

Journal of Biblical Apologetics

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Front Cover Art as described by Francis A. Schaeffer

“The Renaissance is normally dated at the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries, but to understand it we must look at events which led up to this, especially its philosophical antecedents during the Middle Ages. And that means considering in a bit more detail the thought of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Aquinas was a Dominican. He studied at the universities of Naples and Paris, and later he taught in Paris. He was the outstanding theologian of his day and his thinking is still dominant in some circles of the Roman Catholic Church. Aquinas’s contribution to Western thought is, of course, much richer than we can discuss here, but his view of man demands our attention. Aquinas held that man had revolted against God and thus was fallen, but Aquinas had an incomplete view of the Fall. He thought that the Fall did not affect man as a whole but only in part. In his view the will was fallen or corrupted but the intellect was not affected. Thus people could rely on their own human wisdom, and this meant that people were free to mix the teachings of the Bible with the teachings of the non-Christian philosophers.

Among the Greek philosophers, Thomas Aquinas relied especially on one of the greatest, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.). In 1263 Pope Urban IV had forbidden the study of Aristotle in the universities. Aquinas managed to have Aristotle accepted, so the ancient non-Christian philosophy was reenthroned.

To understand what result this had, it is worthwhile to look at Raphael’s (1483–1520) painting *The School of Athens* (c. 1510) to comprehend some of the discussions and influences which followed in the Renaissance period. The fresco is in the Vatican. In *The School of Athens* Raphael painted Plato with one finger pointed upward, which means that he pointed toward absolutes or ideals. In contrast, he pictured Aristotle with his fingers spread wide and thrust down toward the earth, which means that he emphasized particulars. By particulars we mean the individual things which are about us; a chair is a particular, as is each molecule which makes up the chair, and so on. The individual person is also a particular and thus you are a particular. Thomas Aquinas brought this Aristotelian emphasis on individual things—the particulars—into the philosophy of the late Middle Ages, and this set the stage for the humanistic elements of the Renaissance and the basic problem they created.”

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Introduction to Journal of Biblical Apologetics Is Natural Theology Fideistic? By Dr. Robert A. Morey

The question posed above may be shocking to some Evangelicals. It may even be viewed as outrageous to ask such questions. The typical smug response is:

“Why, everyone is into natural theology today. Our favorite apologists are all supporters of it. In countless radio shows, seminars, books, and tapes we are challenged to choose between “faith or reason.” And, who would be so stupid as to choose faith over reason? To choose faith instead of reason would mean that Christianity is based on ignorance and a blind leap of faith. Thus all intelligent Christians are agreed that Reason is the basis of Christianity.”

Of course, the issue is NOT between man's “reason or faith” but between “reason or Revelation.” The humanistic apologist begins and ends *a priori* with some aspect of fallen *man* as the Origin of truth. Thus he assumes that we must choose between *man's* reason, *man's* emotions, *man's* faith or *man's* experience. “God” is not on the humanist menu.

Professing Christians who are humanistic apologists and philosophers are fideists in the classical sense of starting from blind faith. They have blind faith in human Reason as the Origin of truth, justice, morals, and beauty. If you challenge their faith in human Reason as the measure of all things including God, they end up arguing in circles.

Christian Humanist: Through human reason we can demonstrate the truth about the existence and attributes of God. Such issues as evil, time, and eternity can be answered apart from and independent of the Bible. Man can use his reason to figure out theology and philosophy.

Christian Theist: You must have a lot of faith in human reason to make such assertions. What is the basis of your faith in human reason? On what grounds do you believe in human autonomy? Isn't your faith a “leap in the dark?”

Christian Humanist: Are you accusing me of being a fideist? Reason, not faith, is the basis of truth! People like Van Til, Schaeffer, Clark, Frame, Morey, etc. are fideists. Not me.

Christian Theist: What is a fideist?

Christian Humanist: Oh, that is a dirty word in philosophy and theology. It refers to those who are ignorant of philosophy and who view their faith as the basis of what they believe. Most uneducated Christians are guilty of it.

Christian Theist: But don't you have *faith* in human reason and in human autonomy? Don't you *believe* in starting from man, not from God? Thus you base your theology and philosophy on *faith in yourself*?

Christian Humanist: Well, of course I do. All great philosophers and theologians believe in natural theology. They all began with themselves. Haven't you read Plato, Aristotle or Aquinas?

Christian Theist: Oh, I see that your faith is based on *Argumentum ad Populum*. A philosopher or theologian is "great" only if he is humanistic? Aren't you stacking the deck? Aren't you appealing to the authority of pagan philosophers?

Christian Humanist: Reason tells us that reason is the Origin. Get with the program.

Christian Theist: Ah, so we arrive at last at your fideism. You believe in reason because reason tells you to.

Christian Humanist: How dare you charge me with fideism!

Christian Theist: Look, you believe in "reason" because "reason" tells you to believe in it. Isn't that circular reasoning? You appealed to the gallery and to the authority of pagan philosophers. Your faith in reason is thus irrational and a leap of faith on your part. How is it that you can appeal to the uninspired authority of Aristotle or Aquinas and, yet, if I appeal to the inspired authority of Paul or Isaiah, you would decry my appeal as fideism?

Christian Humanist: This is not how the game is played! Are you saying that you start from God's Revelation instead of man's reason or faith?

Christian Theist: Yes! By George, I think he's got it.

Christian Humanist: But, if you begin with God and his Word instead of with man and his reason, this would make us slaves to the Bible. In order for man to be truly free, he must be free from God and the Bible.

Christian Theist: What you just said is what Satan told Adam and Eve in the Garden:

"You must break free from God's Word. Make up your own mind what is right and wrong, true and false. If you must choose between what God says and what you think, go with your own reason."

I prefer what Paul said, "Let God be true even if this means every man is a liar." The biblical apologist begins with God's Revelation in Scripture. It is more reliable than even first-hand eyewitness accounts according to [2 Peter 1:16–21](#). When someone states that the issue is between "reason or faith," he has been brainwashed by humanism. The issue is between God or man, i.e. God's Revelation or man's reason, experience, emotions or faith.

Christian Humanist: That is absurd. We all have to begin with ourselves, our own ideas, and our own reasoning abilities.

Christian Theist: Don't use the fallacy of equivocation on me. By "begin with" or "start from," I mean that God's Word is the ultimate Judge or Origin of truth and morals. We all use our reasoning abilities every day. Being rational and being a "Rationalist" are two different things.

Christian Humanist: But we must begin, not with the Bible, but with general revelation found in nature. Look in [Rom. 1](#) and [Psa. 19](#). Read it and weep!

Christian Theist: My friend, can't you see you have just refuted yourself?

Christian Humanist: How?

Christian Theist: To prove that we should not begin with the Bible—you begin with the Bible? To justify not starting from Scripture - you start by quoting it! You just slit your own throat. Indeed, without the Bible, you would not even have the idea of general revelation. When you run around trying to prove the existence and nature of God from reason alone, what "God" are you talking about?

Christian Humanist: What do you mean, "What God?"

Christian Theist: Are you trying to prove the existence of the "God" of the Qur'an, the Vedas, the Book of Mormon, the Divine Principle?

Christian Humanist: Duh! I am referring to the God of the Bible, not the God of the Vedas or the Qur'an.

Christian Theist: Once again you start with the Bible and you begin with the God who revealed Himself in it. You have been so saturated with *biblical* ideas of God, man, sin, creation, revelation, etc. that you are *incapable* of starting without the Bible. The only ones who can truly start from their own reason apart from the Bible are the heathen who never heard of the Bible or any of the religions which refer to it. Such a person must be in *total isolation* from Judaism and Christianity, and any religions that borrowed material from those religions. When we look in history to see what isolated heathens have deduced from nature using their reason, we find nothing but gross idolatry and immorality. *Thus natural theology is a complete bust.* It has never worked in the past and it will never work in the future. It is unlikely you will ever meet someone who has been *totally isolated* from the Bible. The "heathen" today are generally those who have heard the Word but reject it.

Christian Humanist: You mean I cannot be objective and neutral in using reason alone to find God because all those words and concepts have a *biblical* meaning?

Christian Theist: Yes. Those apologists and philosophers who do not admit this are either ignorant or deceptive. If you are a Christian, you **cannot** free yourself from all the ways the Bible has influenced your thinking. *It is impossible for you to begin with yourself apart from the Bible when your "self" has already been influenced by the Bible.*

The assumption that theology, philosophy, and apologetics can be derived from human Reason apart from special Revelation needs to be examined carefully because many of those who were the loudest supporters of it in the last 25 years have, by and large, become apostate. The forbidden fruit of natural theology has proven to be very poisonous indeed.

Clark Pinnock is a good example of this ugly reality. He began as an ardent defender of the inerrancy of Scripture. We remember with fondness his lectures and books in support of *Sola Scriptura*.

Beginning in the 70's, there was an epistemological revolution in Pinnock's thinking and he became a great supporter of natural theology. In the end, he joined the Communist Party in Canada, denied the omniscience, omnipotence and sovereignty of God, attacked the eternal conscious punishment of unbelievers in hell, rejected the doctrine of original sin, questioned the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and that Daniel wrote Daniel, and finally denied that it was necessary to hear of and believe in Jesus Christ to be saved. Each time he betrayed a biblical truth, he did so in the name of "Reason."

Pinnock is only one of a very long line of neo-Evangelicals in the later half of the 20th century who have betrayed Christ. Some of my seminary professors and fellow theological students who started out in the Faith came to despise it. Franky Schaeffer's apostasy grieved us deeply. Almost without exception, the slippery slope to apostasy began when they abandoned *Sola Scriptura* and adopted *sola ratiōne*.

Once they made the blind leap of faith that man can discover the existence, nature and attributes of God by human Reason apart from the special Revelation found in Scripture, they developed "natural" apologetics based on human Reason. *Man was now the measure of all things including God!*

From natural apologetics, they slid down the slope to the idea that if man can know God apart from the Bible, then he can make it to heaven without the Bible. If the Bible is not needed, then repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ are not needed either. Thus the heathen are not lost. They do not need to hear of or believe in the gospel. *Natural theology inevitably leads to natural salvation.*

Of course, there are a few natural theologians who, at this time, are still orthodox to some extent. Residual pietism left over from their evangelical phase emotionally prevents them from sliding all the way down the slope. But their students do not have any pietism to hold them in check. Those who sow the seeds of natural theology frequently see their students reap the whirlwind of apostasy.

The Roman Catholic Church was led into natural theology by the heretical Thomas Aquinas. It was officially adopted at Vatican I and is very visible in the New Catholic Catechism. Why some Protestants choose *sola ratiōne* over *Sola Scriptura* can be traced to various philosophical, moral, and psychological causes, none of which are noble.

The first edition of the Journal of Biblical Apologetics will examine the origin, nature, and defects of natural theology and issue a clarion call to return to our biblical roots and Evangelical heritage.

Dr. Robert A. Morey
Editor

Greek Origins of Natural Theology

By Dr. Robert K. McGregor Wright, ThM, PhD.

Preamble

Christian Apologetics has always recognized that God has spoken not only in his verbal revelation now contained in the Scriptures, but also through the natural phenomena and structure of the Creation. This is made clear in such passages as [Psalms 8 and 19](#), and in [Romans 1](#) and [Acts 14 and 17](#), and is implied on many other occasions.

The controversy continues however, as to *whether the apologist should argue for the existence and attributes of God by starting from the empirical properties of the Creation without referring first to the inscripturated portion of revelation*. For Reformed thinkers, this is the essence of the question. Can God's existence and attributes be probatively demonstrated by rational proofs *derived from nature alone*? Or should we first *presuppose* the existence of the God of the biblical revelation, and only then interpret his Creation in terms of his own prior interpretation found in special revelation? Is it possible to prove the existence of God without reference to the Bible, or is this project impossible and therefore a strategic mistake for the Christian apologist?

The purpose of this article is to show that not only does the Bible contain no encouragement to the Christian apologist to develop a "natural theology" independently from Scripture, but that in fact such a project is a reversion from the biblical world-view, in the direction of pagan philosophy. The entire project is a pre-Christian phenomenon in Greek philosophy, and only entered the early church's theology after other compromises with non-Christian thought had prepared the way for such efforts. In fact, it is not only invalid as a method, but is also incompatible with the Bible's view of the knowledge of God.

The issue here is not whether God reveals himself through the creation (usually referred to as "general revelation") or not, but whether "evidences" as traditionally developed from facts or reason, should be made the *basis* of theistic proofs constructed *apart from the consideration of special revelation*. Nor does a skeptical attitude to the traditional theistic proofs have any bearing on the validity of the so-called "transcendental proof" developed recently by reformed presuppositionalists (Bahnsen, Frame, etc.)

