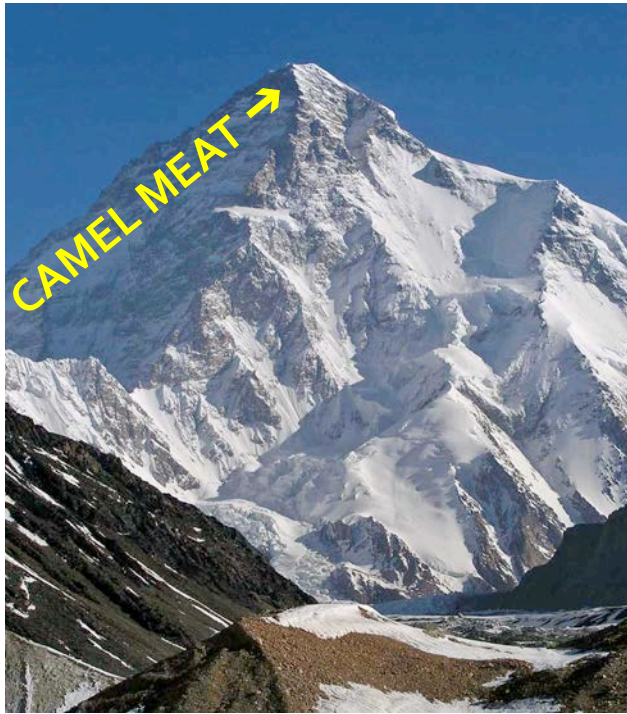


Testing the Prophets

Reason and the Choice of Faiths

Medieval Anti-Rationalists

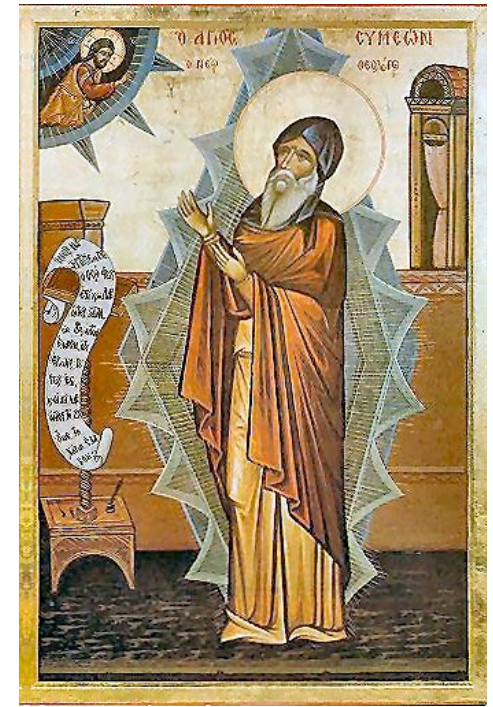
IBN TAYMIYYA



BERNARD OF
CLAIRVAUX



SYMEON THE NEW
THEOLOGIAN



al-Ghazālī

Reason does not suffice without revelation nor does revelation suffice without reason. The one who would urge pure *taqlīd* and the total rejection of reason is in error and he who would make do with pure reason apart from the lights of the Koran and the Sunna is deluded.

al-Ghazālī

If you are in doubt about whether a certain person is a prophet or not, certainty can be had only through knowledge of what he is like, either by personal observation or reports and testimony. If you have an understanding of medicine and jurisprudence, you can recognize jurists and doctors by observing what they are like, and listening to what they had to say, even if you haven't observed them. So you have no difficulty recognizing that Shāfi'ī was a jurist or Galen a doctor, this being knowledge of what is in fact the case and not a matter of *taqlīd* shown to another person. Rather, since you know something of jurisprudence and medicine, and you have perused their books and treatises, you have arrived at necessary knowledge about what they are like. Likewise, once you grasp the meaning of prophecy and then investigate the Qur'ān and [*ḥadīth*] reports extensively, you arrive at necessary knowledge that [Muḥammad] is at the highest degree of prophecy.

al-Ghazālī

Thirst for grasping the true natures of things was a habit and practice of mine from early on in my life, an inborn and innate tendency (*gharīza wa-fiṭra*) given by God in my very nature, not chosen or contrived. So as I neared maturity the bonds of *taqlīd* weakened for me and I was emancipated from inherited beliefs. For I saw that young Christians always grew up to accept Christianity and young Jews to accept Judaism, while young Muslims always grew up to accept Islam. And I heard the *ḥadīth* related of the Prophet, “every child is born in the innate condition (*fiṭra*) but his parents make him a Jew, Christian, or Magian.”

Judah Halleivi d.1141



- His *Kuzari* describes the conversion of the king of the Khazars to Judaism after interviewing a philosopher, Christian, Muslim, and Jew.

