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Olli-Pekka Vainio. *Beyond Fideism: Negotiable Religious Identities.* Ashgate, 2010.

Fideism is a commonly used term in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, and most people think that they know what they are referring to by it. The basic idea seems to be that in order to qualify as a fideist, one must believe that religious propositions are not believed on the basis of reasons, or some other type of evidence, but because of something else, perhaps trust or some sort of inchoate experience. In these contexts, fideism is normally used as a blunt instrument, as it were, to silence the opposition. But what does it really mean to be a fideist? Were Tertullian and Kierkegaard, for instance, really fideists, as often claimed? In his latest study, *Beyond Fideism: Negotiable Religious Identities*, Olli-Pekka Vainio attempts to answer these questions. *Beyond Fideism* (henceforth BF), however, is not simply about fideism. For Vainio, the question of fideism is a question about theological method and the relationship of reason and faith therein. This leads him to analyse different ways in which contemporary (and sometimes self-consciously postmodern) theologians understand theology. Finally, BF develops a novel way to understand religious rationality and religious identity. Current discussions and debates have their roots in the postliberal or post-foundationalist turn in theological method in 1980s. BF can best be seen as a part of this ongoing debate about faith and reason in theology.

BF consists of four, somewhat independent, parts. The first part is a historical look into Christian thinkers usually taken to be prototypes of fideism. Vainio examines such diverse theologians and philosophers as St. Paul, Tertullian, Blaise Pascal and Alvin Plantinga. What Vainio aims to do here is to show that how the thinkers view faith and reason is much more complicated than ordinarily assumed. In Vainio's view, if fideism means that faith goes beyond what reason can prove, then most Christian theologians and philosophers from Aquinas to Plantinga are fideists. If, on the other hand, fideism means that one must believe religious propositions against the deliverances of reason or without any evidence, then no one is really a fideist. Even with Kierkegaard and Tertullian, religious faith is an attitude grounded in some kind of reasons or evidence.

First of all, Vainio points out how philosophically loaded and historically contingent the notions of “knowledge”, “reason” and “faith” are. These concepts change from one historical period to another and we must be sensitive to this. In the Biblical parlance, faith is an attitude akin to faithfulness to a message or a person, not an attitude that is adopted without good evidence. Similarly, although both Tertullian and Pascal were sceptical of the ability of reason to obtain religious truths, they did not think that reason and faith were in opposition. According to Vainio, Tertullian was well versed in logic and philosophy of his day and constantly used publicly accessible arguments and natural theology against his Christian and non-Christian opponents. Tertullian was critical of certain secular philosophies of his day, but not of reason *per se*. This point of view was also shared by Pascal, who was sceptical of reason’s ability to obtain truths about God. The point that Pascal wanted to make with his Wager arguments, Vainio argues, was not that one should believe in God because of the practical benefits of believing, but that no inquiry should be a matter of reason only. Both Christians and non-Christians supplement reason with passion and experience. This is something that contemporary “fideists” such as Plantinga and his *Reformed Epistemology* also emphasise: the idea that all justified beliefs must be grounded in incorrigible basic beliefs makes most beliefs, not just religious beliefs, irrational. We must be more lenient in what we allow into the foundation of our belief-structure. Consciously accessible reasons and evidence come in when we assess the defeaters and counter-evidence for our basic beliefs.

BF basically argues that fideism comes in degrees. *Conformist fideism* is a sceptical position according to which, since there are no reasonable criteria for assessing evidence or reasons, people should just believe what others believe. This, again, is a position not seen in Christian philosophical and theological traditions. Thinkers such as Plantinga, Pascal and Tertullian represent a view that Vainio calls *communicative fideism*. Communicative fideists think that (1) religious beliefs and religious language can and should be understandable “from the outside”, (2) that the Christian world-view can reasonably engage with other world-views and (3) that truth can be understood in terms of correspondence. According to communicative fideism the act of faith needs to be rationally warranted, although the object of faith itself is beyond the reach of reason. In this sense, reason can be used to clarify the object of faith and support the act of faith.

