

"Are Reason and Spirituality Compatible?"

Dallas Willard @ "Socrates and the City"

April 11, 2012

Introduction — This is a tremendously important discussion — "*Are Reason and Spirituality Compatible?*" You can put it more plainly - Are Christians nuts? The answer, by the way, is no.

1). [1:43] Socrates asked this question relentlessly in Athens — "How should we live?" He well understood that only the correct deployment of reason and spirituality, in cooperation with each other, could answer that question. Spirituality and reason or knowledge are not only compatible, they are made to work together, and if they don't human life falls into chaos.

2). [2:30] Today, of course, historical forces the past three centuries or so, have forced them apart and in opposition to one another. "Spirituality" is thought often as a matter of feeling, or use the word 'faith', and arbitrary decision. And, sure enough, chaos has descended. That forces a deadly opposition of faith and knowledge now reigns in our country, especially in the academic setting.

3). [3:45] What is spirituality or the spiritual? Spirituality is, first of all, non-physical—if something is not given to sense perception, or by extension in the sciences built up from sense perception, simply have nothing to say about. But, positively, it is—directly or indirectly—personal. Try thinking of spirit as — *Unbodily, personal power*. It has much to do with body but it is not bodily.

4). [6:30] In various ways, spirit and the spiritual are manifested in:
Self-awareness
Art: in the creation and in the experience.
Morality: intention and character
Meaning: it bring us gifts of transition, to move us onward.
Religion or transcendental intrusion.

That's a list of things that fall under the heading of "spiritual". That's why when you see someone give up on religion, they will flee to art. It will offer a meaning to your existence that will allow you to tolerate a godless universe. All of these derive from and largely consist in what is non-physical and personal.

5). [8:20] Art, for example, consists in mastery and employment of a physical, sense-perceptible 'medium' for the expression of a human vision of realities and values, which are then made available, as otherwise they would not be. That's why art is so important and precious to experience in the public for those who seek and understand.

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To see that that you have not seen. That's why Oscar Wilde said, "Nature imitates art." Art is a precious gift of meaning.

6). [9:25] Morality has to do with intentions of good and evil, settled into character, and even into the bodies and life arrangements of good and bad people of varying degrees). Intentions and character are manifested in actions and in social arrangements. Because of this problem about spirituality and knowledge and reason, we now have a society that is bereft of moral knowledge. And that is one of things that you lose when you get the wrong view of what knowledge is.

7). [10:10] But now this question forces itself forward:

Are these areas of "spirituality" accessible to reason, rightly deployed, resulting in knowledge?

Can you have knowledge that Rafael is a greater painter than some other person that you'd like to mention? Or do you judge art based on what it is worth? If you can get enough money for art, it's art baby!

Are these areas of "spirituality" accessible to reason, rightly deployed? "No!" is the response generally assumed today. But this leaves us with no rational and reliable guidance for life. And for most of human history the answer has been emphatically, "Yes!" Certainly for Socrates, Plato, and nearly all of the great thinkers recognized in the history of thought (Descartes, Locke, Kant). So we have to ask the question - were they stupid, or are we today misguided?

Now let's talk about knowledge.

8). [12:40] Knowledge is what you get when you apply reason.

Knowledge (def.) - You have knowledge of something if you are able to represent it (speak about it, deal with it, etc.) as it is, on the appropriate basis of thought and experience. This is a description of knowledge as knowledge actually functions in human life.

9). [14:35] Knowledge of any subject matter is gained by bringing it before the mind, examining its properties and relations in all ways possible, formulating judgments about it, and logically organizing and testing them in ways which that particular subject matter allows.

Knowledge is what you require of your dentist.

You want that of your auto shop. You don't want them to say, "We are lucky at making repairs."

Astronomy is a field of knowledge, astrology is not.

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[16:10] This is where the trouble begins...because the real struggle is over authority, who has authority. The struggle is always over, "who knows?" People claim to know.

* Congress members voting on a bill they have not read but they claim to know.

This note is very important...

