

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract

The issue of the relationship between faith and knowledge is very interesting to be studied from the contemporary times. Each period of life is unique in understanding the issues of faith and knowledge. Likewise, John Hick's opinion in his book 'Faith and Knowledge' is very interesting to be researched. In this brief paper, the writer limits the definitions analysis to Oxford Dictionary and John Hick. Then, the writer will evaluate those definitions to clarify the relationship between faith and knowledge. The understanding that opposes faith and knowledge will cause confusion when talking about the issue of them. Is there a gap between faith and knowledge? We would say that there is no gap between them. We admit, however, that there is a sequence or an order between them. First, it begins with the revelation of God that produces passive faith to us. Through various circumstances, experiences and education, we as human being will embrace the process of getting knowledge about reality and God's revelation.

Keywords: : Faith, Knowledge, Reason

INTRODUCTION

John Hick recognizes that there is a gap between faith and works in his preface of second edition of his book, Faith and Knowledge.¹ From this statement, we could see there is a distinction and separation between faith and knowledge. Some people consider that faith and knowledge are both sources of authority upon which beliefs may rest.² Therefore, the main discussion of this

paper is determining the relationship between faith and knowledge in Christian education context by defining the meaning of both terms. In this brief paper, I limit my definition analysis to Oxford Dictionary and John Hick. Then, I will evaluate those definitions to clarify the relationship between them.

¹John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (Eugene, Oregon: Wiff & Stock, 1957).

² <http://www.iep.utm.edu/faith-re/>

Four Basic Models of Interaction of Faith and Knowledge

First is the conflict model. When they, faith and knowledge, seem to be saying different things, there is genuine rivalry. Second is incompatibilist model. Here the aims, objects, and methods of reason and faith are understood to be distinct. Reason aims at empirical truth; religion aims at divine truths. No rivalry exists between them. The third one is weak compatibilist model. Here it is understood that dialogue is possible between reason and faith, though both maintain distinct realms of evaluation and cogency. The last view is strong compatibilist model. Here it is understood that faith and reason have an organic connection, and perhaps even parity.

Some natural theologians and Catholic philosophers have attempted to unite faith and reason into a comprehensive metaphysical system. The strong compatibilist model, however, must explain why God chose to reveal Himself at all since we have such access to him through reason alone.

Definition of Faith and Knowledge

Oxford dictionary defines that faith is complete trust or confidence in someone or something, Strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof.³ Knowledge, on the other hand, facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject; awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation; or sexual intercourse.⁴ Beside to sexual intercourse, it implies that Oxford dictionary limits faith definition to feeling, such as confidence, and religious area. Knowledge, on the other side, is related to head, such as knowing, facts, information, and academic setting.

John Hick, a philosopher of religion and theologian, argues that faith is employed both as an epistemological and as a nonepistemological term. The words *fides* and *fiducia* provide conveniently self-explanatory labels for the two uses. We speak, on the one hand, of faith (*fides*) that there is a God and that such and such propositions about him are true. Here 'faith' is used cognitively, referring to a state, act, or procedure which may be compared with standard instances of knowing and believing.

³ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/faith>

⁴ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/knowledge>

On other hand, we speak of faith (*fiducia*) as a trust, maintained sometimes despite contrary indications, that the divine purpose toward us is wholly good and loving.⁵ Hick, thus, defines faith not only in area of cognitive but also feeling. Hick does not explain the definition of knowledge in his book.

Evaluation of the Definitions

Speaking theologically, faith has passive and active meaning. Passively, faith is God's work in us that changes us and gives new birth from God (John 1:13).⁶ Actively, on the other hand, it means believing, obeying, trusting, hoping, and being faithful in Christ and Holy Scripture.⁷

Therefore, faith is two-sided coin. On one hand, it has a beginning, in the past, but it does not stop but it is 'on going' activity such as obeying and being faithful.

The definition of knowledge, on the other hand, has to be viewed from two aspects: time and its role. In terms of time, I concur with Dru Johnson that knowing is a process and the moment of discovery is an event.⁸ It means that the understanding of knowledge should be seen comprehensively from the process to the discovery. Oxford

dictionary is in harmonious with this understanding because it also mentions the process, through experience and education, as a part of getting knowledge.

Practically, poor process will produce a poor knowledge; however, good process does not guarantee good knowledge. Knowledge role, in my opinion, is not an authoritative source; it is just a tool to serve a bigger purpose.