In the second part, Vainio examines the postliberal turn in theological method and the epistemological developments that led to it. This section is quite brief and is meant to provide a general introduction to the philosophical critique of *classical foundationalism* in epistemology and to the development of postliberal theological method from its inception in the early 1980s until today. Vainio traces the postliberal turn in theology to the downfall of classical foundationalism, according to which all beliefs (in order to be justified) need to be grounded in basic beliefs that are somehow incorrigible or infallible. Both *postfoundationalism* and *antifoundationalism* reject this basic claim and argue that we do not have incorrigible or infallible basic beliefs. Instead, we should take our basic beliefs as fallible and situated in a specific context. From the rejection of classical foundationalism, it follows that there is no universal foundation for knowledge, but instead knowing (theological knowing too) takes place in a specific cultural and historical context. In philosophy, this development led (in conjunction with other factors) to the emergence of *communitarianism* and *pragmatism*. Many theologians allied themselves with these developments and opened a new space for theological and religious rationality that was not subjected to some sort of universal or infallible “reason”. George Lindbeck’s *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984) became a catalyst for these developments as Lindbeck argued that theological doctrines can be understood as second-order discourse, that is, rules of first-order religious language in a religious community. Many other theologians, such as Stanley Hauerwas and Hans Frei, were also inspired by these developments.

The third part provides an overview of contemporary, post *Lindbeckian*, theological methods from the point of view of how reason and faith are understood in them. Vainio aims to develop a more analytically sophisticated description of contemporary theological methods than the standard descriptions of Hans Frei (*Types of Christian Theology*, 1992) and Robert Greer (*Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options*, 2003). Vainio distinguishes four different poles of gravity towards which theological methods tend to gravitate: Traditionalism, Descriptionism, Revisionism and Correlationism. What all these models of theological method share is a commitment to the idea that there are no neutral and universal criteria for rationality. In such a postmodern context, different theological methods provide different solutions regarding the goals, function and philosophical assumptions undergirding theology.

In *Traditionalism*, the goal is to preserve the identity of church and Christian tradition. Traditionalists, such as Robert Jenson, David Bentley Hart and Bruce Marshall, situate themselves in the tradition of Karl Barth and support a kind of moderate foundationalism: the Christian tradition needs no outside justification. Although natural theology is somewhat frowned upon, philosophy is used ad hoc to clarify theology and explain the content of the Christian message to outsiders. Diametrically opposite to Traditionalism, there is the more pragmatically oriented *Revisionism*, which privileges political, moral and other types of goals over the preservation of tradition. Although the Traditionalist rejects the idea that there is universal reason, she still understands truth by way of correspondence and holds onto some kind of metaphysical (or internal) realism. Revisionist theologies, among which Vainio includes feminist theologies (e.g., Mary Daly and Grace Jantzen), deconstructionist theologies (e.g., Gordon Kauffman, Don Cupitt) and many others, usually abandon truth as correspondence and metaphysical realism. Reality is something for us to deconstruct and reconstruct according to our goals.

Revisionism is close to another pole of gravity that Vainio calls *Descriptivism*. The Descriptivist seeks to distance herself from theological debates and describe religious and theological use of language from a kind of disinterested or neutral position. The philosopher D. Z. Phillips is the paradigmatic case here. Inspired by Wittgenstein, Phillips sees the meaning of all language grounded in the form of life in which its users live. The realism/anti-realism debate that goes on in philosophical theology is fundamentally flawed because we cannot really compare languages across different forms of life.