The Tradition Of Natural Theology

Natural theology was established as a legitimate phase of Catholic thought by the early church Fathers, but was not given its most definitive formulation until Thomas Aquinas. It was Aquinas who effectively settled the question for western Catholicism and for much of traditional Protestantism thereafter, including such modern evangelical apologists as Norman Geisler. Systematic discussions of this question therefore habitually begin with a consideration of St. Thomas' famous formulation of the "five ways" of proving God's existence by looking at nature. To this was traditionally added the "ontological argument" as presented by Anselm of Canterbury. Later analysts further reduced the five ways to three, because some of Aquinas'

formulations turned out to be just different versions of what came to be called the “cosmological” argument from causation or contingency.

Traditional natural theology has therefore usually fielded four types of argument intended to prove God’s existence by starting with the Creation. They have been called the *ontological*, the *cosmological*, the *moral* and the *teleological* arguments. They correspond roughly to the classical division of Greek philosophy into the four central issues of Being, Knowing, Ethics, and Purpose, and they have been related to Aristotle’s four “causes,” distinguished as the material, the formal, the efficient, and the final cause. Also, modern systems theory tells us that any working system minimally requires four “components,” the material, the informational, and the intentional components, plus a more elusive something called “expertise.” In order to function, the system called a computer on the desk before me requires a material structure made of metal and glass and plastic, while the informational component is built into it by the original designers and the programmers of the software. Then, it would not be a “computer” rather than a “TV” unless it had been manufactured according to a purpose or end intended by the designers. The expertise (such as it is) is supplied by my poking at the keyboard to express a certain set of choices which in turn prompt a particular result in the printing of these words on the screen. Through the keyboard I can manipulate the program to select pertinent information. Without all four of these components there would be no computer, no working “system,” and so this essay would have to be composed some other way. Similarly, the world as a whole may be thought of as a system with the same set of components.

By observing these components, we can make inferences about the *makers* of the computer. Likewise, natural theology invites us to look at the four similar components of the world considered as a whole, and to draw conclusions about its *Maker*. Hence, the traditional Theistic Proofs take their departure from the Being, the Information, the Morality, and the Design of the world. It is also argued that the analogous nature of human knowledge about God does not alter the relevance of the four major theistic proofs.

The reader must go elsewhere for a demonstration that either the theistic proofs are all logically invalid (the “inferences” and “conclusions” just mentioned do not validly follow from the premises), or that even if formally valid, the conclusions they yield are not the God of the Bible (*cf.* Aristotle’s prime mover). Our purpose here is limited to showing where they *came from*, and that this point of origin was not the Bible itself, but the surrounding Greek intellectual culture.

The tradition of beginning an apologetic program with natural theology and then adding special (or *supernatural*) theology as a kind of supplement, was described by Catholic theologians in the famous saying that “Grace does not destroy Nature, but only completes it.” By this they meant that the lower realm of Nature is autonomously intelligible to us in terms of itself, while our understanding of the higher realm of Grace must come from God’s revelation. Nature can be understood to yield its own *science* without prior dependence on the *faith* described in verbal revelation (such as we find in the Bible), so that we must first derive our *natural* knowledge of God from the Creation (such as that God is there, wise, omnipotent, and good), before adding *saving* knowledge to it (he is also an eternal Trinity of Persons), by the Church’s authority. In other words, Grace comes to Nature rather like a religious icing on a secular cake.

Framing the topic this way originated in the first place from acceptance of Aristotle’s famous disjunction between “believing” and “knowing.” For Aristotle, real knowledge was initially empirical, and this kind of knowing was treated as not only available to the autonomous human

consciousness naturally, but was strictly objective. “Knowing” was based empirically on our experience of Facts, while “believing” was what you did when you didn’t really “know,” that is, when you had no empirical basis for what you believed. Accordingly, the “realm of faith,” which the Thomists labeled Grace, was clearly distinct from the “realm of science,” which the Thomists called Nature. With this statement, we are home already with the scientific prejudice of the twentieth century, in which people of science are those who *know*, while people of faith merely *believe*.

From then on, the big question for Catholic thought becomes how to relate the realm of Nature to the realm of Grace. It could even be argued that this is still the central project of Catholic apologetics. The usual way of doing this is to show that we can start with what we can know naturally, and then *supplement* this natural theology with the added bonus of supernatural revelation from the realm of Grace. Since grace and revelation (and salvation mediated through the sacraments) come from God, the realm of Grace is above (Lat. *superior*), the realm of Nature on the hierarchically-ordered great chain of Being. That is, Grace is *supernatural* (above Nature). Accordingly, the realm of Nature is subject to the higher realm, being lower or beneath it (Lat. *inferior*), which meant that Theology was Queen of the sciences. At least, that was how they saw the world in the Middle Ages. The Nature-Grace dichotomy provided a motif, which structured such problems as the relation of faith to science, of the sacraments to the lay life, and even of church to state.

Fundamental Assumptions Of Natural Theology

Aristotle taught *an autonomist free will*, and bequeathed this view of human nature to the Stoic school that he inspired. Of course, he had no conception of a Fall affecting the whole of our nature, but simply assumed that the will could autonomously choose either way for or against anything presented to it by the intellect. In other words, Aristotle taught that God as the prime mover of natural motion (Gk., the *PROTON KINOUN* or Lat., *primum mobile*), could be known by an autonomous intellectual process essentially the same as other types of empirical knowing. He had no concept of the “realm of Grace” later developed by Catholic theologians in the Middle Ages.

Natural theology accepts this autonomy of the natural intellect as axiomatic, and further assumes with Strato of Lampsacus that the universe can be made intelligible in terms of itself. Then, from what we already know of the world, God can be deduced as a first cause, as a necessary being, as an origin of moral meaning, or as a great designer. Considering what the Bible says about *knowledge* and *wisdom* and *instruction* all beginning with the acknowledgment of God (e.g., in [Prov 1:7, 9:10, 15:33](#), etc.), and considering what St. Paul does in [1 Corinthians 1](#) and [2](#), with the idea that the Greeks discovered God apart from revelation, it is disturbing that so many believers have been willing historically to accept Strato’s naturalistic axiom, that the principles for interpreting the world should be found in the world itself, rather than in an eternal principle or “god” outside the world. Following David Hume’s acceptance of this thesis, Antony Flew has insisted on his “presumption of atheism.” Yet many Christians have remained oblivious to the anti-Christian character of such a naturalistic assumption, allowing Strato free rein in the lower realm of Nature.

One would think that for the Bible-believing Christian, it would be obvious enough that simply because he is the Creator of the world, God’s own prior interpretation of the cosmos would have to be the necessary condition and ground for all true interpretation of reality. Surely,

the place to start to understand the world would most naturally be with what God actually says about it? For example, this would define out of court any theory that asserts an eternal world or “matter” over against the creation of everything finite in time. But if [Genesis 1:1](#) and [John 1:1–3](#) are allowed to define Aristotle’s eternal matter out of court, why should we not also believe that [Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, and 15:33](#) define Aristotle’s empiricism out of court as an adequate *basis* for a believer’s theory of knowledge?

Aquinas no doubt believed that he had a properly unified world view, rather than the dichotomy suggested to us by the division between Nature and Grace. How then, was the gap to be bridged? For Aquinas, although it was true that human nature in its mind, emotion and will, was depraved by the Fall, this depravity was reversed in every Catholic at Baptism, which sacrament regenerated the soul, freeing it to function in essentially the same freedom that Adam had before the Fall. Free will therefore operated equally well in both the lower realm of Nature and in the higher realm of Grace. It was man’s metaphysical autonomy that bridged the gap in practice, between Nature and Grace, as he reasoned his way up the chain of Being by analogy and allegory from the lower to the higher realm.

The other unifying feature of the Thomas synthesis between Nature and Grace was provided by this “analogy of Being.” This guaranteed that because “even the different beings of the spiritual and the material have Being in common,” (*Summa theologiae* I: q.65, a.1), there is an “analogy” or likeness between the finite and the infinite which makes it possible to use human reason to cross the epistemic gulf between them.

Thomas is seen jumping this gap in his famous conclusion(s) to each of the five ways, “and this [conclusion to the argument] is called God.” This facile equation of such an entity as a prime mover with the God of Christianity is one of the most serious problems besetting the proofs. As one reformed apologist pointed out, believers might reasonably hope that the theistic proofs *are* all invalid, for should one of them be successful, we would be faced with proof for a God *other than* the God of the Bible! In other words, Christians should see Aristotle’s god as an idol.

Syncretism In The Early Fathers

Whether the earliest Christians to venture into philosophical apologetics took seriously the fact that the Bible *presupposes*, rather than *proves* the existence of God, is not always as clear in most Fathers as it was to Tertullian. What *is* clear, is that they quickly began to borrow the arguments of the Greeks wherever they sensed a philosophic lack in the Bible. This “lack” was really created by the way the Greeks asked the questions, and formulated their objections to Christianity. Instead of questioning the presuppositions on which the questions were based, the early Fathers sought to respond to objections against religion in much the same way that their Greek mentors in philosophy had been doing for many years. Terms and arguments, involving important controlling presuppositions, were all happily borrowed wherever they seemed for the moment useful, without regard for the implications these ideas might later have for the future of the Christian worldview. But a short-term solution might eventually come to have long-term problems hiding in its fabric, which would demand further attention in a later context, and even undermine some further argument or doctrine down the pike.

Perhaps the most startling example of this “long-term” effect in our own day, starts with the time-honored attempt to solve long-standing problems in evangelical theology by appeal to a libertarian concept of free will. The “free will defense” has long been popular as a short-term solution to the problem of evil, but what happens when the further quite reasonable conclusion is

drawn, that to be “truly free” (*i.e.*, in the sense required for the accepted answer to the problem of evil), it must also be impossible for God to know future contingencies that depend on such freewill choices? In this way, the “openness of God” movement is now undermining the entire structure of the traditionally-conceived attributes of God. Yet nobody in that movement seems willing to question the initial presupposition of libertarian free will. This dogma is simply taken for granted, and is given a privileged status as unquestionable.

A most blatant early exponent of the program of syncretism was the very influential Clement of Alexandria (*ca.* 150–215 AD), who clearly studied previous syncretists like Justin, but also noted the connections between Greek thought and biblical revelation in the writings of Philo Judaeus (d. *ca.* 50 AD). Philo was a contemporary of the Apostles who sought to combine Greek thought with the Old Testament by simply allegorizing the parts that didn’t fit. Clement also learned syncretistic philosophy from Pantaenus, first head of the famed catechetical school of Alexandria. It is now generally agreed that he probably also knew Ammonius Saccus, (d. about 240 AD), whose work inspired the Neo-platonist movement, and who was the teacher of both Origen and Plotinus. It would appear that Clement was in fact saturated in the philosophical atmosphere of Alexandria’s Middle Platonism, and tried to do for Christianity what he had seen Philo do for Judaism.

Despite his desire to formulate a “*Christian Gnosticism*,” Clement shows no understanding of the effects the Fall had on the intellectual cast of the natural mind. He simply equates human reason with the “breath of life” breathed into Adam in [Gen 2:7](#) (*Stromateis*, i. 94. 2, and v, 87. 2). In that context he connects the *ennoia phusike* (natural insight, common intellect) of all wise men with the human ability to reason, breathed into Adam at his creation (v. 88. 1–2). He considered that the “breath of life” imparted something of the Logos to man, identified with the “image” of God (v. 95. 4–5). The concept of a natural revelation is developed by Clement in *Stromateis*, i. 94. 3–4, and v. 87. 3–88.1. He thought the Greeks not only had the potential for understanding God’s revelation in nature, but actually were correct in their grasp of nature’s true principles. In i. 26. 2ff, he refers to both innate wisdom and divine inspiration from the Logos as sources of Greek wisdom (cf. v. 88. 2–3). In v. 29. 4 he even represents Pythagoras and Plato as inspired prophets! Elsewhere he compares Greek thought to showers rained on them by God, or to seeds broadcast by the divine Sower. He seems to have got these images from Philo, Justin Martyr, and the Wisdom of Solomon. Likewise in Ecclesiasticus, human wisdom is compared with a rainfall of divine Wisdom. For Clement, as for Philo, the human *nous* (mind) is the divine element in all men. Human wisdom is viewed in Philo, Justin, and Clement as a seed or particle of the original Logos. The parallel with Stoicism and with Plato himself before them, is very apparent here.

Both Justin and Clement therewith trace both human philosophic speculation and the special revelation of the Prophets back to a common source, effectively blending natural theology with revelation. Both Greek philosophers and biblical Prophets are alike divinely inspired.

