its vocabulary list would give ‘word’ as the English translation of *logos*.²⁵ Consistent with this, all the major English translations of the Bible translate *logos* in John 1 into ‘word’. On the other hand, if you were to consult a classical Greek lexicon, its entry would show a much wider range of possible usages for *logos*. Among them would be things like ‘argument,’ ‘rational discourse,’ ‘thinking,’ ‘reasoning,’ ‘rational reflection,’ ‘account,’ ‘argument,’ ‘story,’ and most notably, ‘reason.’²⁶ In the Greek of the ancient world, reason, intelligence, mind, etc., are clearly within the field of meaning of the word *logos*.

meaning; *logos* meaning the WORD would not. (2) Understanding LOGOS as the primal purposive rationality involves a straightforward understanding of the word *logos* in its Greek milieu. The suggestion that designating God as the WORD is a reference to the Genesis creation account where God speaks the creation into existence has always seemed forced to me. The fact that God speaks and creation occurs does not directly suggest that God *himself* should be designated the WORD. On the other hand, the fact that God is the ultimate, self-existent rational mind that has created and designed all of reality does directly suggest that God *himself* should be designated the MIND—that is, the LOGOS—particularly in the cultural milieu of John’s time.

25. See J. Gresham Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1923), 23 and 262; and see Eric G. Jay, *New Testament Greek: An Introductory Grammar* (London: S.P.C.K., 1958), 32.

26. See *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, 9th ed. (Oxford

In John 1, John uses *logos* to convey two different, but related meanings. On the one hand, it can be used to denote a story or narrative—a script. On the other hand, it can denote the rational faculty. In my initial rendering above, I render the Greek word *logos*, simply transliterating the Greek term, when John means to denote the pre-existent script that God purposed for cosmic history. I render it LOGOS where John means to denote the rational mind that devised that script. It is the latter usage that concerns us here. In the latter usage (LOGOS), John uses the Greek term *logos* not to denote reason in the abstract, but to denote the concrete reason that lies behind all that exists—that purposive, intelligent reason that planned and ordered all things. He means Reason with a capital R.

Virtually all ancient Greek philosophy held that a primal rationality was the source of all rationality and created the structure and purpose of everything that exists. Stoicism was a very popular philosophy in the world of John’s day. Stoics held that the world (i.e., the cosmos) came into being by the design of an intelligent, purposive force. The cosmos is rationally ordered and purposive precisely because a rational creative force gave it its form and existence. They had a name for this rational force. It was called the Logos.²⁷ (Stoicism maintained that the Logos was an impersonal force. They did not believe in a personal creator God. Therein lay an important difference between Stoic philosophy and the biblical worldview.) But the general concept was not confined to the Stoics. Hence, it provided a concept that John could effectively employ in the prologue to his gospel.²⁸

It was widely accepted in the world of John’s day that the order and purpose of the cosmos was to be explained by reference to a primal rationality widely referred to as the Logos. John accepts the attribution of cosmic order and purpose to this Logos. But he does not accept the

Press, 1940), s.v. “λογος”. Although many New Testament usages are legitimately translated ‘word’, it is debatable whether the usage of *logos* to mean word is a root, foundational meaning or a derived meaning. It seems likely to me that *logos*, when used to mean “word”—as well as *lego* used to mean “speak”—comes from the fact that a word—whether written or uttered—is the symbolic representation of a CONCEPT—a product of RATIONAL thought. If so, then the word’s more primitive and basic meaning is the one mentioned here—reason or rationality.

27. F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), 110–112.

28. While Stoicism was a popular and widely influential philosophy in the first century, the concept of the LOGOS as the primal rationality that gave rise to the rational structure of all of reality was shared by virtually the whole ancient Greek world—though it was not always identified by the name ‘*logos*’. It was not a uniquely Stoic concept; it was pan-Hellenic.

29. John does not explicitly highlight this inference; to address the philosophical problem of the

Greek (particularly the Stoic) conception of the Logos. The Logos is not an impersonal force. It is one and the same with the personal God who revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In the beginning was the *logos*. Now the *logos* was with God, indeed *God* was the LOGOS. This *logos* was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence through this *logos*, and not one thing that has ever come into existence came into existence apart from it.