This leaves one more pole of gravity, *Correlationism*. Theologians, such as Wolfhart Pannenberg, Alister McGrath and J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, prioritise the Christian tradition, but aim to build bridges between traditions and different forms of rationality. Van Huyssteen, for instance, talks about postfoundationalist or *transversal* rationality that identifies a common core in the ways in which we acquire knowledge in different domains. Correlationists tend to be more optimistic towards natural theology than Traditionalists or Revisionists, and usually hold onto ontological realism and truth as correspondence. Since most writers in this camp have sympathies towards a specifically *critical realist* understanding of theology (ontological realism and fallibilism), they have found it easy to engage with the sciences from a theological point

of view. Especially McGrath and van Huyssteen have done pioneering work in this area. The goal here is not to justify the Christian message from the outside, but instead engage in a conversation that shows to the non-Christian how the Christian message “resonates” (a term coined by McGrath) with non-Christian worldviews and rationalities.

Finally, the fourth section of BF is where Vainio does most of his constructive heavy lifting. Here he presents a model of religious rationality and identity. According to Vainio, an acceptable theory of religious rationality should allow for at least the following possibilities: religious language and worldview can be intellectually understandable “from the outside”, religious traditions can be open to conversation and can engage in a non-violent dialogue with other traditions and allow the growth of wisdom and new insights that can shape the tradition from the inside.

Vainio argues that religious rationality should be connected with what he calls *negotiable identities*. By negotiability, Vainio means an open-ended process of theological reflection and deliberation that is based on the core identity and beliefs of the community. The core identity of the Christian community, he claims, is based on the Christ-event, that is, the event in which God became a man in history. Since this is a historical event, the identity of a contemporary Christian is always a mediated identity that is based on the canonical witness of Biblical authors and the Christian tradition which has been intertwined with philosophies and worldviews of different times. Christian beliefs, therefore, have their grounding in the experiences and historical contingencies of the Christian tradition. This is the reason why they cannot be given a simple synchronic justification in terms of, e.g., a complete system of natural theology. Although Vainio’s model is fallibilistic (included in the idea of negotiability), there is room for strong identities. Religious commitment is not disinterested in the same way as most scientific commitments, for instance, are. Most of the time, taking a disinterested view or remaining agnostic is not a live option. Being a fallibilist does not mean that one should only hold beliefs tentatively, but instead it means that you are open to the possibility of defeating evidence. Finally, negotiable identity necessarily involves personal growth in the virtues of humility and courage.

BF succeeds in covering an enormous amount of debate and discussions in theology in a relatively short space (only 184 pages). It still has its problems, however. One problem is that BF is somewhat fragmented. The first part does not fit in well with the rest. In the first

part, the focus is on how faith and reason have been understood and what subtypes of fideism there are. In the other parts, Vainio seldom mentions fideism and mostly talks about theological method in a broader sense, not just in terms of the relationship between faith and reason. At least the first and second chapter of the book could have simply been published as separate, although relatively long, journal articles. The second problem of BF is its generality. Especially in his discussions of different theological methods, Vainio seldom engages in a close scrutiny of the views of particular theologians and philosophers. Perhaps this is not necessary for categorisation, but it leaves the reader, who is not familiar with these theologians and philosophers, in a position in which it is difficult to assess whether Vainio's categorisations are accurate. However, a close reading of all the writers Vainio discusses would have produced a much bigger and more cumbersome book. Vainio also omits certain important traditions from his analysis completely. I understand that his aim is to discuss postmodern and postliberal developments in the context of Protestant theology, but contemporary *Thomism* and its many variants might have been discussed more extensively as they present a somewhat different kind of solution to the problems of postmodern theology. Further, Vainio does indeed mention hard (and soft) rationalism and their adherents in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology (e.g., Richard Swinburne), but BF does not really deal with how they criticise contemporary theology and seek to remedy its problems in any detail. A look into these arguments would have made the book's treatment of the philosophical theology of the last decade more balanced.

Despite the problems that have to do with generality and fragmentation, Vainio succeeds in providing the reader with a road map that introduces the reader to a great number of recent discussions and debates concerning theological method in a concise way. Given the philosophical lucidity of Vainio's analysis, his book will be very useful to philosophers who seek to understand the contemporary theological scene.