But Clement is not satisfied with this. He also argues with Justin and Philo, that the Greeks plagiarized the Old Testament writings, and also that much Greek thought has a demonic origin (in such events as the irruption of angels found in the interpretation of [Genesis 6:1–4](#) in Enoch 16:3), that angels descended from heaven to mate with human women and generate the false religions taught in the heathen mythologies. In this way, he can have his philosophic cake and eat it too, for Clement treats this theft of divine wisdom as an act of divine providence.

By the time we observe Clement’s acquiescence in the further notions that the observable world is but an image or representation of a spiritual world of ideas above, that God made the world of a pre-existent matter rather than *ex nihilo*, and that although the world was “created,” it

was not generated in time, but in eternity past, we realize that he is no longer developing a Christian philosophy, but *a christianized gnosticism*. In fact, Clement's general view of the Greeks is that their *gnosis* was intended by God to prepare the world for the "true *gnosis*" of the Christian revelation. This is the theme developed so fully by Eusebius of Caesarea's *Preparation For The Gospel*, which summarizes the syncretistic approach to the Greeks in some detail, providing what became the classical statement from the third century onwards. Its eventual fruits in the theology of Eastern Orthodoxy can be observed in such competent accounts as Vladimir Lossky's *The Mystical Theology Of the Eastern Church*, in which the Neo-platonist vision of the sixth-century Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is treated as if it were an essential part of the apostolic deposit!

It must be said in his favor however, that Clement was at least trying to respond to the two most serious problems faced by apologists in the second and third centuries. First, not only did many uneducated Christians have a highly negative attitude to philosophy and to Greek education in general, a "fundamentalist" attitude evidencing a full retreat from any responsibility for developing a full-scale Christian philosophy out of the materials of revelation, but secondly, philosophers themselves were writing detailed refutations of Christian claims, of which the *Alethes Logos (True Doctrine)* of Celsus is the best known. Much of this pagan attack on Christianity has been reconstructed from the extensive quotations given by Origen in his famous answer, the *Contra Celsum* and is available in a recent edition.

But the question remains to fester, that the attempt to christianize Greek philosophy is necessarily bedeviled by the basis of all non-Christian thought systems in the fallen assumption of human autonomy, with its concomitant problems of naturalism, Being-in-general, and the perennial conflict of an ultimate unity with an ultimate diversity. It could usefully be argued that the early church developed the doctrines of Canon, *creatio ex nihilo*, and Trinity in response to these three problems.

The Pre-Socratics

Little attention will be given here to the details of the Greek ideas of God before Socrates. The important point is that the entire pre-socratic program was based on the Stratonician assumption of a self-interpreting Being-in-general which was really an eternally evolving *organism*. That is, the eternal substance of Being was a living thing. The word *hylozoism* was coined to describe this notion, and means "living matter." The evolving world we experience was "more like a cabbage than a machine," as one writer put it.

By "God" the pre-socratics either meant

- 1) the eternal substance out of which the world evolved, or
- 2) the universal principles of unity, diversity, law and change which were somehow innate within that evolving substance from the beginning. This living and evolving life-process threw up plants, animals, and men, as well as
- 3) the finite polytheistic divinities of the mythologies, as it flowed on in time. As a representative of meaning #2), we shall consider here only Xenophanes of Colophon.

Xenophanes is credited with a strong view of "the One God." The fragments and references that remain of him indicate that he was asserting the absolute unity of the One God over against the polytheism of his day, and collectively, his account leads to the view that his One God was in fact identical to the unity of Being as a universal cause of the *phainomena* (appearances) of the Many. He does not definitely deny the existence of the Many as Parmenides was to do, but like

Pythagoras and Theagenes of Rhegium, he does use allegorism to show the “real meaning” of the polytheistic myths. Even the gods of the pantheon are reduced to phenomena, although Xenophanes seems to have thought that the natural forces of the world really did have “gods” animating them. Of “the One God” he said that he “is all sight, all thought, all hearing...[he] without effort brandishes all things by the thought of his mind (*noon phreni*) [he] abides ever in the same, never moving.” He “is coherent with all things (*sumphune tois pasin*).” Over against the many gods, he is “eternal” (*aidios*), not “immortal” (*athanatos*), being both “unbegotten” (*agenetos*) and “free from becoming” (*agenetos*). And over against these attributes, all phenomena, including the soul, is made of material substances of varying grades, so that limit and flow, or rest and motion, can apply to phenomena only.

But nowhere in the pre-socratics do we find a theistic “proof” that starts with the world and concludes with a distinct Creator-God. The reason is obvious. Since the ultimate divinity is Being-in-general, this is to be presupposed, not proved. So Xenophanes illustrates both the strength and the irrelevance of presocratic speculation about the reality of a god. It was not until Plato and Aristotle, that the task of refuting the denial of the existence of gods seems to take the form of an attempt to prove their existence. And even then, though the form of the argument is increasingly clear, the result is still highly ambiguous, for nothing in Greek thought from Thales to Plotinus gives any solution to the problem of pantheism versus polytheism, to the perennial One-and-Many problem.

Plato

The main source in Plato’s work on natural theology is his loosely-argued defense of the existence of God (or gods) in the *Laws*, chapter X. This is a dialogue in which an unnamed “Athenian” explains to his largely acquiescent hearers why it is inappropriate for philosophers to be allowed to teach either, 1) that there are no gods, or 2), that the gods do not concern themselves with human affairs (a complaint commonly made about the group who coalesced around Epicurus in the following century), or 3), that the gods can be bribed and distracted from concerns of justice by sacrifices and prayers. Sometimes Plato refers to “God” as if he means a single personal deity, and more often to “the gods” as a general reference, indicating that his own view of God was caught in the classic Greek dilemma of the unity and diversity of the Ultimate. Much of value has been written for centuries on “Plato’s view of God,” but the upshot of this discussion is that he equated Being-in-general with The Good, and with God as containing his “world of ideas.” So when he refers to “God,” Christians should not treat this as if it describes anything like orthodox Christian theism. This sliding scale of ideas about “the Divine” (*to Theion* or *ho Theos*) amounts only to an observation that Being, the All, the Cosmos, manifests a group of divine attributes.

So when Plato argues (in *Laws X*) to the existence of the gods from the *consensus gentium* (agreement of the nations), he is simply claiming the common sense view that people recognize that human nature as a whole senses the presence of God in the order of the world. When he argues in the same context that the orderly motions of the sun and stars speak of the gods, he is merely pointing to a “design factor” in the universe itself. He also observes that the love the gods have for justice is an appropriate basis for human laws, but this speaks only of our need for standards, not of a “proof.” Plato’s argument that the motions and changes of the world require a self-moved origin which he calls the soul, and then equates with God, comes closest in this dialogue to a theistic proof as we recognize it today. Unfortunately, he never transcends the

problem of how to decide between one God and many. That task he left to his star pupil, Aristotle, who “solves” the problem simply by offering a quote from Homer averring that “the rule of many is not good: let the ruler be One” (*Illiad*, ii, 204). But Christians do not consider that the answer to polytheism is pantheism, any more than the answer to Plato’s rationalism is Aristotle’s empiricism.

Aristotle

In book twelve (*Lambda*), parts 7, 8, and 9 of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle discusses the necessity of a prime mover, himself unmovable, whom he equates with the Intellect of the cosmos. This first cause of all motion in the world has been described as “Thought thinking itself,” because, he says, “the Intellect and its intelligible object are the same.” He speaks of an “actuality [which] is in virtue of itself, a life which is the best, and is eternal. We say that God is a living Being which is eternal and the best, so that life and continuous duration and eternity belong to God, for this is God.” In section 8, he makes the point that “it is of himself then, that the Intellect [God] is thinking, if he is the most excellent of things, so that Thinking is the thinking of Thinking.” This eternal Thought is a “first principle,” because the cause of eternal motion must itself be eternal and immovable. “It causes the primary motion, which is eternal and one.”

The point will not be labored here that Aristotle’s prime mover is nothing much like the Jehovah of the Bible. He has no interest or involvement with the things that move further down the causal chain, like us. It is not even clear that we are among his thoughts at all.

In these parts of the *Metaphysics*, we are presented with a series of propositions which may seem at first to be a bit disconnected in the text, but together they add up to a very clear example of what has come to be known as the Cosmological Argument. It is from this source that Thomas Aquinas developed his own version of this proof in the several “ways.”

It must not be forgotten that when St. Thomas refers to “the Philosopher,” he means Aristotle. It should also be remembered that Thomas already had two unambiguous examples before him, of how Greek philosophy (particularly Aristotle) could be used in the service of a religious apologetic. First, the Muslims had already discovered the Greek originals of the Stagirite, and had translated them into Arabic while using Aristotle’s theistic arguments to defend Islam against Christian objections. In fact, Aristotle first appeared in Europe in Arabic, from which the mediaeval Latin texts were translated. Then second, the great Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides had already copied his aristotelian teachers Averroes (Ibn Rush’d) and Avicenna (Ibn Sina) to produce his apologetic for Judaism, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, a strongly aristotelian work. In his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas would beat Jew and Muslim hollow at the great game of syncretistic apologetics. We have here a case of the common maxim that great artists have great teachers. There is also something to be said for the advantage of not being a pioneer in such matters. By the time Thomas came to the task, many of the pitfalls involved in the defenders of a religion based on revelation trying to make use of Greek ontology and epistemology based on the “Stratonician presumption” had been noted already by the Muslims. The bottom line however, is that Thomas’ biblical motivations undermined his aristotelianism, while his uncritical acceptance of Greek presuppositions undermined the coherence of his theology. These incoherencies were soon to be taken advantage of by William of Occam. But that’s another story.

Later Greek Philosophers

An important Stoic influencing the early church was Epictetus. He flourished in the second half of the first century, and became widely popular. Paul (and so Luke) seems to have quoted him in [Acts 17](#)). He explicitly argued for God's existence from the design and beauty of the colors and the eye designed to see them. "In this great city (the world) there is a Householder who orders everything." The abilities of the human body correspond to the properties of the external world like a sword to its scabbard. "From the very construction of a completed work, we are used to declaring positively that it must be the operation of some Artificer, and not the effect of mere chance." This is probably as near to a formal proof of God we will find in Epictetus, but since our rational soul is itself a little bit of the universal Logos, it naturally gravitates to God as its Origin. Epictetus recognizes also the omnipresence and Fatherhood of God, and his loving providence and goodness. The rationality of man requires not only that we acknowledge God's sovereign right to do with us what he will, but demands sincere worship also. The appeal to God is natural for the wise man, and a formal proof would be unnecessary, since nobody was denying the existence of ultimate Being.

In short, for the Greeks, a natural Theology is the same as the theology of Nature. Ultimately, *Being* is God; *to Theion* is just the divine element of Reality.

Two Key Scriptures Often Misused

Romans 1:16–32. These verses are the *locus classicus* for the topic of natural theology, and are regularly quoted in its support, although they offer no formal proof for God's existence in themselves, and expressly state that the knowledge of God seen in the creation is *revealed* by God, not that one could start from a lower realm of science to reach the higher realm of revelation.

To begin with, verse 18 states that the thing being *revealed* from heaven is the "wrath of God" on the unrighteous, not the existence of God in itself. Reformed theologians call this God's General Revelation, to distinguish it from Special (or verbal) Revelation. What can be known of God from the creation is said to be perfectly clear and obvious, because God has already "made it obvious" (*phaneron. . . . ephanerosen*). Indeed, that God is eternal, that he is unimaginably powerful, and that he has personal divinity (*theiotes*) are three things about God that are said to be obvious to the sinner from the creation of the cosmos. So clear and obvious is this essentially universal revelation, that Paul notes that "they are without excuse," (*anapolegetos*) or "without an apologetic" for their sin. He adds (verses 21–23) that sinners *start out* with this virtually innate revelation, and instead of being thankful ("when they already knew God,") they fail to glorify God, and actually *suppress* this natural awareness of God's presence. Ultimately, their replacement of this revelation by worship of idols is caused by "worshiping and serving the *creation* instead of the *Creator*." This is a clear reflection on Adam and Eve's turning from what God had said about the forbidden fruit to the properties of the fruit itself, called "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" by John in [1 Jn 2:16](#). They simply "did not wish to retain God in their knowledge." Paul did not see the Stoic "citizenry of the Cosmos" as a university of seekers. Belief in the divinity of the Cosmos is a substitute for, not a searching for, the real Creator "who is blessed forever" ([1:25](#)).

Paul's perspective is a far cry from the tradition of trying to start with selected attributes of the Cosmos, and trying to formulate arguments from them that some kind of "god" exists. Aristotle's bizarre Prime Mover is proof enough of this.

