



IVP  
CLASSICS

Escape  
from Reason  
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## ESCAPE FROM REASON

In Chapter 4, Schaeffer lifts up the idea that because of the inevitable drawing of this “line of despair,” man as man is dead.

The “line of despair” was Schaeffer’s way of addressing the loss of antithesis in American culture led to giving up all hope of achieving a rational unified answer to knowledge and life.

He believed that we simply have mathematics, particulars, and mechanics by which man has no meaning, purpose, nor significance.

- Thus, he considered the works of men like Sartre and Camus, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Huxley as anti-philosophies.
- He even denounces Kierkegaard and Tillich with their “leap theologies,” which attempt to keep religion weighed down with the non-rationality and anti-philosophies below the line of despair.

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Schaeffer outlines what he believes the various steps leading below the line of despair, beginning with the German philosopher, Georg William Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) who became the first man to open the door into the line of despair.

Hegel taught, that philosophically we have a thesis, and an opposite antithesis, whose relationship deviated from the horizontal movement of cause and effect and became a synthesis through dialectical thinking.

Dialectical thinking is a form of analytical reasoning that pursues knowledge and truth as long as there are questions and conflicts.

The most modern uses of the dialectical paradigm are through the "Socratic Method," which sometimes can be essentially abused.

The dialectical system seeks to find the balance between opposites; i.e, not thinking of things in "black and white" terms; rather accepting of the gray.

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- Dialectics does not accept anything as an absolute; for it continuously asks, “What is being left out of our understanding of this situation?”

Contradictory thinking consists of a logical incompatibility or incongruity between two or more propositions.

- ▶ We either love or hate something    ▶ We are either strong or weak.
- ▶ We are either happy or depressed    ▶ We either accept & move on or reject & rebel.

Dialectical thinking encourages us to consider that both things—which seem like opposites—can coexist, thereby combining to create a “new” truth.

- Dialectical uses "**BOTH AND**" instead of contradiction which is "**EITHER OR**"
- Dialectical uses multiple perspectives to arrive at the most economical, reasonable or least offensive conclusion.

In the end, Hegel’s philosophy produced a synthesis as opposed to antithesis which could be arrived at by reason.

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Schaeffer believes that while Hegel opened the door leading beneath the line of despair Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard was the first one to go below the line.

- Kierkegaard concluded that one could not arrive at synthesis by reason alone.
- Rather, one achieves everything of real importance by taking a “leap of faith.”

Schaeffer, therefore, maintains that Kierkegaard’s conclusions gradually led to the absolute separation of the rational and logical from faith.

- What is this leap and what does it involve?

“This step has brought us to Kierkegaard and the leap. With Kant we noticed that the line between nature and universals had widened considerably. What Kierkegaard’s leap did was to put away the hope of any unity. After Kierkegaard we are left with this: (a) optimism must be non-rational, and (b) all rationality is equal to pessimism. The hope of a connecting link between the two spheres has

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disappeared. There is no permeation or interchange—there is a complete dichotomy between the upper and lower stories. The line between the upper and lower stories has become a concrete horizontal, ten thousand feet thick, with highly charged barbed wire fixed in the concrete.

[Schaeffer, Francis A. *Escape from Reason* (IVP Classics) (p. 60-61). InterVarsity Press]

“What is particularly important to notice in this system is the constant appearance in one form or another of the Kierkegaardian emphasis on **the necessity of the leap**. Because the rational and logical are totally separated from the non-rational and the non-logical, the leap is total. Faith, whether expressed in secular or religious terms, becomes a leap without any verification because it is totally separated from the logical and the reasonable. We can now see, on this basis, how the new theologians can say that though the Bible, in the area of nature and history, is full of mistakes, this does not matter. It does not matter what terms we adopt. The leap is common to every sphere of modern

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man's thought. Man is forced to the despair of such a leap because he cannot live merely as a machine. This, then, is modern man. It is modern man, whether expressed in his painting, his music, his novel, his drama or his religion.

[Schaeffer, Francis A. *Escape from Reason* (IVP Classics) (p. 67). InterVarsity Press]

Schaeffer teaches Kierkegaard's leap put away the hope of any unity, nor are there any categories because categories are related to rationality and logic.

- Without a dichotomy of truth and nontruth in antithesis we are left adrift.

Schaeffer then continues to chronicle the subsequent philosophers who followed Kierkegaard's thought including the atheistic existentialism of Karl Jaspers, Jean Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger.

These men reasoned below the line of despair and gave up hope of a rational answer to the questions of life – being left with only the anti-rational.

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So the tension must be addressed: In case of conflict: Should we side with **divine truth** (that which proceeds from God) or **empirical truth** (*learned through observation, experience or experiment*)?