But John's primary purpose in the prologue is not to challenge the Greeks' inadequate understanding of the Logos. That is secondary. His primary purpose is to highlight the pre-existence of divine Reason and to thereby highlight the rationality of the created order. The pre-existent God is himself rational. He is the primal reason who, in the beginning, was the source of all reason. He is the self-existent rational being who imparts rationality to all other rational beings and who created the whole cosmos in conformity to the dictates of reason, an attribute of his own being.

Why is John intent on highlighting the pre-existence of Reason and the rationality of the created order? Because he wants to focus on one aspect of that created order: namely, he wants to focus on man and stress the fact that man was made *with a purpose*. Specifically, man was designed to experience Life—what elsewhere is called Eternal Life. Life, by the design of the rational creator who created the whole cosmos, is the ultimate good of mankind. This goal, if achieved, would fulfill the very purpose for which man was created.

All things came into existence through this *logos*, and not one thing that has ever come into existence came into existence apart from it. Included in this *logos* was Life (as the ultimate good of mankind), and (the way to) Life was the light (the ultimate wisdom) of men.

This, then, sets the stage for one of the most succinct statements of the gospel in the entire Bible:

Now this light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not extinguished it.

Death is mankind's problem. We do not have the Life purposed for us by the LOGOS, and we do not know how to gain this Life, our ultimate fulfillment. Instead, we are in darkness. Are we forever abandoned to the

darkness of ignorance and death that now surrounds us? Has the darkness so completely enveloped mankind that no hope remains? “No!” John says. A ray of hope continues to shine, penetrating the darkness. Threatening though the darkness is, it has not extinguished the light. The possibility of Life for man remains. He can still achieve the Life for which he was created. That is the significance of the gospel. That is the meaning of the story about Jesus that John is about to recount.

My exposition above is meant to illuminate the point at issue. What is the LOGOS in John 1? The most reasonable interpretation is that John uses *logos* to designate the most ultimate rationality in all of reality, God.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD AS THE LOGOS

Some very important implications for our view of reason arise from an understanding of John 1:1–3. John highlights two important facts: (1) God is the LOGOS, i.e., the Primal Reason, and (2) the entire created order has been created by this LOGOS, God himself. What follows? Very simply, that the entire created order is rational and conforms to the dictates of reason.²⁹ God created it to function in conformity to the principles of reason and logic. But not only is the impersonal created order rational (making physical science possible), all other aspects of the created order are rational as well. Even those aspects of reality that come into existence through the choices of free moral agents ultimately conform to rational orderliness. Every part of reality and everything that happens originates from the creator God in conformity to his rational design and his rational purposes.³⁰ So, not only is God rational, all of created reality is rational as

possibility of knowledge was not his purpose in writing. Nevertheless, by identifying the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with the LOGOS, John is clearly acceding to the concept of the LOGOS current in the intellectual culture of his day. But the contemporary concept of the LOGOS was, in part, developed to answer the philosophical problem of knowledge. Therefore, by identifying the God of Israel with the LOGOS, John is implicitly acknowledging the point I want to make explicit. The philosophical problem of knowledge is answered in the biblical conception of the rational creator God.

30. In chapter 6 I discuss the relationship between the Creator and freewill choices. I maintain that freewill choices are products of creation just as surely as rocks, trees, mountains, and quarks. For now, it is sufficient to note that if John had only the impersonal created order in mind when he says “...and not one thing that has come into existence came into existence apart from it (the *logos*)...”, then only the laws of physics would be knowable by human reason. Knowledge of an individual person or of human nature would not be knowable through common sense and normal human intelligence. It would be impossible to discover any rational or logical patterns that would constitute a true understanding of history, sociology, psychology, or

well.

Significant implications for the Bible’s view of reason, truth, and knowledge follow from this:

1. *Created reality is knowable.*

Man, reasoning from life experience, can acquire valid knowledge of what exists in the created cosmos. The faculty of reason (*logos*) that God (the LOGOS) created in man constructs beliefs according to those same laws that define and order the universe—i.e., the laws of reason and logic. God created the cosmos to be rational. Therefore, a built-in match exists between rationally sound (*logikos*) beliefs and the truth about how things really are.

God purposed for us to know, so he made our minds such that we truly could know. He made our minds to correspond to reality. Specifically, he designed our minds so that the beliefs that constitute genuine knowledge of reality—because they give us true information about the way things actually are—are the very beliefs we judge to be rationally valid.