Judah Hallevi

There is no scope for rational argument (*qiyās*) here, in fact rational argument deems what has been said to be absurd... I cannot bring myself to accept these things, having them sprung on me without having grown up with them.

Judah Hallevi

Natural, generated things are all determined, balanced and proportioned in their mixtures from the four natures, and by the slightest adjustment they become perfect and well-shaped, and take on the animal or plant form to which they lay claim. Yet the slightest thing can corrupt the mixture of the form that shapes it. Haven't you seen an egg being corrupted by the least accident of excessive heat, cold, or movement, so that it fails to receive the form of a chicken? [...] So to whom is it given to determine the actions as far as the divine produces them, other than God alone?

Judah Hallevi

Nature speaks through custom, the Law through the breach of custom. The two may be reconciled: those customs that are breached were only natural [in the first place] because they were within the eternal will, conditional upon it and instituted according to it, since the six days of creation.

Ibn Falaquera d. end 13th c.

His *Epistle of the Debate* pits a rationalist Jewish philosopher against a Jewish traditionalist.



Can reason establish the principles of Judaism?

HASDAI CRESCAS

- d. early 15th c.
- His *Light of the Lord* attacks Maimonides' proofs for fundamentals of the faith (God's existence, oneness, and incorporeality).

JOSEPH ALBO

- d. 1444
- Thinks only God's existence can be proven.
- But we should accept the "roots" of Judaism by faith, not reason.

Reason and faith in Christianity

THOMAS AQUINAS

- Takes principles of theology to be like axioms, on which reason can build up a system.
- But thinks some of these principles are accepted by faith, e.g. you can prove God exists but not that He is a Trinity.

LATE BYZANTIUM

- Attack on Latin scholastics by Barlaam of Calabria in 1335: they offer demonstration of what is not certain.
- Gregory Palamas replies that truths of God are certain, but by faith not reason.

Peter Abelard

d.1142



- Wrote *Sic et non* listing conflicting authoritative texts.
- Clashed with Anselm of Laon over use of authorities.
- Believed Plato anticipated the idea of Holy Spirit.

William of Conches on World Soul and Holy Spirit

God wanted to make the world an intelligent animal, but nothing can be intelligent without soul, so he excogitated the soul (*ergo excogitavit animam*). [Plato] did well to say “excogitated” and not “created,” insofar as the soul is said to be the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is not made, created, or generated by God, but it proceeds.

Peter Abelard on World Soul and Holy Spirit

What the philosophers said about the World Soul should be accepted as figurative expression. Otherwise we would have to deplore Plato as not the greatest philosopher but the greatest fool. For what is more absurd than judging the whole world to be a rational animal, unless that is it was put forward as a figurative expression?

Peter Abelard's *Dialogue*

- The characters are a Jew, Muslim and Christian.
- All three accept the goal of using reason to establish their faith, instead of “following mere human opinion and the love of your own kind of people.”



Abelard's *Dialogue*

If all people used the same authorities, there wouldn't be so many different religious faiths. But just as everyone deliberates with his own reason, individuals pick the authorities they follow.... Those who wrote only on the basis of reason, whose views are seen to abound with it, have *earned* their authority, their being worth believing. But even in their judgment, reason is put *before* authority... Authority is regarded as having last place, or none at all, in every philosophical disputation.

Abelard's *Dialogue*

We don't yield to their authority in the sense of not discussing their statements rationally before we approve them. Otherwise we would be ceasing to do philosophy, if while disregarding the investigation of reasons we mainly used topics from authority.

[The Bible] hands down certain natural commandments (*naturalia praecepta*) you call moral, such as loving God and one's neighbor, nor committing adultery, not stealing, and not committing murder. But others belong so to speak to positive justice. They are adapted to certain people for a time. For example, circumcision for the Jews, baptism for you.

Ramon Llull

d.1316



- His *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men* is a dialogue between a non-believing philosopher, a Jew, Muslim, and Christian.

“Think of the harm that comes from men not belonging to a single sect, and of the good that would come from everyone being beneath one faith and one religion... Since we cannot agree by means of authorities, let us try to come to some agreement by means of demonstrative and necessary reasons.”

Llull's *Book of the Gentile*

Men are so rooted in the faith in which they found themselves and in which they were raised by their parents and ancestors, that it is impossible to make them break away by preaching, by disputation, or by any other means man could devise.

The articles of our faith are so sublime and so difficult to believe and understand that you will not be able to comprehend them unless you apply all the strength of your mind and soul to understanding the arguments by which I intend to prove the above-mentioned articles.

A flaw in the bootstrapping approach?

- If we settle for “justified *taqlīd*” we can’t rule out the appearance of a conflicting authority.
- This is ok: it simply shows that bootstrapping gives us rational, justified belief and not knowledge.
- This is more realistic than the demands for full rationalist *ijtihād* laid down by Averroes, Falaquera, Abelard, and Llull.