- Should we resort to trusting doctrine or reason?
- As doctrines, backed by some divine power, are considered sacred, should we consider these immune from rational evaluation and accept these by faith – even when they do not stand up to the reason?

Some argue that with proper understanding and application, both belief and reason can go together, while others maintain that these are contradictory or competing; residing in distinct domains.

What should we do when the reason and doctrine differ?

- The Doctrine of theists (believers) says God is all powerful and is in complete charge of everything – so then then why is evil so prevalent – Is He really present?

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- ❑ The standard theist response to that argument is called the free-will defense.
- ❑ In response to that piece of reasoning, the nontheist usually makes a distinction between natural evil (e.g., Ebola) and moral evil (e.g., child abuse), and notes that the free will defense provides no reply to the argument from natural evil.

At this point, the theist sometimes abandons reason and takes refuge in a faith that feels no need to answer the quibbles of reason; even resorting to quoting Paul in his letter to Timothy:

- **II Tim 2:23** But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing they gender strife
- Other theists cite the details of their own religious experiences, suggesting that experience trumps reason.

But once reason has been abandoned, all argumentation becomes pointless and the discussion has moved beyond reason's reach.

What is at question here is the solidity of trust that believers have in what they believe.

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- **I Pet 3:15** “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a *reason for the hope that is in you.*”
  - ❑ Have you ever noticed what is being questioned?: **The hope that is in us**
  - ❑ Why in does the unbelieving world ask Christians about their hope?
  - ❑ He doesn't say that they will ask about our faith, about our doctrine, or even about our good conduct.

But Peter is expecting that they will ask about our *hope*. Why?

- Go back to the beginning of this epistle and we find Peter declaring:
  - ❑ “*According to [God's] great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (I Pet. 1:3)
  - ❑ To be born again is to be alive with hope, which is not an add on to the Christian experience.
  - ❑ He then goes on to give the first imperative of the letter: “***Hope fully*** in the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:13)

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Because hope is a heartfelt, joyful conviction that our short-term future is governed by an all-caring God, therefore we can have the same reliance to our long-term future.

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews states that “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1)

- Paul writes in Romans 10:17 “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.
- I.e., God’s word is not only a source of our faith and it the foundation of our faith

Therefore, when called to trust reason or doctrine, the believer must be prepared to share the doctrinal support for their belief from a biblical justification.

The Bible holds an essential place in Christian faith and is the placeholder of all truths relative to our relationship with God.

- This we declare with contradictory certainty and are never dialectic in our citation

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Muslims believe that the Qur'ān is the final word of Allah and they never doubt what it says or portends.

- Allah says about the Qur'ān: “This is the Book about which there is no doubt” [Surah 2:2].

Furthermore, one of the unique characteristics of the Qur'ān's message is that its teachings are applicable to all times with no contradictions.

- Allah says in the Qur'ān: “We have not neglected anything in the Book” [Surah 6:38].
- He also says: “Had it been from any other than God, they would have found in it much discrepancy” [Surah 4:82].

Thus, when a Muslim faces a situation where his perception of the truth is different from what is in the **Qur'ān** or the **Sunnah**(tradition) of Prophet Muhammad, he immediately sides with the **Qur'ān** and **Sunnah**.

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People's perception of the truth can change with time (remember when the Earth was believed to be flat) but the creator has the truth.

- “The Qur’ān guides people to the proper use of reason within a scientific framework of mind. [Thoraya E. Abdel -Maguid <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4374248/>]

Muslims have a disciplined loyalty to the **Qur’ān**, and yet those who claim to be followers of Christ and children of God – having at some time in the past called the Bible the Word of God – are not faithful to its claims.

For thousands of years, the Church has acknowledged the lofty status of Scripture by referring to the Bible as its canon (ecclesiastical rule or law), meaning the Bible is the written standard for its faith and practice.

What extraordinary claims to make about a collection of ancient literature, and yet many people in today's society have allowed a denigration of its verity based on common cultural objectives:

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## **1. The Bible is full of contradictions and discrepancies.**

❑ Matthew places the “Sermon on the Mount,” on a mountain (Matt. 5:1), while Luke says Jesus spoke on a “level place” (Luke 6:17).

[Matthew picking up on the God giving law to Moses on Mt. Sinai – Luke did not]

❑ Tensions, or seeming contradictions” in the Bible are usually occurs when there is a misunderstanding of the genre and purpose of a certain passage or is when one measures the Bible by an inappropriate standard.

## **2. The Bible is full of violence, genocide, prejudice, and injustice, often commanded by God—and it’s been used by Christians to justify more violence and oppression.**

❑ The Bible, after all, gives us the brutal truth about sinful human beings.