10) [17:12] Possession of knowledge conveys to the one who knows in a given area) rights and responsibilities to act, direct action, formulate policy and supervise its implementation, and to teach. That's what knowledge does. Faith does not do that unless it has knowledge. Tradition does not do that. You see, because it is so important, people will claim knowledge when they don't have it.

This is why knowledge and claims to knowledge are so important, but also so contested, among human beings. Knowledge opens possibilities of harmonious relations with reality, and reality is something you don't want to run into. Knowledge helps you have harmonious relationships with reality. That's why it is so important.

11). [18:40] Knowledge and the hope for knowledge opens up common ground for cooperation in shared activities, and for discussion and possible resolution of differences and disagreements. If no knowledge is possible, all of these are ruled out and this is very much the position we find ourselves today and one reason we live in the middle of politics of contempt. It is because people no longer has a hope for a common ground for people to meet. If there is no knowledge, there is no common ground, no place to meet. When you abandon that, there is nothing left but conflict. Then force alone rules. Only knowledge lays the foundation for tolerance because it provides a common ground, or least a hope for common ground, upon which people who are reasonable can meet and work out their agreements and disagreements.

12). [20:35] The effect of ruling the 'spiritual' out of the domain of reason and knowledge is to leave the most important matters of human life at the mercy of force, drift, human arbitrariness and feelings, with no rational direction of their development, classification, and ordering. So far as human events now stand, that is where we are. So they say, and many are saying, that that is how things must be. Shall we accept that?

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* Late 1800's, it was discovered that theology was not a subject of knowledge and so that was pushed out of the curriculum and then they said, "Where will we locate ethics?"

See Julie Rueben, [The Making of the Modern University](#)

13). [23:44] Is there a way back? Only if responsible and visible groups of people— institutions—are willing to develop an intelligible and defensible understanding of what knowledge is, and of how it is gained, and present the spiritual realities with which they are concerned as subjects of knowledge they actually possess. That would be hard to do. Knowledge functioning in human affairs has to be grounded in institutions. But that, so far as "the spiritual" is concerned, is exactly what is now lacking in our "knowledge institutions": universities and their offshoots.

14). [24:50] Our university faculties are now socialized by their training, and confirmed by their professionalized setting, against knowledge in the "spiritual" areas. It could be "professional death" for an individual to claim knowledge in those areas, especially with respect to religion. There is little or no hope of change in current attitudes toward this tremendously important area of reason and spirituality, arising from the universities in general.

You can study spirituality as a social phenomenon but not as something that deals with reality.

15). [25:35] But institutions of higher education that are explicitly and strongly identified with the historical Christian movement might be able to do something about this situation if they would come together around the project of reversing the expulsion of the content of their "faith" from the domain of knowledge—especially with reference to the existence of God, the spiritual nature of the human person, and the resurrection of Christ.

Now at this point, a hush settles over the room. It is almost as I said something obscene. That's because I am getting to the quick of your minds because you are sensitive about this issue.

16). [26:48] Such institutions would then explicitly develop and defend an intelligible and realistic understanding of what knowledge is, and they would then present the basic contents of Christian teaching—*Mere Christianity* as it has been called—as knowledge, to which everyone is responsible because it presents realities with which all must deal. They would publicly and reasonably declare all of this in ways wise and possible, even before doubting and hostile onlookers, including "accreditation" committees.

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Let's conclude with this...

17). [27:25] Only in a universe of a certain sort can knowledge, reason, and spirituality be at home with one another, and each function in relation to the other as is intended by their very nature. Given that, there would be a possibility of understanding how spirituality is rational and reason is spiritual. If you were to say that to someone like Plato and Socrates, they would say, "Yes, what else is new?" because that's what they understood.

How spirituality is rational and reason is spiritual and of framing individual and social existence around their unity in a life guided by knowledge of what is true, good, and beautiful.

[28:48] In summary, properly understood, reason and spirituality call out for one another and serve one another in a life guided and informed by aims and habits that characterize a flourishing human existence. This stands forth clearly in the classical and biblical sources which still nourish what is best in contemporary life.

Thank you.

~ ~ ~ **End of Presentation @ 29:15** ~ ~ ~

Q & A