Acts 17:16–34. The Areopagus Address is not an exercise in apologetic dialogue or bridge-building. It is a radical repudiation of the entire structure of the Hellenistic worldview, and contains at least twenty separate expressions that together contradict everything of importance in the Greek religio-philosophical vision. Paul starts by observing that they admit ignorance of the divinity, calls them highly superstitious, idolatrous, ignorant, self-contradictory, and then proves that their worship contradicts their theology. He quotes the Stoics Aratus and Epictetus against the Stoics, and plays off the pantheists against the polytheists. Finally, he tells them that God authoritatively as their Creator, *commands* them to repent and believe in a particular man called Jesus, who is not even a Greek, but a Jew!! This kind of particularism went against the very grain of philosophic Hellenism, with its vaunted attitude of superiority to the particular ethnic faiths, and its claim to offer a "citizenship of the world." The coup de grace comes in verse 31 with the claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Every Greek "knew" this was impossible, and in any case was unnecessary, because of the inherent immortality of the soul. Who in heaven would need a material body in the after-life? The very idea was absurd. Virtually everything Paul said was a threat, or a challenge to the rationality and sophistication, of the people before him. His analysis reduces the Greek worldview to a mass of self-contradiction, and is predicated throughout on the basic criticism of all Greek thought, that they denied the Creator-creature distinction, and started with Being-in-general instead.

Still, as Luke says on another occasion, "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (**Acts 13:48**). It was a tiny group, but one of them was a member of the Areopagus council itself, and would have his name plagiarized by an important syncretist of the future, the pseudo-Dionysius, about 500 AD.

Although individuals might indeed seek after God and perhaps even find him (**17:27**), it is a very feeble seeking, and a highly tentative finding, considered apart from Special Revelation. The Areopagus address only confirms **Romans 1**, and effectively illustrates what Paul would say about Greek philosophy in the first two chapters of First Corinthians. The Greeks by their wisdom, *knew not God*. The essential thing they lacked was those "words which the Holy Ghost teaches," the propositional truth of special revelation (**1 Cor 2:6–16**), in terms of which alone experience can yield Truth.

The fact remains that any form of getting at the knowledge of God by starting with the creation is without countenance in the Bible. From Moses' opening statement that in the beginning God created the world, through Solomon's insistence that all forms of human knowing must begin with the recognition of who Jehovah-God is, to John's poem to the Creator (in **Revelation 4:8–11** and **5:8–14**), as the one who is alone glorified by his own creation, the Bible makes God the ultimate reference-point for all intelligibility whatsoever. For the Prophets Apostles, it's no God, no meaning at all.

Syncretism

From the earliest Apologists of the second century, through the fuller attempts at Christian philosophy, to the full-scale systematic theology of Thomas Aquinas and so on to the present, those engaged in apologetics have been continuously tempted to make Athens at least a sister city to Jerusalem. This is very evident in the long history of attempts to join one system or

another to the biblical revelation, whether as a “Preparation Of The Gospel,” a Christian Gnosticism or Platonism or Aristotelianism. But all the great battles of philosophy are won or lost in the area of presuppositions, and unless our presuppositions come from God’s Word as the determining revelation, false assumptions will be allowed to replace them. This has been true with a vengeance in the long attempt to develop a “natural theology” out of our experience of the world without first allowing God to be what he must be in the nature of the case, the ultimate reference-point and presupposition of all Christian rationality.

One of the most powerful tools for the facilitation of syncretistic systems has been allegorism, the ancient system of transformist hermeneutics that allows the interpreter to make an earlier text say virtually anything he wants. It was invented by the Greeks in order to make the mythologies speak a philosophy they knew not of, and from such syncretists as Philo and Clement, and Origen, it spread to the entire Catholic Church. By the Middle Ages every word and phrase in the Bible was assumed to have a “four-fold sense.” Any “holy tradition” could by this method be found *somewhere* in the Bible, depending only on the ingenuity of the interpreter. As Hack points out, “from Theagenes of Rhegium (late sixth century) on, the ingenious stupidity of this device commended it to Greeks of a philosophic bent” (p. 68). It simply allowed anything to be combined with anything else: “the Stoics devoted to it a large part of their energies, and smoothed the way for the expansive allegorical discourses of Philo and of the Christian Fathers.”

The ultimate failure of a Christian philosophy erected on pagan presuppositions, is to be told by the unbeliever when we confidently invite them to “Come over to my position” is, “What do you mean, Come over? *You are already in my position, and you don’t even know it!*”

Conclusion

If the warning of Solomon that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, knowledge, and instruction” (in [Prov 1:7](#), [9:10](#), [15:33](#), and elsewhere) is not allowed to include God’s sovereignty over the question of presuppositions, it will quickly be reduced to a platitude with no point of contact with the world of apologetic thought. Apologists will then continually be tempted to fabricate a common ground with their “cultured despisers” that does not really exist. And they will be tempted to ignore the Creator-creature distinction of [Genesis 1:1](#) in order to chat with the Greeks about Being and non-Being, just before they are caught in the bear-trap of the One-and-Many dilemma, from which no believer has ever escaped intact.

Unless Solomon’s warning is taken at face value, it is only a matter of time before a compromised apologetic disintegrates under the weight of its own self-contradictions, however we may cover them with the plasters of “antinomy,” “paradox” and “mystery.”

Sources And Further Reading

On *Clement of Alexandria*, the doctoral thesis of that title (Oxford, 1971) by Salvatore Lilla is especially helpful on Clement’s embracing of the Greeks. On mediaeval thought, especially Thomism, the classic studies of Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit Of Mediaeval Philosophy*, and *The History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* are probably still the best places to start. The unfolding of the Nature-Grace dichotomy is effectively described by Wilhelm Windelband in his *A History of Philosophy*, pages 301–347. Gordon Clark explains the fallacies of the traditional theistic proofs in his *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, (Trinity, 1986) pages 28–43, and so does

Antony Flew in *God and Philosophy* (Harcourt, 1966) pages 58–123. An evangelical attempt to rehabilitate the theistic proofs can be found in chapter 13 of Norman Geisler’s *Christian Apologetics*, with a much fuller discussion in chapters 5–9 of his *Philosophy of Religion*.

On the idea of God among the Greeks, *The Evolution Of Theology In The Greek Philosophers* (the Gifford Lectures of 1901–2), by Edward Caird is still serviceable, while R. K. Hack’s *God In Greek Philosophy To The Time Of Socrates* (Princeton, 1931) covers the pre-socratic age, and has a good clear explanation of each philosopher, illustrated with lots of useful quotations. Hack’s account should be compared with Kathleen Freeman’s *Companion To The Pre-socratic Philosophers* (Oxford, 1949), to show how the fragments of Xenophanes are variously interpreted. *The Theology Of The Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford, 1947) by Werner Jaeger also has a good chapter on Xenophanes.

Cornelius Van Til shows how the presupposition of human autonomy causes the progressive disintegration of Christian attempts at philosophy in *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Den Dulk, 1969). In chapters IV, V, and VI of *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Baker, 1969), he traces the effects of compromise with Greek thought from the patristic age to mediaeval Catholicism. All of Van Til’s works are available on a single CD from the Westminster Seminary Bookstore.

E. P. Gillett’s *God In Human Thought* (New York, 1874), is an older but comprehensive two-volume history of natural theology down to Bishop Butler. Likewise, *Studies In The History Of Natural Theology* (Oxford, 1815), by C. J. J. Webb has a good essay on Plato’s theology.

On Stoicism, see R. D. Hicks’ *Stoic And Epicurean* (New York, 1962), A. A. Long’s *Hellenistic Philosophy* (Berkeley, 1986), and the first volume of Frederick Copleston’s *History of Philosophy*.

Edwin Hatch, *The Influence Of Greek Ideas And Usages Upon The Christian Church* (the Gifford Lectures of 1888) is priceless, but later scholars think that parts of it are overstated. It remains however, the most helpful outline of the subject of its title available.

I used the translations by Ross and Apostle of the *Metaphysics*, and by Jowett of Plato’s *Dialogues*.

My own *No Place For Sovereignty* (IVP, 1996) shows with historical illustrations, the philosophic incompatibility of the libertarian free will theory with both the Bible and reason, and offers a calvinis-tic response to Clark Pinnock’s “openness of God” theology, argued from specific texts of the Bible.

Natural Theology In Byzantine Theology by Steve Hayes

I. Exposition

Christianity stakes its veracity on its status as a revealed religion. The knowledge of God and his designs for the world depends on the free and unilateral action of God in choosing to disclose his character and counsel. Just as God is sovereign in redemption, so is he sovereign in revelation. In Scripture, the mark of a false prophet is not so much that he speaks falsely, but that

he presumes to take the initiative in speaking for God when God has not spoken to him (e.g. Deut 13:1–5; Jer 14:14; 23:16, 26; Ezk 13:2–7,17).

To put all this another way, Christian theology is premised on the principle of special revelation as over against general revelation alone. As a practical matter, we may say that special revelation is another name for verbal or propositional revelation, which is-in turn-identical with the canon of SCRIPTURE.¹ In Protestant theology, the Bible is the only dogmatic authority. This is reflected in the Reformation slogan *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture only). Natural theology is based on reason rather than revelation, and is prior to revelation insofar as it presumes to authorize revelation. Not surprisingly, it is more popular in Catholic than Protestant circles.

So far I have been summarizing the general position of classic Protestant theology-with special reference to Reformed theology in particular.² But there is another tradition in historic theology that takes an opposing and opposite position on the rule of faith.³ And that is the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Greek Orthodoxy or Byzantine theology represents the seminal expression of this tradition. Byzantine theology rejects *Sola Scriptura* in favor of Scripture and tradition as dual dogmatic fonts. What lies behind this demotion of revelation?

I would attribute this in large part to the impact of Neoplatonism in the formative stages of Greek Orthodoxy:

Neoplatonism in general was simply the philosophy of the [Greek] Church Fathers of the 4C and afterward. It was at once the intellectual air they breathed and their adversary. The story of Greek-and hence, orthodox-theology throughout the Byzantine era is similar to Jacob's wrestling with the Lord; but this wrestling [match] was with a philosophical tradition in an effort to make it an instrument of the revelation of Christ.⁵

The father of Neoplatonism was Ammonius Saccas (c. AD 175–242).⁶ Ammonius had two brilliant pupils-Plotinus (c. 205–70), the pagan philosopher; and Origen (c. 185–254), the Church Father.⁷ Another conduit of Neoplatonism was the work of Dionysius (c. 500). He was influential for two reasons: (i) his work was attributed to the convert of St. Paul (*Acts 17:34*), and this pseudonymous attribution was taken at face value; (ii) his system has a highly symmetrical character that lends it a certain aesthetic appeal.

There is, in Platonism, a tension in the relation between abstract universals (the one) and concrete particulars (the many). Neoplatonism reflects and reformulates this tension with a view

¹ Before the closure of the canon, special revelation could assume non-verbal modes of expression (e.g. theophanies). But since that stage of redemptive history is past, and since-moreover-our knowledge of events is-itself-dependent on the written record of Scripture, there is a practical identity between special revelation and Holy Scripture.

² “Reformed theology” is synonymous with Calvinism. One of the distinctives of Reformed theology is its integration of epistemology and soteriology. God is sovereign over what he says and what he does.

³ The “rule of faith” is the source and standard of doctrine and ethics in Christian theology.

⁵ Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church, M. Procurat et al., eds. (Scarecrow, 1996), 236; cf. 34.

⁶ Cf The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy, A. Armstrong, ed. (Cambridge, 1970).

⁷ On the intricacies of this identification, cf. F. Schroeder, “Ammonius Saccas,” ANRW, Band II: 36.1:493–526.

to relieving it. Because Neoplatonism was developed in reaction to Christian theology, it is much more religious and personalistic than Platonism. Elements of Neoplatonism include the following:

(i) *Metaphysics*:. The entirety of existence ranges along a common continuum. What differentiates one thing from another is its degree of being. The divine is more real than the mundane.

(ii) *Epistemology*. Because the divine represents the most general mode of existence, it lacks a specific character. Hence, it is unknowable. We cannot know what it is like, but only what it is unlike. However, it is possible to experience the divine via direct mystical encounter. This experience is non-propositional in content.

(iii) *Ethics*. Because the divine is utterly other, it cannot relate to the world directly. Indeed, the world represents an inferior mode of existence. Direct contact would be degrading. Hence, the divine relates to the world via a series of mediators (e.g. angels; intelligences). This is the Neoplatonic method of harmonizing the one-over-many problem.

The Neoplatonic turn conditions a good deal of Byzantine theology:

(i) *Revelation*. As over against Protestant theology—with its principle of historical, propositional revelation—Byzantine theology blurs the distinction between special and general revelation:

Precisely because their understanding of the Truth was not conceptual, the theologians could not admit either that Truth was expressed by the New Testament writings in a verbally and conceptually exhaustive manner.⁸

The true theologian was one who saw and experienced the content of his theology... the experience of the saints would be fundamentally identical with that of the apostles.