The essence of “the problem of knowledge” that has interested philosophers for millennia is this: how can we know that those beliefs we judge to be true do, in fact, give us accurate information about reality as it actually is? John offers the only really adequate solution to this aspect of the problem of knowledge: because God designed our minds to judge in conformity with the way he created the cosmos to be. The built-in rationality that shapes our beliefs about the cosmos is the same rationality that has shaped the cosmos itself.

Many thinkers have agreed that human knowledge and the reality external to man conform to a common standard—namely, the standard of reason itself. As we have seen, this alone solves the problem of knowledge. I can know that my true beliefs conform to the world as it truly is precisely because my beliefs and the world are equally rational according to one and the same rationality. Human reason can comprehend the intrinsic rational structure of the actual world; hence, man can know the truth about the world.

The ancient Greeks believed this. Most secular naturalists would affirm this. Various philosophies throughout history have offered this solution to

anything else in the humanities or social sciences. Though such skepticism is in vogue among secular thinkers, it is contradictory to everything common sense tells us and to everything on which our everyday lives are based. Such radical skepticism is not livable in practice; and there is no greater refutation of a belief than our inability to live it.

31. According to Socrates, true beliefs that, while true, are not accompanied by an explanation

the problem of knowledge. But no one—other than the biblical theist—can adequately answer the ensuing question: how can I explain that there is a correspondence? Why is it that human intelligence and the cosmos operate according to the same ordering principles of reason? Secular naturalism and other philosophies dogmatically assert that this is so. But they have no intellectually satisfying explanation for why it should be so.³¹ Only the Bible offers that: namely, because created reality and the human mind were created by the same self-existent creator God who is himself intrinsically rational and whose purpose in creating human intelligence was so that man could know the truth about reality.

2. *Irrational beliefs about created reality are false beliefs.*

The rationality of the created order has a very important implication: any belief about created reality that does not conform to reason or logic (i.e., that is an irrational belief) cannot possibly be true. Everything that has come into existence, according to John, has come into existence according to the dictates of the rational purposes of God. (“...All things came into existence in conformity with this *logos*, and not one thing that has ever come into existence came into existence apart from it...”)³² Therefore, if some belief does not conform to the dictates of reason, it cannot be a true belief.

3. *God is knowable.*

Man, reasoning from life experience and God’s revelation of himself, can know the truth about God. The reason (*logos*) that God (the LOGOS) has created in man constructs beliefs about God and ultimate reality that conform to principles that are intrinsic to God’s very essence. A built-in match exists between our rationally sound (*logikos*) beliefs and the truth about who God is. God made our minds not only to match the reality of the created order, but also to match the reality of who he is. God purposed for man to know himself as well as his creation. So he made our minds to function in such a way that we truly could know him. Our ration-

for why and how they are true do not rise to the level of knowledge; they are merely true opinion. The witch doctor who cures a diseased eye by putting cow dung on it does not have true knowledge of the cure. The modern doctor who has learned that a certain chemical (which the cow dung contains) heals a particular eye disorder for a particular reason is the one who has true knowledge. The secular naturalist, like the witch doctor, may have the right cure for the problem of knowledge, but he has no true knowledge of that cure if he cannot explain why it is so. Only biblical theism can do that.

32. This is not explicit in John’s statement, but it is clearly implied. For John, as for the ancient

ally valid beliefs about God—the transcendent One—are indeed *knowledge* of him.

4. *God and ultimate truth do not transcend reason.*

The Bible, then, is at odds with the popular belief that God and ultimate truth transcend reason. Nothing can transcend the self-existent God who existed before the cosmos. He is the ultimate transcendent reality. Yet John states explicitly that—before the birth of the cosmos—there was LOGOS, REASON. How can that be? Only if, as John says, God is that pre-existent Reason. God cannot transcend reason, for that would be to transcend himself. Reason, like goodness or holiness, is an attribute of his very being, and God does not transcend his own attributes.

The more popular notion posits a serious limitation on the ability of human reason to know God. This is unbiblical. True, we are seriously limited in what we can know about God. We can only know of God what he reveals to us. He is, after all, transcendent. He is not a part of the data of everyday experience. But this limitation on our knowledge of God is not what the popular notion has in mind. The popular notion would suggest that reason itself fails us when it comes to knowing God. But reason itself does not fail us. Reason is unfailingly reliable with respect to a knowledge of God. It is the extent of our experience that limits us. Reason cannot operate without data, and the data we have on God is not (and never can be) complete. Hence, we can never acquire a complete and exhaustive knowledge of who he is. Human knowledge of God will always be limited. But not because reason was involved! What little we can know about God is valid precisely because it does conform to reason. No irrational belief about God could possibly be true, for God is LOGOS itself.

