Faith and Reason DBQ

Using the following documents, compare Christian and Muslim attitudes toward the relationship between faith and reason from the founding of each religion up to the present day. Include in your analysis how these attitudes have changed or developed over time.

Historical Background

Greek Philosophers

**Plato** (428 - 347 B.C.E.) Student of Socrates and teacher of Aristotle; founded The Academy. Understood the self as divided between a material body and immortal soul. Argued for the existence of absolute truth and unchanging reality. Theory of forms (eternal concepts like goodness and beauty) prefigured Christian understanding of heaven as a perfect world, of which the earth is a mere imitation.

**Aristotle** (384 - 322 B.C.E.) Student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great, father of Logic. Argued that humans are rational creatures capable of understanding God through observation of the natural world. Saw God as the first mover, having set into motion the cycle of cause and effect by creating the universe out of nothing (ex nihilo). Believed morality is the cultivation of certain virtues based on reason (beginning of natural law theory).

Christian Thinkers and Schools of Thought

**St. Augustine** (354 – 430 C.E.): Early Christian theologian and philosopher. Mainly influenced by Plato, whose teachings he attempted to reconcile with the writings of St. Paul. Helped formulate the doctrine of original sin, and preached the need for God’s grace as indispensable to human freedom. Key influence on medieval Christian thought, as he was writing at the time of the fall of the Roman Empire. Also a major influence on later Protestant denominations of Christianity.

**St. Thomas Aquinas** (1275 – 1274 C.E.): Catholic priest, philosopher, and theologian. Mainly influenced by Aristotle, whose teachings and system of logic he used to expound Christian doctrine. Remains a major influence on Catholic theology today.

**Scholasticism**: A medieval Christian philosophy that developed in the first universities, using dialectical reasoning (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) to support dogma (Church teachings).

Islamic Thinkers and Schools of Thought

**Mu’tazilites**: A school of Islamic theology influenced by Greek philosophy and based on rational thought that flourished from the 8th to 10th centuries. Key beliefs: Qu’ran was created in time (not coeternal with Allah); reason can help us determine what is right and wrong.

**Ash’arites**: A school within Sunni Islam that arose in opposition to the Mu’tazilites. Key beliefs: Qu’ran is coeternal with Allah (not created); reason may be used to discredit rationalism and support revelation, but is not itself a source of truth.

**Hanbalites**: The most literal and severe of the four original Sunni schools of Islamic law and thought. Held that reason should not even be used to discredit opponents. Would later influence the Wahhabi movement that predominated in Saudi Arabia. Influence can be seen in today’s Islamic fundamentalism.

**Ibn Sina (Avicenna)** (980-1037): Persian philosopher and physician who sought to reconcile Greek rationalism with Islamic theology.

**Al-Ghazali** (1058-1111): Persian thinker who helped secure victory over the Mu’tazilites by attempting to discredit the Greek philosophers who had influenced them. Credited with revitalizing Islam by reconciling Sufism (Islamic mysticism) with mainstream Sunni belief and practice.

**Ibn Rushd (Averroes)** (1126-1198): Spanish-Muslim philosopher who criticized al-Ghazali and other literalists for preventing the study of philosophy. His unique interpretations of Aristotle reignited interest in Greek philosophy in Christian Europe, including the Scholastics.
Document 1. Tertullian, early Christian author from Carthage. c. 210 C.E.

What has Jerusalem to do with Athens? I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic or a dialectic (logical) Christianity. After Jesus Christ, we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research. [Philosophy offers] rash interpretation of God’s nature and purpose. It is philosophy that supplies the heresies (false beliefs) with their equipment... A plague on Aristotle.

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The Greeks should not be condemned by those who have merely glanced at their writings, for comprehension of these works requires careful investigation. Philosophy is not the originator of false practices and base deeds as some have (argued); nor does it... lead us away from faith.

Rather philosophy is a clear image of truth, a divine gift to the Greeks... God is the cause of all good things: some given primarily in the form of the Old and the New Testament; others are the consequence of philosophy. Perchance too philosophy was given to the Greeks primarily till the Lord should call the Greeks to serve him; thus philosophy acted as a schoolmaster to the Greeks, preparing them for Christ, as the laws of the Jews prepared them for Christ...

The way of truth is one. But into it, as into a perennial river, streams flow from all sides...

Some do not wish to touch either philosophy or logic or to learn natural science. They demand bare faith alone, as if they wished, without bestowing any care on the vine, straightway to gather clusters from (it). I call him truly learned who brings everything to bear on the truth; so that from geometry, music, grammar, and philosophy itself, he culls what is useful and guards the faith against assault. And he who brings everything to bear on a right life, learning from Greeks and non-Greeks, this man is an experienced searcher after truth...

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A person who is a good and true Christian should realize that truth belongs to his Lord, wherever it is found, gathering and acknowledging it even in pagan literature, but rejecting superstitious vanities and deploring and avoiding those who 'though they knew God did not glorify him as God or give thanks but became enfeebled in their own thoughts and plunged their senseless minds into darkness. Claiming to be wise they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the image of corruptible mortals and animals and reptiles' [Rom. 1:21-3].”
Document 4. Abu Ya’qub al-Kindi (801-873 C.E.), first Muslim Arab philosopher. Caliph al-Ma’mun appointed al-Kindi as tutor to his son. Al-Kindi was later banished and his letters banned.

Nothing should be dearer to the seeker after truth than truth itself... We ought not to be ashamed of appreciating the truth and of acquiring it wherever it comes from, even if it comes from races distant and nations different from us. For the seeker of truth nothing takes precedence over the truth, and there is no disparagement of the truth, nor belittling either of him who speaks it or of him who conveys it. The status of no one is diminished by the truths; rather it enriches all.