Here we see the Neoplatonic genesis of apophatic or negative theology and its relation to mystical theology.¹⁰ In principle, Greek Orthodoxy reduces revealed theology to natural theology inasmuch as a true saint can reproduce the experience of the Apostles.

In Neoplatonism, the human mind is essentially divine. It participates in the *anima mundi* or world-soul. This, then, is the basis of mystical insight. Once the human subject is able to emancipate himself from the distractions of sense through the use of spiritual exercises,¹¹ he enjoys direct access to the truth—albeit on a non-cognitive order.

⁸ J Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (Fordham, 1976), 9.

¹⁰ God's essence is "totally unknown," "unknowable," "undefinable," and "indescribable," *ibid.*, 77; J. Meyendorff., *Living Tradition: Orthodox Witness in the Contemporary World* (St. valdamir's Press, 1978), 182–83; cf. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, K. Parry et al. eds. (Blackwell, 1999), 36–37. cf. Meyendorff endorses the mantra and breathing techniques to achieve this altered state of consciousness, *ibid.*, 70–71. Note the direct parallel with Hindu and Buddhist meditation.

Because Byzantine theology takes a less pessimistic view of sin than Reformed theology, it regards revelation as supplementary rather than corrective in character- as over against the position of Calvin.¹²

A more recent development in Eastern Orthodoxy theology is its easy acquiescence to liberal Bible criticism. Meyendorff makes casual and comfortable reference to “deutero-Isaiah,” while the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is overthrown without objection.¹³ On this reconstruction, inspiration is not a discrete event operating on select individuals (e.g. prophets; Apostles), but a generalized process that operates on the community of faith:

Tradition is the sacramental continuity in history of the communion of the saints; in a way, it is the church itself.¹⁴

This, again, blurs the distinction between general and special revelation by effectively collapsing revealed theology into natural theology; for if inspiration and revelation are such diffuse phenomena, then that shades into ordinary providence and historical theology.¹⁵

Byzantine theology was predisposed to this development by its loose views of canonicity and elevation of tradition. Sacred Tradition is the functional equivalent of an open canon and continuing revelation.

(ii) *Sin*. In Byzantine theology, sin is defined more in terms of ignorance than guilt or corruption:

There would be no place, then, in such an anthropology for the concept of inherited guilt.¹⁶

One should note in passing that this is the hallmark of Christian heresies like Gnosticism as well as Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism.

Because Byzantine theology has a less radical view of original sin, it downplays the noetic effects of sin. Spiritual ignorance is not so much due to a moral impediment as it is to human finitude and fleshiness. Man is “called to overcome constantly his own created limitations.”¹⁷

(iii) *Salvation*. Consistent with its anthropology¹⁸ and hamartiology,¹⁹ Byzantine theology defines salvation in mystical and ontological rather than forensic and penal-redemptive categories. “Salvation” is understood “in terms of theosis or ‘deification,’ rather than as a justification from sin and guilt.”²⁰ At a certain level then, Byzantine theology reduces salvation to epistemology (i.e. illumination; enlightenment).²¹ And for those who cannot achieve immediate

¹² Cf. Institutes, 1.6.1.

¹³ Living Tradition, 29–30; Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church, 293.

¹⁴ Living Tradition, 16; cf. Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church, 323.

¹⁵ Note the parallel here with the school of canon criticism founded by Brevard Childs.

¹⁶ Ibid., 143; cf. 145, 160–61.

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸ “anthropology” is the doctrine of man.

¹⁹ “hamartiology” is the doctrine of sin.

²⁰ Ibid., 226.

²¹ “epistemology” is the theory of knowledge.

union with God via mystical rapture, the “mysteries” (sacraments) are able to effect a token of the same inasmuch as the “knowledge of God” is given “through Baptism” and “continuous participation in the life of the body of Christ in the Eucharist.”²²

(iv) *Sacerdotalism/sacramentalism*. We can also see how the Neoplatonic notion of mediators between the human and divine both dovetails with and underwrites the sacerdotal²³ sacramentarian shape of Greek Orthodox ecclesiology. Although God is essentially unknowable, his “energies” are mediated through priestcraft and sacrament.²⁴ In principle, though, a subject could bypass this apparatus by means of mystical ecstasy. Since, on this scheme, nature is prior to grace; it follows that natural theology prior to revealed theology.

II. Evaluation.

(i) I do not object to the interaction of philosophy and theology. However, there is a question of priorities. The proper role of philosophical reflection on articles of the faith is to take its cue from revelation, exploring the rational grounds of revealed theology, its internal relations, and outward relations with other domains of knowledge—as well as summarizing Scripture in credal and polemical terms that clarify its claims and guard against heretical interpretations.²⁵ Philosophical theology ought to take the metaphysical and epistemic assumptions and assertions of revelation as its point of departure.

By contrast, Byzantine theology takes over whole planks of its theology from Neoplatonism. In its doctrines of God and man, sin, grace, and the means of grace, it adopts and adapts the framework of Neoplatonism. Now it should go without saying that the Bible has a great deal to say about the nature and knowability of God, the condition of man, God’s general relation to the world, and to man in particular—not to mention sin and salvation. This supplies the proper starting-point and reference-point in formulating Christian philosophy and theology.

Even judged on its own grounds, Byzantine theology built on a false foundation by assuming the authorial ascription of the Dionysian corpus. But since that attribution²⁶ is now known to be pseudonymous, its traditional standing was premised on false pretenses.

Historical theology has always had mediating theologians (e.g. Barth; Bultmann; Maimonides; Origen, Pannenberg; Philo; Rahner; Tillich; Valentinus; von Balthasar). These men would toy with Biblical categories as a code language for their alien agenda. But this was the work of individuals, and their influence was generally short-lived. In the case of Byzantine theology, however, we have an entire theological tradition spanning centuries that represents an exercise in mediating theology. “The voice is Jacob’s, but the hands are Esau’s” ([Gen 27:22](#)).

(ii) It should also go without saying that there’s no point in pretending to believe the Bible unless we believe what the Bible says about itself. Insofar as modern Orthodox thought has

²² Byzantine Theology, 77

²³ “sacerdotal” means ‘priestly’.

²⁴ Ibid., 77, 184; Byzantine Theology, 77.

²⁵ For a profitable model of the relation between faith and reason, cf. P. Helm, *Faith & Understanding* (Eerdmans, 1997).

²⁶ Note the parallel here with the role of the False Decretals in the rise of the papacy.

quietly capitulated to liberal Bible criticism and the scientific establishment, it has even lost its hold on tradition. People convert to Eastern Orthodoxy in the illusion that it represents a bulwark of conservative Christian values. But just as termites work silently and unseen, leaving only a facade; modernism has also burrowed deeply into the grain of contemporary Orthodox thought.

(iii) My exposition has papered over some tensions in Byzantine theology. Although Neoplatonism stresses the absolute alterity of the divine, the scheme is essentially pantheistic. And this sets up a tension between the impenetrable God of apophatic theology, on the one hand, and a doctrine of mystical participation and theosis, on the other hand.²⁷

(iv) I would not rule out the possibility that a Christian may enjoy a spontaneous and unsolicited mystical experience. However, to turn this into a systematic technological feat whereby a mystic can dial up God by means of mechanical exercises is offensive to the sovereignty of God. Moreover, any theology of mysticism must begin with a Biblical doctrine of God and man. Furthermore, mystical encounters—even if authentic—enjoy no dogmatic authority. Paul describes his own experience as ineffable (2 Cor 12:4).

(v) Many people fail to ask the right questions about religion. They confuse what they like with what God is like. It is also easy to get wrapped up in role-playing. We want to belong and be accepted. But reality is unyielding, and unless my beliefs line up with the way things actually are, they will be crushed when they come up against a real world situation. A man on a drug high may feel he's flying, but that won't soften the landing twenty-stories below. There is a lot of play-acting and make-believe in Orthodox theology and worship. I don't mean that Orthodox believers are hypocrites. I mean that they're so caught up in their role that they don't take a step back and ask, Do my beliefs match up with what God has told me to believe?

For example, Meyendorff admits that “Byzantine theology did not produce any significant elaboration of the Pauline doctrine of justification expressed in Romans and Galatians.”²⁸ Shouldn't that indifference be a source of grave concern and apprehension? Paul regards this doctrine as absolutely “crucial”—the pun is intended—to the nature and integrity of the Gospel. Remember what I said at the outset. Christianity is a revealed religion. Unless you base your belief on revelation, your creed amounts to wishful thinking, and wishing won't make it so—any more than flapping your arms will make you fly.

Is “Natural Theology” A Form of Deism?

by Dr. Robert A. Morey

Deism is alive and well today not only in liberal Protestantism but also in neo-Evangelical circles. It comes in many different forms. But at the bottom of the system lies several false and heretical assumptions.

²⁷ Cf. The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity, 159, 384–386.

²⁸ Byzantine Theology, 160.

Anti-Christian Deism

In its openly anti-Christian form, Deism proclaims that human Reason is the sole Origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty. This dogma arose out of the fundamental pagan Greek philosophic doctrine of human autonomy: *Man is the measure of all things*.

The Deist assumes that man's Reason is sufficient in and of itself to discover, judge, and defend the truth about everything. Thus Special Revelation, i.e. the Bible, is unnecessary. Since it is unnecessary, it would be a waste of time for God to reveal it and a waste of time for us to read it. Thus both theology and philosophy can safely ignore the Bible.

But, if we are not to go to the Bible for our theology, where should we go? Deists claim they can find philosophical and theological "truth" in something they call "Nature." Hence the term "natural" theology.

The Word "Nature"

Now Deists love to use the word "Nature," but rarely define it. The word is not defined because most Deists assume that the meaning of such terms as "free will," "Reason," and "Nature" do not need any definition. They reflect the *a priori* concepts that form the presuppositional foundation of humanism.

The word "Nature" sometimes refers to the "universe" that is perceived, measured, and weighed by the five senses. But it can also refer to human "nature," i.e. man's reason, experience, and emotions. Thus we can discover and defend "truth" according to what *we* think it is, what *we* experience it to be, and what *we* feel it is. By this method the Deists can pretend that they have "objective" truth. But, in the end, they are stuck in the quicksand of subjectivism and relativism. Indeed, every Deist has his own "truth" according to his own "reason." What one affirms as true - the other denies.

Another important assumption that goes along with human autonomy is "ontological" thinking that states that reality must conform itself to what I think is possible or impossible. For example, if I feel that miracles are simply not possible, then they cannot happen. As C. S. Lewis pointed out, if you begin with the assumption that miracles are not possible, you will end up concluding that miracles do not happen. Circular reasoning always ends up where it first began.

Most Deists reject such doctrines as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the bodily resurrection, original sin, the atonement, eternal punishment, the inerrancy of Scripture, etc. as not being "in accord with Reason." If they acknowledge the existence of any deity, it is a finite god who cannot know or control the future.

Since Deists obtain their theology from "Nature," it is thus no surprise that they end up claiming that salvation can be found in and through "Nature" as well. Natural salvation is the inevitable corollary to natural theology. The biblical teaching that salvation only comes in response to faith in Jesus Christ is rejected as unreasonable and cruel. The heathen are saved if they live good lives and are sincere in their beliefs, whatever they are. The Catholic apologist Peter Kreeft is a good example of this kind of universalism.

"Christian" Deism

Some pastors, theologians, and philosophers within the Evangelical community are Deists whether they acknowledge this or not. We leave to God to judge the hearts of Deists who claim to be evangelical Christians. It is quite possible for them to be a “Christian” in their hearts and Deists in their theology at the same time. Our criticisms of their “natural” theology and philosophy should not be taken as an *ad hominem* attack on their character or motives. They can kiss babies, pet dogs and be nice people but be utterly unbiblical in theology and philosophy.

While we admit that some Deists profess to be Christians, we must not be so naive as to think that just because someone claims to be a Christian this means that his theology or philosophy is automatically “Christian.” Thus we will not be turned aside from criticizing someone’s theology or philosophy because they claim to be a Christian. Far too many theologians and philosophers in Evangelical circles are Deists in their thinking. We must lovingly confront them and call them to repentance.

“Christian” Deists believe that what is revealed in the Bible will always be in accord with their “Reason” because their “Reason” has already determined beforehand what the Bible can or cannot teach. Thus man is the measure of all things — including what the Bible can and cannot teach. The key is that man’s “Reason” limits revelation.