5. *Reason is not merely a part of the created order, nor is it functional only within the created order. It transcends the created order and can function to give us knowledge of God himself.*

This follows directly from (3) and (4).

6. *Irrational beliefs about God are false beliefs.*

It should be clear from the discussion above that any belief about God and transcendent truth that does not conform to reason or logic (*i.e.*, that is an irrational belief) cannot possibly be true. This conclusion should be

Hebrews, nothing existed in the beginning but God. Everything else was created by him. Hence, any other manifestation of rationality had to be created by him.

33. See appendix K for my definitions of these terms.

highlighted for the purposes of this book. John states that God is intrinsically rational. Indeed, God is himself the origin of all rationality.³² Therefore, if some belief about God does not conform to the dictates of reason, it cannot conform to a true understanding of who God really is.

7. To be irrational is to be in rebellion against God; to opt for irrationality is to opt for something that is wrong—something contrary to God’s very nature.

This is yet a further implication of God’s being the LOGOS. Evil and wickedness constitute rebellion against God, for God is himself intrinsically good, and to be evil is to refuse to emulate who God is. Likewise, irrationality constitutes rebellion against God, for God is intrinsically rational, and to be irrational is to refuse to emulate who God is.

OBJECTION TO THESE INFERENCES

One might object: “All that you have been arguing assumes that man’s reason is, for the most part, the same as God’s reason. But that is not so. God’s logic is not like our logic. God’s ways are not our ways. God’s reason is not our reason. We cannot assume that God’s rationality is the same as our rationality.”

No one can argue with the contention that God’s ways are not man’s ways. That much is clear. But to concede that does not require that the divine *logos* be different from the human *logos*. God’s ways being different from ours is attributable to a host of other differences between God and man. God is holy; we are wicked. God is the transcendent creator; we are finite creatures. God is wise and knowing; we are foolish and ignorant. We have a perspective narrowed by the present moment; God has a perspective as broad as the future itself. There are numerous reasons why God’s ways are not our ways. But the claim that human rationality is different from divine rationality is not one of them.

In discussing the issue of divine rationality as it relates to human rationality, an inadequate conception of what rationality is contributes to the confusion. Reason must not be confused with an actual piece of thinking and its conclusion. That is, REASON differs from REASONING.³³ There is no question that, due to our limited perspective, our thinking (reasoning) arrives at very different conclusions from God’s thinking (reasoning). But not because God employs different rules of logic. Rather, he applies the same rules of logic to a different set of facts, values, and

34. Some would argue that this is exactly what Kierkegaard is suggesting in *Fear and Trembling*—

assumptions. Fallen, weak human beings hold wrong-headed assumptions, have a perverse set of values, and lack many of the relevant facts. Inevitably we will come to conclusions that differ from God's. But the difference is not due to a different rationality. It is attributable to a different and inferior application of the same rationality.

We, as human beings, are all equipped with the same rationality. Yet we arrive at significantly different conclusions. Why? Because we start from different assumptions, we have different perceptions of the facts, we have different hierarchies of values, and we have different personal agendas. It is clearly *not* because we are equipped with different kinds of reason. Neither is the difference between God's way of thinking and our way of thinking due to different kinds of reason. We share the same *logos*.

When God asked Abraham to offer his son Isaac on the altar, was he asking him to do something that was totally illogical? Something that made no sense by the standards of human logic, that only made sense in the light of an alien divine logic? No! God was not asking Abraham to reject ordinary human reason as an avenue to truth and obedience. He was not being asked to reject human logic in favor of some mysterious divine logic. Rather, he was being asked to trust that he (God) was in a better position to determine what ordinary human reason would entail. God and Abraham shared the same standards of logic, the same principles of rationality. But God knew more facts, and he understood more clearly how his purposes were to be achieved. Hence, he had a superior perspective from which to judge what ordinary human reason dictated.