Document 5. Al-Ghazzali, Persian thinker widely regarded as having won the debate for the Ash’arites against the Mu’tazilites. Various writings. 1058 – 1111.

Philosophers are unable to know these things by rational demonstration. If these things were true, the prophets would know them through inspiration or revelation; but rational arguments cannot prove them...

The pilgrimage is the most irrational thing in Islam. There we perform gestures and rites that are absolutely irrational. For this reason, the pilgrimage is the place where we can, better than in any other place, demonstrate our faith because reason does not understand anything at all of it and only faith makes us do those actions. Blind obedience to God is the best evidence of our Islam.


Now, the goal of this statement is for us to investigate, from the perspective of Law-based reflection, whether reflection upon philosophy and the sciences of logic is permitted, prohibited, or commanded — and this as a recommendation or as an obligation — by the Law.

Since it has been determined that the Law makes it obligatory to reflect upon existing things by means of the intellect, and to consider them... therefore, it is obligatory that we go about reflecting upon the existing things by means of intellectual syllogistic reasoning...

...(W)e find that our predecessors in former nations have reflected upon existing things and considered them according to what is required by the conditions of demonstration... From this it has become evident that reflection upon the books of the Ancients (Greek philosophers) is obligatory according to the Law, for their aim and intention in their books is the very intention to which the Law urges us. And [it has become evident] that whoever forbids reflection upon them by anyone suited to reflect upon them — namely, anyone who unites two qualities, the first being innate intelligence and the second Law-based justice and moral virtue — surely bars people from the door through which the Law calls them to cognizance of God — namely, the door of reflection leading to true cognizance of Him. That is extreme ignorance and estrangement from God (may He be exalted).

[Philosophy is] the foundation of folly, the cause of all confusion, all errors and all heresy. The person who occupies himself with it becomes colorblind to the beauties of religious law, supported by brilliant proofs... As far as logic is concerned, it is a means of access to philosophy. Now the means of access to something bad is also bad... All those who give evidence of pursuing the teachings of philosophy must be confronted with the following alternatives: either execution by the sword, or conversion to Islam, so that the land may be protected and the traces of those people and their sciences may be eradicated.


Part I, Question 2, Article 2: Whether it can be demonstrated that God exists?

Objection 1: It seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated. For it is an article of faith that God exists. But what is of faith cannot be demonstrated, because a demonstration produces scientific knowledge; whereas faith is of the unseen (Heb. 11:1). Therefore it cannot be demonstrated that God exists...

Reply to Objection 1: The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge... Nevertheless, there is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof, accepting, as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated.

Part I, Question 2, Article 3: Whether God exists?

...Objection 2: Further... it seems that everything we see in the world can be accounted for by other principles, supposing God did not exist. For all natural things can be reduced to one principle which is nature; and all voluntary things can be reduced to one principle which is human reason, or will. Therefore there is no need to suppose God’s existence.

On the contrary, it is said in the person of God: “I am Who am.” (Exodus 3:14)

I answer that, The existence of God can be proved in five ways.

...whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another. If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover... Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God...

Reply to Objection 2: ...whatever is done by nature must needs be traced back to God, as to its first cause. So also whatever is done voluntarily must also be traced back to some higher cause other than human reason or will, since these can change or fail; for all things that are changeable and capable of defect must be traced back to an immovable and self-necessary first principle...
(The) inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance, not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history—it is an event which concerns us even today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe...

We will succeed in (coming together as Christians and Muslims) only if reason and faith come together in a new way, if we overcome the self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically verifiable, and if we once more disclose its vast horizons. In this sense theology rightly belongs in the university and within the wide-ranging dialogue of sciences, not merely as a historical discipline and one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, as inquiry into the rationality of faith. Only thus do we become capable of that genuine dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today.

As early as the first century of the Muslim calendar, Islam has known radical sects who demanded blind adherence to their rigid reading of the articles of faith, side by side with mainstream Islam, whose adherents eschew violence and extremism and do not profess to hold a monopoly on Truth. …The conservative ibn-Hanbal served as the bulwark of orthodoxy and tradition against any intellectual endeavour, and for a time exerted a considerable hold on public imagination… In addition, the world of Islam was the scene of a battle of ideas between Abu Hamid Al-Ghazzali (Algazel), a strict traditionalist who did not believe the human mind capable of grasping the Truth as ordained by God, and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who championed the primacy of reason. The exponents of these two schools waged a bitter battle… But despite (Ibn Rushd’s) spirited defense, the outcome of the battle was clearly in Al-Ghazzali’s favour, and the great majority of Islamic jurists adopted his ideas, interpreting the precepts of Islamic law by appeal to the authority of tradition and spurning deductive reasoning altogether… But though Ibn Rushd’s ideas were rejected by the Muslim world, they took root strongly in Europe, particularly France, which embraced his vision of the primacy of reason wholeheartedly.

The perception of Islam today by many non-Muslims is that it is a fanatical and violent religion. That is a superficial view which ignores the fact that there are two models of Islam, one that is uncompromising and extremist in its views and another that is tolerant, moderate and humanistic… What needs to be done at this stage is to champion the cause of enlightenment by supporting moderates and promoting the humanistic understanding of Islam that once prevailed among the vast majority of Muslims. Efforts in this direction must go hand in hand with a counter offensive against the rigid, doctrinaire, even bloodthirsty, version of Islam that first appeared among isolated communities separated from the march of civilization by the impenetrable sand dunes of the Arabian desert…