

Ockham's Razor Today

Written by K B Napier
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Have you heard of Ockham's Razor? It is a term used in philosophy, and was coined much later than the man whose life prompted its use. The original Latin phrase is translated as:

"Entities (of explanation) should not be multiplied beyond necessity."

William of Ockham (or Occam) was a Franciscan monk living in England, but was a true believer... which is why his work and words did not please the Catholic overseers of Britain; for this reason some labelled him 'The first Protestant'. He lived about 1287AD to 1347AD and was probably born in Ockham, a village in Surrey, UK, well before Calvin *et al* began the fires of Reformation. However, this brief study is not about his life, worthy though it was, but about his 'razor', a philosophical tool used to examine statements.

A translation of his thoughts on the matter goes thus: *"Nothing ought to be posited without reason given, unless it is self-evident or known by experience or proved by the authority of sacred scripture."* (Quoted from Encyclopedia of Philosophy, in plato.stanford.edu).

I suggest to you that this is not just right up to date as far as thinking is concerned, but is the basis for genuine science (of any field, including theology) as well as for biblical study. If we look at evolution hypothesis for example, it fails the 'razor' miserably, for it has no reason to be expressed, apart from godlessness; is far from 'self-evident'; is unknown to the experience of *anyone* – past present and future; and finds no authority at all in scripture! Completely useless and regressive.

In another article I have referred to the vast difference between 'evidence' and 'proof', because evidence is not proof *per se*, though both may coincide in some cases. Creation, on the other hand, has reason of observation, is self-evident and known by experience (as Romans 1 testifies, as well as individual sense), and is certainly witnessed in scripture. Evolution NIL, Creation ONE! Evolution, then, cannot pass even step one under the terms of the Razor and

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though it does not pass the test of physical sciences either, it is still believed and taught by godless men.

Why 'razor'? No-one is sure, but it might be because Ockham 'shaved' away layers of rhetoric from arguments until only the truth remained. In many ways, my own ministry has similar principles and I have very little time for chatter or peripheral allusions that lead nowhere. Whereas Ockham spoke in the language of his day, in my own day I have often said that I ignore peripherals and 'aim straight between the eyes'! Something is either biblical or it is not. I do not debate scripture and never argue about it, nor do I bother with fake nonsense. This is because God's word is absolute and 100% correct. Why bother with men's ideas when they differ from this? Interestingly, when I do explain why I teach or believe a certain truth, the recipient rarely acknowledges what is said but keeps going back to his unproved ideas. As an aside, this is what JWs do when on the doorstep and met by Christians... if interrupted in their well-rehearsed talk, they have to go back to the beginning again! This is the sign of slavish repetition, not of unique or even believed thought.

I expect unsaved men to flaunt unsaved ideas that miss logic and truth. But, the same attitudes in saved men, those who call themselves 'Christian', is shameful. They will watch police dramas with avid interest, as the characters unearth this or that evidence and finally come up with proof of the guilt of the perpetrator. If they applied the same stringency to their Christian lives and Bible study, they would become formidable foes of Satan and the world! In all matters not Christian they excel, but in matters of Bible study and research they fail miserably. A little more Ockham and a lot less world would do them a power of good!

At the time of William, universities taught from Peter Lombard's 'Sentences', which was the accepted wisdom of the day. Because William disagreed with it, he came away from Oxford University without his Master's in theology. The same kind of censorship occurs today. Even in art, the same blindness is witnessed. As an art student I developed my own theory of light, which led to a unique way of painting. My tutor thought my paintings were excellent, and 'must have copied' a known artist. Though he could not identify *which* artist, and did not like the fact that I developed such a theory on my own, he then quickly dropped his praise! It is not good that a student outpaints his tutor!

But, the main point is that many theological studies and researches do not follow the very

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simple fact, that anything in scripture is ALWAYS true, and any thoughts rooted in, and arising from, such truth, MUST be perfect and godly. In such there are no errors. This fact is invaluable for criticising heresy and bad Christian thinking. Today, this is Ockham's Razor in action!

Ockham pronounced the then pope to be not just wrong, but heretical, calling him a 'pseudo-pope'. For this reason the Catholic Encyclopedea calls him the 'first Protestant'. What a good title! Ockham's 'error' was that he said God's truth in scripture is the only truth, being its own divine authority. Large numbers of Christians today stumble at such a strong witness, and follow many errors, even heresies, rather than testify to God's word as absolute. The modern errors they accept include sexual perversions like homosexuality and intellectual perversions like evolution, though both are adequately defined in scripture. Their fear of being 'different' is enough for them to cast out truth and publicly despise scripture.

One can find Ockham's ideas in the work of the 19th century philosopher, Augustus De Morgan, but, really, what Ockham insisted upon is merely the principle underpinning God's word. Try applying his statement to modern problems and most of them will just evaporate.

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