

PART FOUR: THE PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD IN SKETCH

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Introduction: Ways of Defining Religion

1. The subjective side (perceived meaning)
2. Transcendent viewpoint
3. Worldview: ultimate frame of reference, big picture, the whole

I. Christianity and Other Religions

A. Method of selection

1. Other alternatives fall out by default, not by direct disproof.

That procedure works because to do otherwise would require shouldering the negative burden of proof. It offers a positive rather than confrontational pattern for “*feeling after God and finding him*” (Acts 17:27).

2. The choice is for the best, not for the one with no difficulties.

Choosing religious commitment does not happen in a vacuum as if the alternative to choosing Christ were to make no religious choice at all. Instead, we choose in a context of comparison; so our choice is not between this and nothing, but between this and that. It is a matter of choosing the best alternative. The Hebrew writer uses that approach for encouraging his readers not to forsake Christianity in favor of Judaism. He portrays Christianity as better, not Judaism as false.

This point relates to the observation (a) that Christianity does not take a defensive stance. For one thing, it is not natural to let people raise difficulties for us to answer about our own faith. In that setup, their queries would not even have to represent an consistent alternative. Since we are handling these questions in real life, what others ask should come from at least a tentative alternative. That is so because on this issue others must take some viewpoint. Otherwise, they could get so theoretical that answers would not really help. People sometimes act as if they have no commitment because then they do not have to defend anything. Christianity offers something people want if they recognize it.

For another thing, (b) the positive presentation must be done anyway for the hearer to see the whole and appreciate the apologetic that comes from systematic advantage.

For a third thing, (c) we have to take the best alternative we know until we find something better.

Finally, (d) the kind of certainty applicable to real-life matters is psychological certainty, more than logical certainty. There is always room for a kind of uncertainty in real-world matters even regarding the truth. There can be a breakdown between referent and perception, between perception and conception, and conception and communication to other people.

3. Choosing against an alternative does not imply that everything about that alternative is false. It only implies that as a system the alternative is incorrect.

B. Methodology for retaining Christianity

“Keep what you have until you find something better.”

II. Theodicy

Deals with the presence of evil in the world and how that squares with the belief system we have espoused. See essays under “The Problem of Evil.”

III. Theistic Proofs

A. General character

The theistic proofs do not prove the existence of God in a positive sense. They create greater probability than the alternatives. In the Christian tradition, arguments for God’s existence aim at demonstrating ethical monotheism.

B. Individual arguments (For a helpful treatment of the arguments in detail, see John Hick’s *Arguments for the Existence of God*. N. Y.: Seabury Press, 1971)

1. Argument from design [form]
2. Teleological argument [purpose]
3. Cosmological argument [contingency/wholeness]
4. Moral argument
5. Ontological argument
6. “Reciprocal Causation A, the Biosphere, and Theistic Proof” may offer a kind of proof different from the first five here. See herein under “Apologetics.” Observations in that presentation seem to go beyond establishing probability and leading to necessity in arguing for the existence of God in certain respects.

IV. Philosophical Considerations

A. Kinds of certainty

1. Logical certainty
2. Psychological certainty

Note self-authenticating experience.

Within psychological certainty various modes exist between direct experience and mediated experience. In scripture (e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:7; John 20:27-28),

faith contrasts with sight (within psychological certainty) rather than with knowledge, or for that matter, with certainty.

B. Relationship of event and meaning

C. Miracle as “contradiction” of natural law (Note Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984). Several usages of “miracles” are in vogue.

1. Miracle as acceleration of natural process
2. Miracle as transcendence of natural law (Contradiction lies in the realm of logic not nature. Contrary applies to the real world.)
3. Miracle as abilities in nature that only come to light at special times (cp. paranormal as natural but not for everyone, everywhere, or at all times).

D. Tests of truth

1. Correlation with external factors
2. Consistency in the internal relationships

E. Concepts of relationship

1. Causality: direct, indirect, combinational
2. Correlation (occasional cause)
3. Reciprocity
4. Thesis-antithesis-synthesis

V. Reasons for Disbelief and Apostasy

- A. Christianity lays a claim on the whole person.
- B. People fail to distinguish psychological and logical certainty.
- C. People leave the biblical faith before they consider whether the alternative is something better (Romans 1:16-25).