

Beyond Faith and Reason: The Consequences of Alasdair MacIntyre's Conception of Tradition-Constituted Rationality for Philosophy of Religion

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Abstract

This study contributes to the discussion within philosophy of religion concerning conceptions of the relationship between faith and reason. Particularly, it evaluates the consequences of Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of tradition-constituted rationality for the way in which the relationship between faith and reason might be conceived.

It is argued that MacIntyre develops his conception of tradition-constituted rationality as a result of his own frustration with modern categories of thought and standards of rationality. In the modern period, commitment to authority came to be understood as a hindrance to the discovery of truth. Understanding rationality as tradition-constituted, however, puts that assumption into question. If traditions of enquiry are the bearers of rational resources, as MacIntyre claims they are, it is impossible for enquirers to perform rational work outside some tradition of enquiry. A tradition's own formative texts and rational resources occupy a place of authority in the practice of critical reflection.

The reintroduction of the notion that commitment to authority can be rational has important consequences for the debate between faith and reason: critical reasoning and acceptance of authority are not antithetical. Rather, reason depends on authority for resources to perform its task. This study thus argues that the apparent conflict modern philosophers of religion attribute to committed faith and critical reflection dissolves once rationality is understood as tradition-constituted.

In sum, this study provides an examination of MacIntyre's writings and in particular of his conception of tradition-constituted rationality. It then proceeds to evaluate the consequences of that conception of rationality for a particular discussion within philosophy of religion