

On Basic Confidence in the Worth of Life

1. To the claim that there is, and in the nature of the case must be, a basic confidence in the worth of life if there is to be any life at all, it is sometimes objected that human beings do not universally exhibit or express any such confidence. Consequently, to advance the claim is judged to deny an obvious fact that invalidates it.

2. But there seems to be a parallel here with the logical principles of reasoning that may serve as the basis for meeting this objection. Cohen and Nagel write: "Logical principles are involved in every proof, and in that sense every proof depends upon them *whether we know them explicitly or not, or whether we have confidence in them or not*" (187). Interestingly, Cohen and Nagel seem to allow for a distinction between "knowing" and "*explicitly* knowing," which they do not allow in the case of having confidence. This may be significant in that they recognize thereby the meaning of the term "confidence" as we ordinarily use it, which is such that confidence is either present or not present, without regard for any distinction between "implicit" and "explicit." But I should argue that this distinction must be as certainly taken into account in the case of "having confidence" as in the case of "knowing." Thus, for example, was not the confidence of persons in medicines being untampered with precisely an implicit confidence prior to the occurrence of events undermining it? In any case, couldn't one say, by exact analogy with Cohen and Nagel's statement, that a ground of worth is involved in every vital act, and in this sense every vital act depends upon that ground, whether or not we know it explicitly, or whether or not we have confidence in it? In other words, perhaps my talk of "basic confidence" could and should be replaced with talk, simply, of "dependence."

3. Against this is to be set the consideration that the "dependence" in question might be merely objective—as it presumably is in the case of beings incapable of understanding—whereas what is obviously required is a mode of dependence that is also *subjective*, in that it involves somehow the *understanding* of one's dependence on the part of the one who is dependent. But this requirement is hardly all that hard to satisfy—witness Schleiermacher's talk of "the *feeling* of absolute dependence." In that event,

however, the question would obviously be whether the difference between talking about "having confidence" and "being (understandingly, or feelingly) dependent" is more than a merely verbal difference.

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"Faith, properly understood, is not irrational, for it is not so much dependent on reason as the ground and source of reason; reason is not the negation of faith, but its development into an articulated system. Every act is fundamentally an act of faith; but it is not a completed act of faith unless it develops into a rational and self-explanatory system of thought. Hence faith that remains mere faith and keeps reason at arm's length is in error, not because it is only faith, but because it is *not* faith; it has not sufficient faith in itself to state itself clearly and abide by the result. This is not faith, but lack of faith, just as it is lack of faith to say, 'I believe this bridge will bear me, but in order to preserve my faith uncontaminated by reason I won't try to walk across it.' People who claim to have a lively belief in God and shrink from expressing this belief in the reasoned terms of theology and philosophy are obviously victims of this lack of faith.

"Yet faith cannot be the product of reason. . . . People do not, and never can, come to believe in God, or in anything else, as a result of ratiocination. The function of ratiocination is not this, but the development or reasoned statement of what faith finds within itself. To say that is not to deny all value to apologetics and to debates; that would be hardly necessary, for everyone knows that the value of these things is extraordinarily slender if they are to be judged by their net result in the shape of conversions. They have a very real value in leading people to answer the question, 'What do I believe?' and that is a question always worth answering. Indeed, if the view I have been maintaining is right, anything that led people to answer the question would be in the interest of religion; for on this view everyone believes in God, if only he could be brought to see it. Reason cannot generate faith, but reason alone can reveal faith to itself, can display to it its own nature" (R. G. Collingwood, *Faith & Reason*: 118 f.).

"A faith unaccompanied by reason . . . is no true faith. The spirit of faith is shown to be a real spirit by embodying itself in reason, that is, by developing its own assertions, which as undeveloped would be mere abstractions, into a rational system of thought and conduct. If you really believe in God you will behave in detail like a man who believes in God. If you believe in the rationality of the world and the trustworthiness of human thinking (these two beliefs are the same belief stated in different terms) you will embody your belief in detailed scientific inquiries. A person who says he

believes in God, but shrinks from developing his belief into a science of theology, or a person who professes his faith in the rationality of the world but will not say how exactly this rationality manifests itself in detail, is like a man who says, 'I believe this bridge will bear me, but I would rather not walk across it.' To speak like that is to show not the purity of your faith, but its absence" (143 f.).

What do I carry away from my further study of Collingwood on religion?

Above all, I carry away the conviction that, while Collingwood is certainly right that "the whole of life, regarded as a whole, is the sphere of religion, and . . . the same whole, regarded as made up of details, is the sphere of science" (*Faith and Reason*: 145), he is almost certainly wrong that "[t]he proper sphere of faith is everything in the collective sense—everything as a whole," while "[t]he proper sphere of reason is everything in the distributive sense—every separate thing, no matter what" (142). In other words, Collingwood misleads in representing the distinction between religion and science as only another way of talking about the distinction between faith and reason—and vice versa. For just as faith, in its way, has to do with parts as well as the whole, so reason, in its way—in the way of *philosophical*, as distinct from scientific, reason—has to do with the whole as well as parts. There are passages, indeed, where Collingwood himself clearly says as much (e.g., 91), so his position on the matter is simply not consistent.

Another thing I carry away is the conviction that Collingwood's treatment of the war between science and religion is as valid and important as Bultmann's, with which it closely converges. Especially helpful in this connection is Collingwood's clarification of "superstition." "To be superstitious," he says, "is to select certain finite things from among the rest and withdraw them from the sphere of reason [Of course, Collingwood should have said "science" here instead of "reason," for the reason given above.]" But "[a]ll finite things are proper objects of [the] scientific habit of mind," and "[t]here is no fact or class of facts which can be withdrawn from its analysis or spared its criticism." "[I]t is precisely the duty of reason [*sc.* science!] to fight superstition wherever it finds it, even if (as it always does) it shelters itself behind the name of religion" (142). "The defeat of superstition is a victory not only for reason but for faith too. Nothing could more thoroughly consolidate the position of religion than that science should systematically drive it from every position of detail that it holds, because nothing could more thoroughly enforce the lesson that if religion is to exist at all it must base its claims not on a reading of this fact or that but on its reading of human experience in its entirety" (144). "The war between faith and reason [*sc.*