For example, Clark Pinnock, Gregory Boyd, Stephen Davis, John Sanders and other “processians” determine *a priori* that God CANNOT know or control the future. Why? Their “Reason” tells them that man cannot be free and God be omnipotent, omniscient, and sovereign at the same time. Thus the Bible CANNOT teach that God knows and controls the future. This is why it is futile to show them the hundreds of verses that plainly teach the historic Christian view of God. Their circular reasoning prevents them from any exegetical considerations.

“Christian” Deists may loudly and dogmatically claim allegiance to the Bible, while being “practical Deists” by deciding such things as the nature and extent of God’s knowledge by their “Reason” alone. For example, when Prof. Frank Beckwith of Trinity International University discussed what God can and cannot know in his book, *The Mormon Concept of God*, he did not refer to a single verse from the Bible. Evidently, we do not *need* the Bible to tell us about the nature and extent of God’s knowledge! This is what we mean when we speak of those who are professing Christians and practical Deists at the same time.

A Test Case

If it were possible for man by his Reason alone to obtain from Nature the knowledge necessary to construct a natural theology and to develop a philosophic worldview, what would be the ideal conditions under which this could take place?

A Perfect Man In A Perfect World

Pre-lapsarian Adam and Eve were perfect in every respect. They had perfect minds as well as perfect bodies. Their reasoning abilities were perfect and, if it were possible for man to discover theological truth on the basis of his own reason, emotions and experience, now was the time for this to happen.

As Adam looked around him at the glories of Paradise, he had so many questions: Why did he exist? What was he supposed to do? What was the meaning of life and the things in life? How was he to treat the animals around him? How did he fit into the universe? What was he to eat?

Was he to take an animal as his mate? Could he eat the fruit from every tree? What was right and wrong?

If natural theology were possible, surely Adam came up with the answers by sitting on a rock, resting his head on his hand, and thinking through all the logical possibilities. By his perfect reason, he could derive perfect answers. After all, there was no need for God to *reveal* the answers to Adam as he could discover them by the sheer power of his perfect intellect. Starting from himself, by himself and with himself apart from revelation, he could know that there was one tree in the garden whose fruit would bring death if he ate it. He could put his ear to a tree and it would tell him to tend the garden.

But, to the horror of all natural theologians, Adam could not discover a single answer to his questions. Man's reason, emotions and experience could not tell him why he was created. He did not have a clue as to what he should do in the Garden. He could have put his ear to a hundred trees, but they would never tell him to tend the garden. He did not know what he could or could not eat. Even if he looked at the animals all day long, not one of them would have told him that he was to give them names. The forbidden tree did not look any different than any other tree in the garden.

And God Walked With Man In The Garden

Adam was not created to be the Origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning and beauty. The Creator assumed the form of a man and walked with man in the Garden in the cool of the day. He would call Adam and Eve to come to him. They dropped whatever they were doing and walked and talked with the Son of God. They had so many questions and He had all the answers.

These daily sessions were Special Revelation. God told man why He created him and what he was to do in the Garden. He revealed to man what he could and could not eat. In other words, God was the Origin or Source of truth, justice, morals, meaning and beauty. Man's responsibility was to receive what God revealed. Man was not the Origin but the receiver of truth.

God
Revelation
Man
(Origin)
(means)
(receiver)

The Fall of Man Into Sin and Guilt

The Fall of man is recorded in [Genesis 3](#) and gives us some interesting information.

1. If it were not for Special Revelation, we would not know that man had fallen from a state of righteousness, holiness and knowledge into sin. No pagan philosopher or natural theologian ever came up with the idea of the Fall of man into sin.
2. Satan did not malign, mock or contradict man's reason, emotions or experience. He did not suggest that man should distrust his reason.
3. Satan cast doubt on the reliability of Revelation when he asked, "Hath God said?" He then directly contradicted it when he said, "You shall not die." He maligned God's motives and cast doubt on the reliability of God's Word.

4. Satan tempted man to become a natural theologian and philosopher! He told man to rely on his own reason; to exalt himself above God and His word; to sit in judgment of God's motives and attributes; to become his own god by becoming his own Origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning and beauty.

The Origin of Natural Theology

From [Genesis 3](#), we learn that the origin of natural theology and philosophy begins with the temptation of Satan, the Fall of man into sin, and the heresy of human autonomy. Satan flipped everything backwards.

Man
Reason
God
(Origin)
(means)
(receiver)

After The Fall

Since the pre-lapsarian world is not a good place for natural theologians, they usually omit any discussion of whether man from the beginning was the Origin or receiver of truth. They rush on to the post-lapsarian world with the assumption that fallen man in a fallen world can do what a perfect man in a perfect world could not do.

After sin entered the world, St. Paul argues in Romans that whatever knowledge man could have obtained from Creation is made void and null by his depravity. Thus [Rom. 1:18](#) tells us that man "suppresses" whatever truth he might have obtained from creation. Thus man's depravity negates any possibility of natural theology.

Having suppressed any natural knowledge that could have led to a natural theology, man's depraved reasoning abilities led him into the darkness of vain, philosophic, speculations ([Rom. 1:21–22](#)). Man's "wisdom" i.e. his highest intellectual attainments, always leads to idolatry ([Rom. 1:23](#)).

This is why all the gods of the heathen are dismissed as demons by Paul in [I Cor. 10:20](#). Thus the gods of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are just as demonic as a god made of coconut husks, pig's teeth, and seashell eyes.

Paul states that when the "rubber meets the road," man will never find the true God through human Reason ([I Cor. 1:21](#)). A fallen man in a fallen world can never by reason alone find the one true God in nature. The defect is not in general revelation but in the noetic effects of the Fall. The fact that no heathen philosopher or religious leader in the history of the world ever found the biblical God and the Gospel in nature is irrefutable.

This is why when Paul goes on to speak of Christian theology and philosophy (i.e. "God's wisdom" as opposed to man's wisdom), he dogmatically states it is not a product of "this age or the rulers of this age." The biblical world and life view cannot be discovered by the eye or the ear of man. Neither can it be discovered by the mind of man. It comes to us by the Special Revelation found in the words of Scripture. ([I Cor. 2:6–16](#))

Christian Deists

Ignoring the message of Romans and I Corinthians, evangelical Deists have assumed that Satan was right: We should sit in judgment of God, His existence, nature, ways and Revelation. Our reason, experience and emotions are on the throne, not God or His Word. But once man enthrones his reason above all that is holy, what is the end result?

Many “evangelical” Deists have decided *a priori* that the immortality of the soul, a conscious afterlife, the eternal conscious punishment of all unbelievers, the lost state of the heathen, the inerrancy of Scripture, etc. are not in accord with “Reason.” They claim that the Bible cannot teach anything that contradicts their “Reason.” Thus they deny that the Bible teaches these things.

Stephen Davis

One clear example of how far these Deists are willing to go is Stephen Davis, a professor at Claremont College. In his book, *Logic and the Nature of God*, (Eerdmans) not only does he reduce God to a blind and impotent finite deity who cannot know the future, but he claims that his god can lie and sin! I would agree that *his* puny god is indeed capable of becoming the devil. Thankfully, I do not worship the same God he does.

On what grounds did Davis make such bold assertions? Did he take us to clear passages in the Bible that state that God can lie? No. His entire book is based on the assumption that his “reason” can determine what his god can and cannot be or do. Thus his god can lie, his god can sin and his god cannot know the future.

When we look into the Bible, what do we find? We find the prepositional statement: “God cannot lie” (Tit. 1:1). Heb. 6:18 categorically states: “It is impossible for God to lie.” Thus we have a flat contradiction between what God says in His Book and what Davis says in his book. Deists will follow Davis down the slippery slope into heresy while biblical theists will follow God and the Bible.

Universalism

Another present fad among “evangelical” Deists is universalism. Pagans such as Socrates received from “nature” all they needed for their salvation. Hindus, Muslims, etc. can be saved without hearing of or believing in Jesus Christ. Roman Catholics will be saved despite the fact that they deny the biblical gospel of the free grace of God.

Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Peter Kreeft, and many others have become quite vocal in their denial that sinners must hear and believe in Jesus Christ to be saved. Some of us are convinced that these natural theologians are so desperate for the “heathen” to be saved -because they are the “heathen” they are talking about! Natural theology has always ended in natural salvation.

Questions That Deists Must Answer

Deists assume the validity of many humanistic and pagan dogmas. To uncover these hidden concepts, ask them the following questions.

1. Is God or man the measure of all things?
2. Is God's Revelation or human reason the Origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning and beauty?
3. Does human reason judge the Bible or does the Bible judge human reason?
4. Should we begin with man or with God?
5. Where does the Bible begin?
6. Should we derive our theology from Nature by reason or from the Bible by exegesis?
7. Does the Bible give us any knowledge that cannot be derived from Nature through reason?
8. Does human reason ever contradict the Bible?
9. Does the Bible ever contradict human reason?
10. Is it true that any knowledge that might have come to us through Nature is automatically suppressed by our depravity?
11. Did any pagan philosopher ever find God through reason?
12. Does anyone seek for the true God?
13. Does anyone understand?
14. Does man's reason without Revelation always end in idolatry and false religion?
15. Can the heathen be saved by what they derive from Nature through their reason?
16. Is it necessary to hear of and believe in Jesus Christ to go to heaven?
17. After man fell into sin, did his depravity corrupt his moral orientation to the extent that he now suppresses truth?
18. Can God's attributes be deduced by fallen man from his reason alone, apart from and independent of the Bible?
19. Can fallen man deduce the existence of the God of the Bible from Nature by reason alone apart from Special Revelation?
20. Is the deity deduced from Nature through reason alone apart from Special Revelation finite or infinite in attributes?
21. Is it possible for *fallen* man to deduce an *infinite* God from *finite* Nature by *finite* human reason?
22. Can you end up with a universal in your conclusion when you only have particulars in your premises?
23. Does the Bible ever refer to the Greek philosophic concept of "Nature?"
24. If the Greek concept of "Nature" is never found in the Bible, should a Christian use it as one of his foundational dogmas?
25. Does the Bible ever refer to the Greek philosophic concept of "free will?"
26. If the authors of Scripture under inspiration did not believe in or teach the Greek concept of "free will," why should we believe in it?

Most evangelical Deists will either refuse to answer these questions or they will be evasive in their answers. But ask your pastors and professors to answer these questions in writing and send their responses to us.

Conclusion

Just as Christ and Baal can never be reconciled, Jerusalem and Athens will never be united in holy matrimony. All the heathen horses and all the heathen kings will never be able to glue them together by “reason.”

What is Natural Theology?

C. Stephen Evans, *Philosophy of Religion*, (IVP:1982)

“There is also, however, the kind of theology called *natural theology* (sometimes called *philosophical theology*), in which the theologian attempts to say what can be known about God or things divine apart from any commitment to any particular religion, claims to special revelation and so on.” p. 14.

Strong’s Systematic Theology,

“God himself, in the last analysis, must be the only source of knowledge with regard to his own being and relations. Theology is therefore a summary and explanation of the content of God’s self-revelation. These are, first, the revelation of God in nature; secondly and supremely, the revelation of God in the Scriptures... We can know God only as far as he has revealed himself.” p. 25

St. Ambrose: “To whom shall I give greater credit concerning God than to God himself?”

Von Baader: “To know God without God is impossible; there is no knowledge without him who is the prime source of knowledge.”

E. G. Robinson: “The first statement of the Bible is, not that there is a God, but that ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth’ ([Gen. 1:1](#)). The belief in God was not and never can be the result of logical argument, else the Bible would give us proofs.”

Coleridge: “Evidences of Christianity? I am weary of the word. The more Christianity was *proved*, the less it was *believed*. The revival under Whitfield and Wesley did what all the apologists of the eighteenth century could not do.”

Runes, Dictionary of Philosophy, “In general, natural theology is a term to distinguish any theology based upon the fundamental premise of the ability of man to construct his theory of God and of the world out of the framework of his own reason... During the 17th and 18th centuries there were attempts to set up a “natural religion” to which men might easily give their assent... Traditional Catholicism, especially that of the late Middle Ages developed a kind of natural theology based upon the metaphysics of Aristotle.” p. 207

Gordon Lewis, Testing Christianity’s Truth Claims, “The inductive appeal to evidences fails, not only because of logical difficulties, but also because of moral problems. As J. Gresham Machen said to the modernists of his day, “You cannot take into account all the facts if you

ignore the fact of sin.” Man is unitary personality, and man as a whole is depraved. According to Scripture and Calvinism, sin affects every human function. Although God reveals his glory in nature, men do not perceive it. Sin “has so vitiated human powers that man can read neither the heavens nor his own heart aright.” But the more fully sin is pointed up, the harder becomes the empiricist’s case for a God all-wise, all good, and all-powerful. If we start with a special revelation of God’s purposes in history, we may see His answer to evil. But natural theology cannot handle the problem of evil, and candid Christians, Clark emphasizes, ought to admit it.” p. 103

Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia: “About the salvation of man, nature can tell us nothing.” (3:1068)

Bernard Ram, Varieties of Christian Apologetics, (Baker: 1965, pgs. 14–16)

“We have found at least three major families among the various apologists...

