

Agnostics .) Nevertheless, it is clear that we don't always act rationally in terms of our beliefs. We will bet on the lottery, even if the odds—expectation value for a likely gain—are not in our favor. We will take on insurance, even if, again, it will in the long run be a losing proposition. As Pascal himself argued (Pensees, #233), it is not always easy to believe on the basis of prudence and rationality:

I am so made that I cannot believe. What, then, would you have me do?"

Pascal replies:

"Endeavor then to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions. You would like to attain faith and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief, and ask the remedy for it...There are people... who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began: by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc."

Now can one "fake it until you make it" as Pascal suggests? Or will the sacraments be ineffective, because the motive of the recipient is mercenary? Which of the Catechism dicta are appropriate,

(1131)"The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace....They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions."

Or

(1128)"The sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God."

The second suggests that if one prays for faith, then the "top-down" approach will work, starting from the head and eventually through to the heart, or, as Pascal suggests:

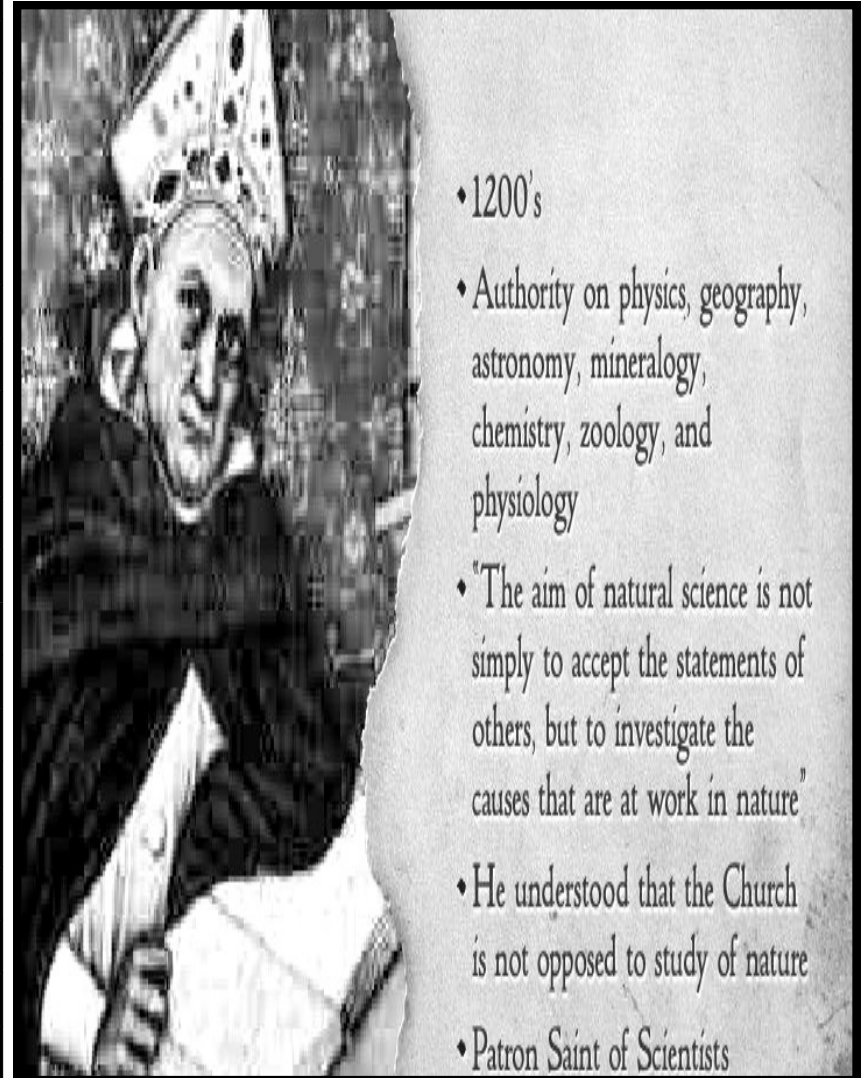
"...at each step you take on this road you will see so great certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at last recognize that you have wagered for something certain and infinite, for which you have given nothing."

So we can see that belief is not an absolute, a two-valued yes or no, but a quality that is measured on a continuous scale, and that can be implemented by means that may be other than rational.

From a series of articles written by: Bob Kurland - a Catholic Scientist

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Catholic Physics - Reflections of a Catholic Scientist - Part 9 Science: a Subset of Rationality & Belief, Knowledge, Faith-- Rational and Irrational



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Science: a Subset of Rationality

This is from a review by Michael Potemra (see NRO, "The Corner", April 28, 2012) about a new book by a noted paleontologist, Michael Asher: *Evolution and Belief: Confessions of a Religious Paleontologist*. Potemra has written an excellent review, to which I can't add anything, but I'd like to quote his quote from the book, because it expresses my attitude about science and religion to a T:

"The absence of a scientific proof for God is more indicative of the limits of science than the lack of a deity... . Evolutionary biology is not about the origin of life or the existence of God. It is about how living things are interconnected through a specific, natural mechanism, one which we can understand through the fossil record, individual development, and molecular biology."

And

"it is rational to believe that an entity beyond our comprehension was the agency by which something was derived from nothing at the beginning of time... . Although I acknowledge my belief to be non-scientific, it is entirely rational. Science is a subset of rationality; the former has a narrower scope than the latter. To ignore rationality when it does fall beyond the scientific enterprise would be an injustice to both reason and humanity."

Most people aren't aware of the distinction between science and other rational enterprises—science requires theory (usually mathematical and linked to other theories, more basic and fundamental), confirmed or falsified by observation/reproducible experiment.

From a series of articles written by: Bob Kurland - a Catholic Scientist Belief, Knowledge, Faith—Rational and Irrational

Belief, Knowledge, Faith--Rational and Irrational



"Alice laughed: "There's no use trying," she said; "one can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* and through the Looking Glass

In order to justify religious faith as a rational endeavor, I will examine what we usually mean by belief and knowledge, and to show, by example, the difference between rational and irrational faith. My motivation for proceeding from this starting point is to show that the arguments of evangelical atheists (those published and those posting on web-sites) ignore their own faith assumption in choosing science (or perhaps more properly the scientific method) as the only source for justifying belief and gaining knowledge. From my background of 50 years as a practicing physicist, I will try to draw examples to show that faith is integral to a scientific world-view, as well as a religious one.

BELIEF

"Lord, I believe. Help Thou my unbelief." Mark, 9:24

Let's talk about belief first. Clearly there is a difference between the statements "I believe in one God..." (the Credo) and "I believe it's going to rain tomorrow". An obvious difference is what one is willing to do or to pay in order to act on one's belief. The Christian martyrs were willing to suffer and to die for their beliefs; you might be willing to bet five dollars that it will rain tomorrow, but not your life, no matter what the weather forecast is.

Accordingly, there are degrees of belief, which in fact can be quantified using various techniques in subjective probability and decision theory (see "Probability and the Art of Judgment" and "Subjective Probability—The Real Thing" by Richard Jeffrey). To explore these methods in detail would require a book, not a blog, but those interested can go to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy articles .

Possibly the most famous example of quantifying belief and using outcome probabilities as a guide to action is Pascal's Wager, in which the argument is made that belief in God is the prudent choice, given the existence of an afterlife (even though the probability of that existence might be infinitesimally small). Objections, most of which are substantial to Pascal's arguments, have been raised and countered (see *Pascal's Wager Revisited—The Pearl of Great Price* and *Pascal's Wager—Insurance for*