Not uncommonly, Abraham's faith is described as if it were a crazy, dramatic abandonment of reason, replaced by a blind, irrational obedience to God. But nothing in the Bible justifies such an interpretation. Abraham's faith was eminently rational; he made a logical choice. Granted, what God was requiring did not appear to be a rational act. But that is where Abraham's faith lay: he trusted that God would never require of him something that was rationally inappropriate. Abraham's conviction was that, if he knew what God knew, the divine command would be manifestly reasonable. But, not knowing what God knew, it was understandable that it appeared crazy and absurd. He trusted that it was a rational act, against all appearances, because he knew he did not possess all the facts.

This is the New Testament's perspective on Abraham's action. The apostles do not present Abraham's faith as a courageous abandonment of reason.³⁴ On the contrary, they presume that Abraham's faith and obedience were utterly rational—justified on utterly rational grounds. Abraham knew the God who had promised him an inheritance through Isaac. He was capable of fulfilling that promise—even if Isaac died. If need be,

God could raise Isaac from the dead.³⁵ One way or the other, God would fulfill his promise. In the light of who God is, such faith is utterly reasonable. Death cannot thwart the unfailing purposes of the creator.

Nevertheless, many feel that we diminish God when we affirm that we share the same *logos* with him. God must have a different, exalted *logos* if he is to be worthy of his status. But this is not the Bible's perspective—most notably, it is not the perspective of the gospel of John.

As noted earlier, *logos* was a common word in the Greek language of John's day. The meaning of *logos* is informed by the phenomena of everyday human experience. *Logos* denotes ordinary human reason and its expression in language. From his choice of *logos* to denote God, we can reasonably infer that, for John, there is no gap between human reason and divine reason. To describe an attribute of the nature of God, he uses a term whose content is wholly defined in terms of ordinary human reason. Why? Arguably, because he believes that divine rationality can be accurately portrayed in terms of human rationality. If John believed, as many do, that God's mind works according to some alien principles of logic (where, for example, logical contradictions can be true), how could he have picked *logos* to describe the mind of God? If God's logic so totally violates what we mean by *logos*, how can that particular word be used to describe it? Surely another word would have been required—even if John had to invent it.³⁶ To suggest that he grants the title of LOGOS to that which is alien to *logos* is an unlikely understanding of what he means. Far more likely, he calls God the LOGOS precisely because he believes that there is one and only one form of *logos* in all of reality—namely, that which is intrinsic to the divine nature. The rationality that structures creation is simply a reflection of the rationality that exists in God himself. Far from being at odds with divine logic, human rationality is completely congruent with it.

namely, that Abraham's faith consisted in his courageous abandonment of reason. I think this is a complete misunderstanding of Kierkegaard. But if it is not, then Kierkegaard's suggestion is without any support from the New Testament.

35. See Hebrews 11:19. See also Romans 4:21 with regard to the nature of Abraham's faith.

36. If John believed there was a gap between human reason and the divine Reason, then I would have expected something more like the following as the prologue to his gospel: "In the beginning was the Irrational Mystery (or, Inexplicable Super-Rationality). Now the Irrational Mystery (Inexplicable Super-Rationality) was with God, indeed God was the Irrational Mystery (Inexplicable Super-Rationality). This Irrational Mystery (Inexplicable Super-Rationality) was in the beginning with God. All things came into existence through this Irrational Mystery (Inexplicable Super-Rationality), and not one thing that has ever come into existence came into existence apart from it."

37. The student of philosophy will recognize the specter of Kant here. If God's logic were dif-

To drive a wedge between the logic of God and the logic of man is an attractive strategy for exalting God and affirming his majesty. But it is wrong-headed and unbiblical. Many differences exist between God and man; reason is not one of them. In order that we might know him and his handiwork, God has equipped us with a mind that operates according to the same logical principles that are intrinsic to his very being. Any view that denies this is at odds with common sense, with sound philosophy, and with the teaching of the Bible.

CONSIDERING THE CONSEQUENCES

But before we leave this objection, let's consider the alternative. What if God's logic were different from our own? Two devastating results would follow:

1. *Knowledge of God would be impossible.*

If the principles that give structure to the very being of God are incongruent with the principles that give birth to our beliefs, then the beliefs we form about God will be fallacious—radically out of sync with the reality of who God is. We can infer from the creation and from our experience that God exists and that he is good. But this is based on human logic. If God does exist and is good, we have a happy coincidence. But, what if the logic innate within God's nature differs from the logic of our minds? Where is the guarantee that our theological beliefs, constructed to conform to human logic, will be true? For all we know, it is just as true to say that "God does not exist" and that "God is evil." If human reason does not apply to God, beliefs contrary to human reason may nonetheless be true.