(i) *Some systems stress the uniqueness of the Christian experience of grace.* If a learned philosopher were to have a debate with a pious peasant, the pious peasant would consider his most trenchant proof for the truthfulness of Christianity to be his own personal experience. Christianity is in his heart! He was there when it happened. It is the apologetic of one’s own personal testimony. It is the kind of apologetic argued from the conversions of famous people or wicked sinners. However, it is usually theologically and philosophically very naïve.

(ii) *Some systems stress natural theology as the point at which apologetics begins. At root his school has deep trust in the powers of human reason in the area of religious knowledge...* As representatives of this school we have chosen Aquinas who builds from the empirical philosophy of Aristotle, Butler who works narrowly with the theory of probability and Locke’s empiricism, and Tennant who makes a tremendous attempt to put religious statements upon the same sort of empirical foundation as scientific ones.

The characteristics of this family are: (a) a robust faith in the rational powers of the mind to find the truth about religion; (b) an effort to ground faith in empirical foundations; (c) a belief that the *imago Die* (image of God in man) was weakened but not seriously damaged by the Fall and sin; and that (d) religious propositions enjoy the same kind of verification that scientific assertions do. Therefore faith in God is just as rational and credible as faith in scientific law.

(iii) *Other systems stress revelation as the foundation upon which apologetics must be built.* ...the revelation school believes that the first school is too subjectivistic. Apologetics must have its principle anchorage in God’s truth and not man’s experience. It criticizes the second school for not seriously evaluating man’s depravity. If sin prevents general revelation from speaking the truth of God, then no natural theology is possible. Apologetics must commence with God’s redemption and God’s word of special revelation.”

T. H. L. Parker: “**Natural Theology:** *Theologia naturalis* as it is now understood is a theology constructed irrespective of revelation. In its pure form it has never existed within the church, which is clearly committed to revelation in some degree...In the twentieth century a radical attack has been directed against natural theology...because it detracts from the

comprehensiveness and exclusiveness of Christ as the revelation of God.” (*Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 1960, p. 372)

Geoffrey W. Bromiley:

“**Natural Revelation:** The term natural revelation describes the fact that God the Creator is self-revealed in his work. As Paul tells us in [Rom. 1:20](#), “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.” The implication is that man, as God created him, may enjoy the knowledge of God without the special revelation attested to in Scripture. It is the triune God who is revealed, for both Christ and the Holy Spirit were active in creation as well as the Father. And it is genuine revelation, deriving from God and not from man. In virtue of his sin and fall, however, man is blind to this plain witness of creation ([Rom. 1:21](#)). He cannot attain from it to a knowledge of the true God, but only to ignorance or idolatry. If traces of the truth remain in natural religion and philosophy, they do so only in a corrupt or fragmentary form. The revelation itself remains, but sin constitutes a distorting veil which is removed only by the new work of saving grace. For the sinner, therefore, natural revelation serves only to condemnation: “They are without excuse.” (*Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 1960, p. 456)

“**Natural Law:** The biblical ground for this notion is found in [Romans 2:13–14](#). This indicates that man knows by creation what is right and wrong, and stands under the guidance and correction of conscience...The argument of Romans, however, is that the natural law, though it is a fact and my find partial fulfillments, is primarily an instrument to condemn the sinner who does not truly perceive or keep it, driving him to Christ as the end of the law for righteousness ([Rom. 10:4](#)) and therefore the beginning of real knowledge and observance of the divine will. It cannot, then, be made an independent basis, alternative or substitute for the law of Christ.” (*Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 1960, p. 372)

J. Van Engen: “Natural Theology: Truths about God that can be learned from created things (nature, man, world) by reason alone...It first became a significant part of Christian teaching in the High Middle Ages, and was made a fixed part of Roman Catholic dogma in 1870 at Vatican Council I. “God can certainly be known [certo cognosci] from created things by the natural light of human reason.”...The first great proponent of a natural theology was Thomas Aquinas, the synthesizer of Greek philosophy and the gospel...The Protestant Reformers objected to the impact of philosophy upon theology and insisted upon a return to Scripture...Orthodox Protestants have generally raised three major objections to natural theology. First, it lacks scriptural basis. Read in context, [Rom. 1](#) and [Rom. 2](#) teach that the pagan’s natural knowledge of God is distorted and turned only to his judgment, in no way to the reasonable deduction of theological truths. Second, and perhaps most importantly, natural theology effectively exempts human reason from the fall and the effects of original sin...Third, conceding the knowledge of God arrived at by pagan philosophers (his being, invisibility, omnipotence, etc.), Protestants object that this is wholly abstract and worthless. This Supreme Being has little to do with the God of judgment and mercy, of righteous and love, revealed all through Scripture and preeminently in Jesus Christ. When Protestants retain descriptions of God’s attributes, as they often have at the beginning of formal theologies, they argue and illustrate them from Scripture, not from philosophical discourse.” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*: (Baker, 1984) p. 752

The Ways of knowing

Carl F. H. Henry

Learned scholars have held a variety of views about the sources of man's spiritual beliefs and have reached very different conclusions about the nature of religious reality and about the method or methods by which these are to be verified. Their many conflicting answers to questions about God reflect at bottom a sharp disagreement over the ways of knowing and of validating religious concerns.

This chapter will attempt to indicate the claims made in behalf of divergent approaches, and asks what method, if any, specially commends itself in the field of theology or religious philosophy. Almost everyone seems ready either to concede or contend that religious assertion is peculiarly a matter of faith. But what relationship if any does such religious faith bear to knowledge? Is faith essentially emotive, volitional, moral or intellectual? Do religious assertions rest on authority, intuition, experience, speculation, or personal preference and prejudice?

Intuition

That religious reality is known not by sense observation or by philosophical reasoning but by intuition or immediate apprehension has been asserted by various thinkers who insist that God is to be found in one's own inner experience as an instant awareness of the religious Ultimate. Some exponents have championed rational intuition, and others sensuous intuition, but in recent generations proponents of religious intuition have fallen mainly into the category of religious mystics.

1. Religious mysticism depicts intuition as a way of knowing that contrasts with both reason and sensation, and therefore also with intelligible divine revelation. Mystics claim that direct insight into the invisible world is available through personal illumination as a means of access to the Divine, allegedly transcending all ordinary levels of human experience. The Divine, we are told, is ineffable—that is, not knowable in terms of criteria applicable to daily life; God transcends distinctions of truth and falsehood and is beyond good and evil. Personal concentration on the Divine through psychic transcendence of the categories of space and time, truth and error, and good and evil, blends the worshiper's consciousness into the infinite All and leads to ecstatic union and identification with the Ineffable.

Since the mystic's immediate union with ultimate reality assertedly supersedes the categories of thought and experience, the religious reality is held to be unverifiable by ordinary ways of knowing applicable to other human relationships.

Now, if what is said about God must be self-contradictory or paradoxical—that is, beyond the criterion of truth and falsehood—then it would appear to critics of this view that we cannot speak intelligibly about the Divine at all. The mystic may consider that the failure of reason to validate or square with his claims attests reason's inadequacy in respect to religious matters. But ought he not rather to question the truthworthiness of metaphysical insights that supposedly require the suspension of reason? What criterion of truth and error remains if God is beyond truth?

The insistence that the self is totally absorbed into the religious infinite, in an ecstatic union that transcends subject-object distinctions, would moreover seem to cancel out the mystic's

ability to give a personal report of the actual state of things. For lapse of self-consciousness can only mean the surrender of any personal knowledge whatever.

The mystic must, of course, respect the canons of reason and the conventions of logic if he is to communicate anything whatever about ineffable reality. And yet, ultimate reality either is capable of intelligible representation, and in that case ineffability is a misnomer, or it is not, in which case the mystic has no ground whatever for speech about the ineffable. It is one thing for a person to claim that he has seen a flying saucer, and on that basis to argue—contrary to those who have not—that such weird mechanisms exist, but it is more preposterous for someone to describe a reality which is said to be inherently inexpressible. It simply makes no sense for anyone publicly to claim that he has intuited the inexpressible. The mystic cannot formulate the experience which other men should have, if they would share his belief, since in the case of an “inexpressible intuition” nobody could know what anybody else’s experience was.

Nor has the mystic any assured basis for belief that the supposedly ineffable is other than a figment of imagination or a mere limiting concept depicting whatever, if anything, may exceed man’s ability to know. No legitimate basis exists for turning paradoxical and contradictory experiences into claims about the nature of ontological reality. The alleged ineffableness of the religious experience betrays more about the discomfiting limitations of mystical method than it truly tells us about the nature of God. Our transcendence of space-time relationships is a psychological distortion due to concentrated abstraction; it is not an *open sesame!* to intelligible information about supernatural reality. Champion of so-called negative theology, who like the mystics promulgated the thesis of divine ineffability, contend *that* God is, yet declare that we cannot say affirmatively *what* God is. But how can that about which we can literally affirm nothing be held actually to be? What assured basis has the mystic for insisting that God *is*, that God is *ineffable*, that *time is unreal* for God, that God is *all* and that *therefore evil is unreal*?

It is wholly legitimate, of course, for any individual to insist that he has very different thoughts about God than do other persons. Yet the mystic would not consider his beliefs worth much could he alone hold them. But if one claims universal validity for any affirmations about the Divine, he must introduce criteria for judging between alternative views; simply to claim that one pursues a private epistemology no more entitles him to a sympathetic hearing than a pyromaniac is due exoneration because he acts on his own unique moral code. Doubtless many religious people do have exhilarating experiences carrying an inner conviction of the truth of positions for which they can adduce no logical support, even as many others have strong “hunches” that cannot be rationally justified but which may or may not conform to fact. Although experiences of this kind, however widespread, may supply data for popular treatments of the psychology of religion, they are of no primary theological or philosophical interest.

Nineteenth-century romanticists—F. H. Jacobi (1743–1819), Friedrich von Schelling (1775–1854), and Friedrich Schleiermacher—contended that contact with ultimate reality is to be made not intellectually or conceptually but intuitionally, mystically, immediately. The Absolute is to be felt, not conceived. As a result, these men wrote not of God as the Religious Object, but of their own religious sentiments. Schleiermacher, founder of Protestant liberalism, in effect substituted the psychology of religious experience for theology, or the science of God. The first edition of his *Reden* (1799), or *Addresses on Religion to Its Cultured Despisers* stressed intuition—a direct perception of the religious reality immediately confronting the mind—equally with feeling, and viewed the universe as its evoking divine cause. Later Schleiermacher shifted the whole weight of religious experience to feeling alone as a direct and immediate relationship. Both approaches abandoned discursive reason and an objectively given divine revelation as

instrumentalities of the soul's access to Deity. Instead, Schleiermacher's emphasis fell on immediate self-consciousness behind reason and will. The insistent question remains how one then knows what he intuits or feels, how one is to vindicate as truly objective anything beyond his own interior sentiments. Schleiermacher's critics rightly emphasized that the Christian religion is not just a special kind of feeling, but proffers valid information about God as he truly is.

As a theory of religious knowledge, mystical intuitionism is implicitly pantheistic. It obscures both the transcendence of the Creator-God and man's moral waywardness. It assumes in man's self-consciousness a secret latency for God-consciousness, for an immediate awareness of God through the self's absorption into the Infinite. Hence it rejects a mediated and objectively given divine revelation. While the Bible assuredly insists that man still bears the divine image, although impaired by his fall into sin, it nonetheless stresses God's ontological as well as moral and noetic otherness; divine revelation is not manipulatable through man's initiative and mystical techniques, but is mediated everywhere at God's initiative through the Logos of God. The Bible, moreover, represents this mediated divine disclosure as rational and objective, and not as transcending logical distinctions and the sphere of truth-and-error. That the Logos of God is central to the Godhead is an unyielding scriptural emphasis. While there is a mystery side to God, revelation is mystery dispelled and conveys information about God and his purposes.

Nor is the self-revealing God of the Bible beyond good-and-evil. The righteousness of God and the wickedness of human sin are emphases integral to the disclosure of the living God.

Nor is the God of Scripture to be discerned only beyond space and time. The God of creation reveals himself throughout the space-time universe and in the very history of humanity; the created cosmos declares his glory, and the happenings of history reflect his purpose.