❑ Here they are referring to the flood story (Gen. 6-9), the killing of the Egyptian soldiers at the Red Sea (Exd. 14-15), or the Conquest (Joshua 1-12).

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- ❑ But, in view of God's unmeasured mercy in allowing the Amorites over 400 years to get their lives right (Gen. 15:16), many events classified as injustice was the judgment of God upon a people of disobedience.
- ❑ God brings the Flood against violent humanity (Gen. 6:11-12); he closes the Red Sea against Egyptian soldiers who were trying to kill the Israelites, and he commands Joshua to fight the Canaanites because their sin had reached "its full measure" (Gen. 15:16).

### **3. The Bible's descriptions of nature and natural history are hopelessly at odds with science.**

- ❑ Biblical truth and scientific truth will never conflict as a matter of principle because, as past theologians have told us, God has given us two books to reveal who He is, namely the **book of nature (Psl. 19:1)** and **the Bible**.
- ❑ **Genesis 1-2**, the main biblical account of cosmic and human origins, describes events using figurative language.

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- ❑ Genesis 1-2 does not spend time in declaring how things were created, only by Whom
- ❑ It is through the tools of science, we see that natural history is best understood as a long, slow process of cosmic and biological evolution, leading to the creation of human beings; thereby presenting no threat to the teaching of the Bible.

### **4. The Bible was written by ancient and primitive people, and has no value to modern people anymore.**

- ❑ It's one thing to say the Bible was written by ancient people and another thing to say that they were written by *primitive* people.
- ❑ It is culturally arrogant to think that God Who never changes is limited by time or space or to even think that it's a dated revelation of eternal spiritual truths
- ❑ Unlike any other religious book, the 66 books of the Bible are written by forty penmen covering two thousand years on three distinct continents, and yet it maintains a perfect consistency of message.

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❑ They wrote in ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek by people who were culturally different from us, and still its words point unerringly to Christ, whose work on the cross was ordained by God—the true author of the Bible—before the world began.

### **5. Christians can't even agree on what it's saying, so who cares if it's true or not.**

❑ In the midst of all the disagreements Christians have on secondary matters, nearly all Christians actually agree on the most important matters.

❑ These similarities are summarized in the various Creeds and doctrinal confessions

❑ As the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it, these are the things that “are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation.”

[Tremper Longman <https://biologos.org/articles/5-common-arguments-against-the-bible-and-how-to-respond-to-them>]

Now to be sure, it is never wrong to voice one's questions about the Bible, and these questions are natural ones to ask.

• But as a believer, our quest should be to understand the Bible and not denigrate it

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Hopefully, all who have legitimate questions, will allow that inquisitiveness to become a catalyst to more interaction with the Bible and not become an excuse for dismissing the Bible.

- The Bible presents “doctrine” which is the bones of what we believe.
- We spend years growing in doctrinal understanding; learning to en-flesh what we believe
- Intellectual conformity is not enough; our fingerprints are required.

The manner we embody faith change as we mature: through relationships, personal crises and by making choices of living a counter to the cultures around us.

- And wrestling with faith and reason is critical to the maturing process.
- Honesty and acceptance of limits helps with the struggles of life

Scriptures warn against trusting man over God: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.” (Jer. 17:5.)

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Eventually all truth — both empirical and divine — will be reconciled and until then, we must hold firm to divine truth while continuing to receive empirical information.

- Someone once said “When empirical information creates doubts, first doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith.”

“In the New Theology the defined words are below the line: NON-RATIONAL—  
CONNOTATION WORDS RATIONAL—DEFINED WORDS. Above the line the new theologian has undefined words. The “leap theology” centers everything in the undefined word. Tillich, for example, speaks of the “**God behind God**”—with the first word “God” totally undefined. The defined words in the area of science and history are below the line; up above, there are only connotation words.”

[Schaeffer, Francis A. *Escape from Reason* (IVP Classics) (p. 67-68). InterVarsity Press]

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Paul Tillich (1886-1965) stands in a tradition of German mystical and Romantic philosopher, being strongly influenced by Soren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger.

- Much of Heidegger's "being and essence" can be seen flowing through his works
- He was author of "The Courage to Be," "Dynamics of faith" and "The New Being"

Tillich's phrase was really **"god beyond God"** which he used in his talk with the late Dr. Shin'ichi Hisamatsu in 1957. His point was to go beyond the little **"g"** gods to the capital **"G"** God.

- Like his contemporary, Steven Ogden of Australia, Tillich was seeking a deeper understanding of the Christian ideal of "ultimacy"
- Ogden believed this understanding resulted from the prevenient presence of God's love.

[Gishin Tokiwa -- Responses to Shubert Ogden, University of Hawaii Press, p. 75-85, 1987]

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