Only divine logic could produce assuredly true beliefs about God. But, on the assumption that God's logic differs from our own, we are incapable of reasoning in accordance with divine logic. Consequently, we could never know anything about him. At least, we could never know that the beliefs we have formed about him are true. We know what our narrow human logic tells us about God. But we could never know whether it depicts him accurately.

2. *No knowledge of anything would be possible.*

Whatever rationality makes up the divine being, John says that everything that has come into existence has come into existence in conformity to that rationality. Accordingly—if human logic is not congruent with

divine logic—no knowledge of anything would be possible. The principles of reason that shape our beliefs would not conform to the ordering principles that have shaped objective reality. Consequently, our beliefs would create a magnificent fiction—internally consistent and rational by human standards, but bearing no resemblance to the actual world that lies beyond the reach of my thoughts and perceptions.³⁷ If human reason does not represent the structure of reality as it actually is, then human beings have no real knowledge of it, for human knowledge is based on human reason.

Here is the bottom line: unless we are prepared to say (against all common sense and against all that we do, in fact, believe) that no knowledge of God and no knowledge of reality is possible, it is absurd to suggest that divine logic and human logic are two different things.

The Sunday School Calculus: A Denial of Reason

In practice, we deny the validity of reason in many different ways. One particularly subtle denial plays an important role in the debate over divine determinism. I call it the “Sunday School Calculus.” We find it in both beginning and advanced levels.

On one occasion, trying to teach my daughter that heaven will be a very desirable place, I asked her, “What is the funnest thing you can think of?” (I was teaching her theology, not grammar.) I expected her to say, “Disneyland!” My next move was going to be, “Well heaven will be more fun than Disneyland.” But, having mastered Beginning Sunday School Calculus, she sabotaged my pedagogical strategy. Quickly and confidently, she answered, “God. God is the funnest thing!” Beginning Sunday School Calculus says, “Take any adjective whatsoever, add ‘est’ (or its syntactical equivalent), and you have discovered a valid attribute of God.”

This same beginning calculus resulted in my son’s confident assertion that God was the stinkiest thing in the world. (We had just driven past a pulp mill.) His older sister—having mastered the Advanced Sunday

ferent from our own, we could have knowledge only of the phenomenal world, the world of our experience. We could never know if we have knowledge of the world as it is in itself, independent of our experience of it.

38. Can God create a rock so large that he cannot lift it? This presents an insoluble dilemma to

School Calculus by then—argued that, to the contrary, God was the best-smelling thing in the world. Advanced Sunday School Calculus instructs you, “Take any adjective that defines a positive attribute (and it must be a positive attribute), add ‘est’ (or its syntactical equivalent), and you have discovered a valid attribute of God.”

What does any of this have to do with the issues we are discussing? An axiom of the Sunday School Calculus holds that *all things are possible with God*—literally, *all things*. At first blush, this axiom seems sound enough. But, in actual practice, it is frequently used as a subtle camouflage for rejecting reason. It can be construed in such a way that it denies the rationality of God.

From a biblical point of view, *not all things are possible with God*. God cannot do evil. It is contrary to his very nature. Likewise, God cannot do what is logically impossible. That, too, is contrary to his nature. God is rational; rationality is intrinsic to his very being. Indeed, he is the source of reason itself. Therefore, everything he does will be rational and logical.

One tempting counter to the ensuing arguments for divine determinism will be to assert, in effect, that God can do what is logically impossible.³⁸ As you shall see, if God can create something to be uncreated, can cause something to be uncaused, or can cause something to be self-causing, my arguments for divine determinism are inconclusive. I am confident that God can do none of these. They are logical impossibilities—things that a rational God could not do. But one schooled in the Sunday School Calculus—committed to the lesson that “all things [even logically impossible things] are possible with God”—will refuse to grant me this assumption.

