

Further Analogies for “Three Perspectives on Abraham's Defense against Kant's Charge of Immoral Conduct”

In October, 2009, Dr. Stephen Palmquist and I co-authored an [essay](#) to counter Kant’s attack on Abraham for thinking that God would call on him to slay his son. We looked at the three traditional perspectives on this, the Jewish, Christian and Islamic, and we provided a defense for Abraham in an imagined court of moral law. And each defense included an analogy to suggest what Abraham could have been thinking in each of these three perspectives, an attempt to go from the verbiage to Abraham's state of mind. Since that time, as I have reflected further on this topic, I think that there are additional analogies which might be used for the same purpose.

Abraham-J. The Abraham of the Jewish take is compared with a magician’s assistant who is to be stabbed by the magician and who trusts the magician (God) enough to know that no enduring harm will arise, although he does not know how this will happen. Another, more remote analogy, might be the circumcision of a Jewish child. There may be blood and there may be pain, but no enduring harm and in this way the boy is brought into the covenant between God and the Jews. Likewise then Isaac will be strengthened in his own limited faith (for he had to be bound by Abraham).

Abraham-C. The distinction here from the Abraham-J take is that with the Abraham per the Christian take the boy might conceivably be killed, but then would be speedily resurrected and so, again, no enduring harm. Here one might utilize the analogy of the surgeon which appears in the Abraham-I section of the essay. The surgeon will subject a child to unconsciousness including perhaps even a short-term cessation of life, but then will resuscitate the child without abiding injury and all for the good of the child.

Presumably the good effect of the experience surrounding the sacrifice would be expected to aid his son in some way, e.g., increasing his own faith in God to the level of that of Abraham (but which was probably thwarted by the resistance of the son and the need to bind him).

Abraham-I. Here with the Islamic take on Abraham the situation is quite different and Abraham-I would be planning to slay his son (who is here mature and who consents to Abraham-I’s intention) in order that the son might avoid “the heartaches and thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to”* and enter immediately into a paradise of unending delight and happiness.** Here the analogy utilized in essay for Abraham-C would be very appropriate. A man has his girlfriend, who entered his life from an earlier time via a time-warp, and who misses her former boyfriend to the point of severe unhappiness. The man helps her enter into another time-warp by helping her jump off of a bridge at a certain time (to enter the time warp again) and to return to the happiness of her earlier life with her former boyfriend. It looks to be a death (suicide), but is for her benefit and she does not die but enters immediately into the company of her beloved. Like this man, Abraham-I will miss his son terribly but still be happy knowing that his son is happy in his paradise.

* From Shakespeare's Hamlet Act 1, Scene 3.

** Since the son is willing to die in the belief that God has ordered this, he acts in faith and expects to die a martyr and thus is entitled to an immediate paradise, according to Islamic thinking.

An additional analogy may also serve to illustrate the thinking of Abraham-I. A simple-minded Catholic mother slays her newborn infant in the belief (per her trusted and authoritative priest) that infants dying after baptism and before committing sin will be immediately and happily forever with God. She does this even though she knows that she herself will spend eternity in hell as a result. She gives up her future happiness for the happiness of her child. This is similar to the situation with Abraham-I except his son had a choice and consented, and Abraham-I would have reason to expect an eventual paradise for himself for acting in faith in trying to be a diligent and sincere slave to even the hint of a divine command. And so the only downside would be the absence of his beloved son until Abraham's own death (when presumably Abraham-I and his son would meet again in a paradise).

Conclusions. The conclusions of the essay remain unchanged, i.e., according to information in the respective scriptural sources Abraham can be considered to have acted in the best interest of his son.

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