My arguments why I cannot consider knowledge as authoritative source because:

(a) My authoritative source could be false, therefore it will not authoritative anymore, although I have been going through a good process. That is because the fallibility and limitation of human knowledge.

(b) Growing in knowledge is a part or element *only* of our growth and development. It is not even a source! When people view knowledge as the authoritative source, they idolize knowledge. If they see knowledge as the only element of our growth, they will fall into pride.⁹ True knowledge will serve the bigger purpose, give a balance and growth to the whole parts as human being.

⁵ John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 3.

⁶ "An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans," *Luther's German Bible of 1522 by Martin Luther, 1483-1546*.

⁷ TDNT.

⁸ Dru Johnson, *Biblical Knowing* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013), 4.

⁹ James W. Sire, *Habits of the Mind* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 69-70.

Why There is a Gap Between Faith and Knowledge?

These definitions help us to understand the relationship between faith and knowledge, and why there is a *gap* between them. Let's talk to the *gap* first. A gap occurs because of incorrect understanding of knowledge.

Some people treat knowledge as their idol, and (the most, if not) authoritative source as it is stated above. Consequently, these people have two authoritative sources: God's revelation and knowledge. As it is mentioned before, it is too risky if we regard knowledge as authoritative source because it could be wrong despite of having a good process.

It means we rely on shaky authoritative source. Nevertheless, if we position knowledge as a tool, we have no problem if our knowledge is wrong. In my second analysis, the gap also appears because of the separation (disintegration) between knowledge and the rest of other aspects, such as character and virtues, of our entire being. As Newman says in reflecting on John 3:7:¹⁰

Your whole nature must be re-born; your passions, and your affections, and your aims, and your conscience, and your will,

must be all be bathed in a new element, and re-consecrated to your Maker, - and the last not the least, your intellect.

Yes, we could distinguish between knowledge and faith, understanding and affections, the mind and will. Nevertheless, we cannot *separate* them in the development as human being because true knowledge has to serve a bigger purpose: help a person to grow entirely. Knowledge is not only informative but above all, it should be transformative and integrated to our whole life.

The Relationship Between Faith and Knowledge

In Christian worldview, faith is a gift of God, we did nothing to obtain that (passively). It has a beginning. It does not end there, but faith continues to in the life of believers. This continuation manifests in obeying, trusting and being faithful to the Word of God.

Nonetheless, since this faith is an active faith, it includes also thinking, analyzing, feeling, experiencing and so forth as a human being. In suffering, for instance, our mind and emotions will interact both with the reality of suffering and Bible.

The questions will come up in our

¹⁰Ibid, 70.

mind and heart such as why do we suffer, what does Bible say about suffering, what is the purpose and how do we response to our situation. When people rethink and experience, in process, these things, they are getting knowledge for themselves in this situation.

Knowledge is a logical consequence of active faith. However, knowledge cannot be a foundation of active faith. In so far as knowledge is a shaky foundation like what I discussed earlier.

Consequently, we need something that is more stable and firm for our foundation and it is special revelation. Presenting this argument, I also answer the objection to the strong compatibilist model, “Why God chose to reveal Himself at all since we have such access to him through reason alone.”

We cannot trust our reasons alone because both the *process* of getting the knowledge or limitation of human mind. The revelation of God should be a foundation of our faith alone. Knowledge, on the other hand, is a logical consequence of active faith and it serves a bigger purpose: to grow completely.

CONCLUSION

Is there a *gap* between faith and knowledge? We would say that there is no gap between them. We admit, however, that there is a sequence or an order between them.

First, it begins with the revelation of God that produces passive faith to us. Through various circumstances, experiences and education, we as human being will embrace the process of getting knowledge about reality and God’s revelation.

The knowledge itself is *one* part of growth as a human being and not the only one. We need to keep a balance between knowledge and character. When people prioritize knowledge more, they will experience disconnection between knowledge and the other parts of their life.

This is the weak compatibilist model. Nevertheless, true knowledge is transformative and should be integrated to our whole life. Knowledge is also *just* a tool, not an authoritative source, to serve a bigger purpose; as Christian, glorifying God is the ultimate purpose.

If people see knowledge as an authoritative source, they will fall into realm of incompatibilist model, even worse is a conflict model whenever they find contradiction between their knowledge of reality and revelation from God. At the end,

this knowledge will confirm and strengthen
our faith.

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