“All things are possible with God” sounds like a pious and noble defense of God’s supremacy. But, in fact, it is a denial of the God of the Bible. God is no more irrational and illogical than he is evil. *He cannot violate logic any more than he can violate goodness*. This is fundamental to my argu-

the Sunday School Calculus. If one says “no,” he denies God’s omnipotence by conceding that there is something he cannot create. If one says “yes,” he denies God’s omnipotence by conceding that there is something he cannot lift. But from the standpoint of the biblical worldview, the answer is simple. No! God cannot create a rock so large he cannot lift it. A rock so large that an omnipotent God could not lift it is a logically impossible entity. And God cannot create something that logically cannot exist (like a square circle), for God is bound by logic because he *is* logic. This is not a denial of the biblical concept of omnipotence, for the Bible (unlike the Sunday School Calculus) never claims that God can do what is logically impossible. Omnipotence is the attribute of being powerful (or transcendent) enough to do anything that is logically possible and morally good. Anything else would violate his nature, and that he cannot do. It is not possible, for example, for God not to exist. But this is no counter-example to his omnipotence. 39. However, see note 22 above.

ment. If God is not logical and rational and if human reason is not a credible guide to truth, then my defense of divine determinism is hopelessly flawed from its inception. But if God is rational and if human rationality is a reliable avenue to truth, then my reliance upon rational argument in defending divine determinism is a strength, not a defect.

Summary and Conclusion

It will soon become apparent that my arguments for divine determinism are rational arguments. We live in a day of strong anti-rational sentiments. Many will dismiss my arguments because they are too rational. But, in this chapter, I have maintained that, not only is rational argument valid, but reason and logic are the indispensable tools of a sound theological method.

It makes as much sense to accuse an argument of being too logical as it does to accuse God of being too good, my wife of being too faithful, or my dog of being too canine. The goal of intellectual inquiry is to construct beliefs that are perfectly rational, perfectly logical. The more rational the argument, the better!

So I am not embarrassed by the importance logic and reason play in my defense of divine determinism, for I am convinced of three important propositions: (1) reason is the only tool God has given us for arriving at truth,³⁹ (2) reason is entirely reliable, and (3) reason is adequate to the task of leading us to truth. To reject reason is a self-defeating intellectual suicide—a renunciation of the God-given intelligence that has served us well all of our lives.

Like college freshmen in an introductory philosophy course, discovering the power of skepticism for the first time, we can wax skeptical toward reason. But skepticism is nothing but a clever sleight of hand. It creates the illusion that it is rational to doubt the reliability of rationality—a sort of philosophical carnival act. But reason cannot be seriously doubted by serious thinkers. How can one, on the basis of reason, seriously doubt reason?

To doubt the validity of reason is to doubt the possibility of knowledge itself—including the knowledge of one's own existence. It is to call into question all knowledge and all truth. It is to call into question the foundations of intelligence itself. Going even further, to deny the validity of reason is spiritual and intellectual suicide of the first degree. It is to

As will become clear in part 4, the power of this author analogy to explicate the nature of

reject the very tool that makes knowledge of truth possible.

Furthermore, the denial of reason can only occur in a theoretical discussion (if even there). Sitting in his office, his feet on the desk, the professor can afford to argue that reason is unreliable. But seeing an oncoming car as he prepares to cross a street, that same professor does not step in front of the oncoming car, reasoning that—since reason cannot be known to accurately represent objective reality—he need not allow reason to control his actions. Determining that it is better not to step out in front of the car, he trusts human logic implicitly. While we can deny reason in theory, we cannot deny it in practice. But if we cannot deny it in practice, what is the point of denying it at all? Our beliefs are valuable to the extent that they help us understand and navigate in the real world. If the unreliability of reason is not a proposition we can practice, in what meaningful sense do we believe it?

The Bible assumes the importance of sound reason to the task of understanding. Further, it explicitly claims that rationality is linked to the very nature of God himself. God is the LOGOS, reason itself. Reason, then, is not a provisional tool given to humans for use while they are “down here.” It defines the nature of all existence, even God’s. It will remain into eternity as one of the parameters that define all true existence. Accordingly, my ultimate defense of reason is a theological one. To deny the validity of reason is ultimately to deny God. Or, at least, to worship a false god—one whose nature does not include rationality as an attribute.

In the arguments that follow, I hope to demonstrate that divine determinism follows by logical necessity from the concept of God clearly taught in the Bible. If I am correct—if I have not made any errors in reasoning—then divine determinism is true. According to the Bible’s view of reason, what is logically necessary is true. It would be irresponsible rebellion against the very nature of God himself to dismiss my arguments without refuting them on the grounds that they are too dependent on human logic.