Thus almost every point of emphasis peculiar to intuitional mysticism precludes our speaking of "Christian mysticism" to avoid profound misunderstandings. That some people have ineffable religious experiences we need not question, although the Pauline survey of world religions ([Rom. 1](#)) catalogues them with human distortions suppressing the revelation of the true God. The New Testament doctrine of union with Christ is not at all a variety of religious mysticism, but an alternative to it. Intimate as is the believer's relationship to Christ, it involves no loss of selfhood and identity, nor does it issue in absorption into the Divine. The character is profoundly altered by the new birth, but the "I" or "me" remains an ontological reality. ["I have been crucified with Christ, the life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me; and my present bodily life is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me" ([Gal. 2:20](#), NEB).] The Bible moreover prescribes no mystical exercises or occultist techniques for approaching deity; it proclaims instead the intelligible comprehensibility of divine revelation and approves intelligible verbal prayer to God, as Jesus himself exhorted his followers to address the Father. ([Matt. 6:9](#) ff.) The Bible nowhere accommodates the speculative notion that ontological disjunction from the Divine is the central human problem, to be overcome by man's pursuit of ecstatic union with the Ineffable; rather, the basic problem is that of overcoming man's moral alienation from his Maker and a revelation and atonement that God himself provides opens the way to the restoration of spiritual fellowship.

2. Although intuition carries the sense of "immediate apprehension," such apprehension may be depicted not only as mystical and super-rational but, instead, as rational (so Plato and Descartes, for example; or Augustine and Calvin, on the basis of the divine *imago* in man). Those who espouse rational intuition insist that human beings know certain propositions are

immediately to be true, without resort to inference; in other words, that all men possess certain underived *a priori* truths without any process of inference whereby these truths are derived. Rational intuition must therefore be clearly distinguished from mystical intuition.

Some secular rationalists have contended that man has intelligible intuitions on the basis of either the soul's preexistence (Plato), or of a direct identity of the human and divine minds (Hegel). Early modern rationalists, like their classic Greek forerunners, viewed human reason as secretly divine.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato holds that intellectual intuition alone can deliver us from what, at best, is merely true opinion about certain absolute realities or their existence. While Aristotle rejected the possibility of innate truths, and derived all knowledge through sensation, he held that intuition and demonstrable knowledge are certain; even the conclusions of demonstration, he averred, rest on first premises more certain than these conclusions, and intuition grasps these principles. At times Aristotle seems to equate intuition with the active intellect viewed as something more than a human function.

Descartes, too, contended that the mind possesses faculties productive of intuitive knowledge, including the certainties of self-existence and mathematics. From the intuitive certainty of self-existence he tried to derive all other truths. He contended that intuition and deduction give us knowledge beyond risk of illusion; intuition he defined as "the conception that an unclouded and attentive mind gives us so readily and distinctly that we are wholly freed from doubt about what we understand ... more certain than deduction itself, in that it is simpler." Descartes adduces no basis, however, for saying that intuition is more trustworthy than sensation and, while elsewhere he insists (*Meditation III*) that the perception of God must precede the perception of myself, he nonetheless makes the *Cogito* or intuitive certainty of human self-existence the first truth of his system.

Whereas Descartes begins with the *Cogito*, Baruch Spinoza (1632–77) begins with the ontological argument, but in explicitly pantheistic manner views rational definition or mathematical consistency as the very mind and being of God.

3. Modern empiricists, on the other hand, do not derive so-called intuitive knowledge from some innate faculty that provides man with first principles, but ascribe all knowledge to inferences from observation. Other than "God exists," a standard example of noninferential knowledge adduced by rationalists was that "every event has a cause." In line with his insistence that human knowledge consists solely of sense perceptions and memory images, David Hume (1711–76) denied that causality has any external or objective basis and presumed to find only a subjective psychological necessity for causal connections. As Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), and William James (1842–1910) applied an evolutionary explanation of the intellect, man's basic ways of thinking, including even the categories of thought and the laws of logic, were regarded as but one of a number of developmental possibilities; however presently serviceable, they are considered replaceable by other categories and other logics. John Dewey (1859–1952) rejected any reference to an intuitional *a priori* in order to derive all truth from experience. Logical positivists held that supposed intuitive truths are simply analytic truths derived by following the conventions of logic, although this explanation fails to cope with claims that man has prelinguistic intuitive knowledge, and moreover confuses the acquisition of knowledge with the linguistic ability to express it.

Kant forcefully contended that Humean sensationalism leads to skepticism. An empirical basis of knowledge, Kant stressed, not only sacrifices all norms, but universally valid reason as

well, and it cannot rationally vindicate its own position. His influential *Critical Philosophy* defended intuition of a special kind—sensuous intuition rather than intellectual intuition. Human knowledge does not include innate truths, he contended, but it does presuppose innate categories of thought and forms of perception, which confer on sensually given objects the status of cognitive knowledge. Even the propositions of mathematics, which combine innate categories and the *a priori* intuitions of space and time, become knowledge only if and as sensory objects exist to which this epistemic equipment is applicable.

Kant defined intuition as “knowledge that is in immediate relation to objects.” By “immediate” he meant “without the mediation of concepts,” so that no judgments are possible concerning the truth of intuitions. His postulation of a cognitively unknowable god encouraged the notion that one may experience what cannot be conceptually defined, that is, the ineffable. Intuition is therefore for Kant, in contrast to the view of rational intuitionists, not a means of cognitively knowing God.

Kant’s profoundest insight is that whoever professes, with Hume, to derive the categories of thought from experience, cannot consistently escape epistemological skepticism. He emphasized that human knowledge is possible only because of innate thought categories which guarantee the universal validity of human knowledge, and provide the basis for the truths of mathematics. But his theory of knowledge needlessly sacrificed much on which another school insisted, that is, a minimum of *a priori* truth about God and the possibility of cognitive knowledge of metaphysical realities because of the ontological relevance of human reason as an aspect of the image of God in man.

Hegel sought to overcome the metaphysical limitations of Kant’s views, but his profoundly unbiblical exaggeration of the reason of man into the very mind of God was self-defeating. His theory insisted that we immediately intuit concepts rather than truths. Human reasoning then combines these concepts into propositions, and mediates knowledge. Truth is expressed only in a system, for knowledge is conceptually systematic. But, by equating the Absolute with the reflective self-consciousness of human minds, Hegel obscured any real created existence. For mankind in the image of God he substituted God externalized as the universe, so that destruction of man and the world would obliterate divine being and life. Hegel made God an inescapable reality by divinizing man, and thereby he caricatured both.

The difficulty with mystical intuitionism was that it was either rationally insignificant or violated its devotion to ineffability whenever it ventured to verbalize any intuitional content. The problem with sensuous intuition was that it forfeited the metaphysical to the suprarational and did not, for reasons to be noted, successfully overcome skepticism. The dilemma of rational intuitionism was that its sponsors either predicated human intuition on divergent metaphysical presuppositions, or articulated no persuasive basis for intuitive certainty; moreover, they disagreed widely over which propositions are intuitive, and over the extent of intuitive knowledge. Since not every human being intuited what the various philosophers insisted is a matter of universal intuitive knowledge, the secular theories carried little conviction.

4. The proponents of rational intuition, however, include a distinctive group of scholars—foremost among them, Augustine (354–430) and John Calvin (1509–64)—who predicated the case for *a priori* knowledge on God’s preformation of man in his image. They formulated the whole possibility of human knowledge in the context of transcendent divine revelation, and avoided correlating their emphasis on *a priori* truth with extravagant claims such as those of Descartes, who sought to derive all the content of knowledge from the intuitive certainty of

human self-existence. Their position needs to be carefully distinguished from that of secular philosophical rationalists, who depicted human reason as an immanent source of ultimate truth, or that of the medieval scholastic Anselm, who considered the human mind independent of divine revelation a source of information not only about God's existence, but also about the Trinity and the incarnation and atonement of Christ. Such extreme claims provoked a reaction by medieval philosophers against any and all assertions of *a priori* knowledge.

Augustine held that on the basis of creation the human mind possesses a number of necessary truths. Intellectual intuition conveys the laws of logic, the immediate consciousness of self-existence, the truths of mathematics, and the moral truth that one ought to seek wisdom. Moreover, he held that in knowing immutable and eternal truth we know God, for only God is immutable and eternal. As knowers all men stand in epistemic contact with God. Calvin, too, held that man's knowledge of self-existence is given in and through a knowledge of God's existence, and that the created *imago Dei* preserves man in ongoing epistemic relationships to God, the world, and other selves.

The one theory that combines intuitive or *a priori* knowledge with a Christian view of man (in contrast to an idealistic or rationalistic divinization of reason) is the view of preformation. According to this view, the categories of thought are aptitudes for thought implanted by the Creator and synchronized with the whole of created reality.

Kant strangely thought that if the categories of thought were God-given aptitudes preharmonized with the laws of nature they would not be *a priori*. He objects to God-given concepts on two grounds: (1) one could never in that case determine where such predetermined aptitudes cease to be relevant; (2) the categories would then lose their essential character of necessity.

Gordon H. Clark rightly notes the ambiguity of the first complaint (*Thales to Dewey*, pp. 410 f.). Does Kant here have misgivings that the categories might then be applicable not only to sense experience, but to God and the supernatural?—which is precisely what a theistic epistemology would affirm! Or does he mean that we would not know which category or categories explain any concrete empirical situation?—a difficulty that equally faces Kant's own theory of *a priori* forms.

Kant's second complaint is that, if the categories were implanted at creation, one could not then say, for example, that effects and causes are necessarily connected, but only that "I am so constituted that I can think this representation as so connected, and not otherwise." Now this is just what the skeptic wants." But Kant is very wrong in thinking that divinely implanted categories of thought would invalidate their necessary application to reality. The fact is, rather, that Kant's own view—that we cannot think otherwise than we think, alongside which he denies that we can know the objective structure of external reality—ultimately undercuts the necessary relevance of the categories.

Although Kant shunned Hume's view that the categories are merely the judgments of the individual knower, and insisted rather that they are structuring elements of a world of thought that is common to all experiencing subjects, his failure to connect the categories with more-than-finite mind left his theory vulnerable to the same skepticism about external reality as Humean skepticism. Hegel sought to escape this difficulty by reintroducing the notion that finite minds are differentiations of a divine Mind, a universal Mind immanent in all finite minds. Thus, for Hegel, the categories are not empty forms of possible experience, nor do they become valid because we impose them on experience. Our minds constitute reality, on his view, because they are the very activity of the Absolute Mind. But nobody who has read Sigmund Freud or heard of

Adolf Hitler today seriously entertains the notion that the human psyche is God in manifestation, nor did the early Christians, or the Hebrews before them, aware as they were of the sinfulness and finitude of man. Yet the image of God in man nonetheless bears noetic implications that have constrained some of Christianity's profoundest theologians to insist that God is the source of all truth, that the human mind is an instrument for recognizing truth, and that the rational awareness of God is given *a priori* in correlation with man's self-awareness, so that man as a knower stands always in epistemic relationships with his Maker and Judge.

Experience

The empiricist rejects the mystic's call for intuitive illumination of transcendent reality, and the philosophical rationalist's call for human reasoning, and considers sense observation the source of all truth and knowledge. Empiricists do not wholly reject reason since reason must relate sense perceptions in an orderly way, but all truth is held to be derived from experience.

The definition of empiricism has been revised frequently throughout the history of philosophy. Mystics sometimes argue that the range of human experience is artificially narrowed, unless the definition is expanded to include their ineffable experiences. Not all persons, they point out, have the technical skill necessary to validate scientific conclusions in their own experience, yet they accept such conclusions on the testimony of competent authorities. Why then should mystical experience be ruled out, simply because it is not universally shared? But contemporary empiricists emphasize that perceptual experience is the only reliable method of gaining information about the world of human experience, and that sound conclusions are verifiable in the lives of all persons.

Modern scientific empiricism differs in significant respects from Aristotelian empiricism. By empiricism Aristotle designated perceptual induction from which the observer assertedly elicits clear truths that serve to guide scientific demonstration. Following this lead, the medieval scholastic Thomas Aquinas appealed first to sense observation of objects and events disclosed in common experience, preliminary to rational demonstration of metaphysical realities. Thomist philosophy is empirical in the Aristotelian sense, stressing that causal explanation is objectively valid, that finite realities require an effective cause qualitatively superior to all effects, and that teleological explanation is metaphysically sound. It professes to give a logically demonstrative proof of God's existence, and of the existence and immortality of the human soul, simply by observational inferences from the universe, and independent of supernatural revelation. Thomism rests all further revelational claims about the supernatural upon this natural theology as a supportive empirical base.

The new empiricism shaped by modern science departed extensively from these earlier views. No longer could the empirical approach be considered merely ancillary or preliminary to a distillation of truth by philosophical demonstration; it now became essential and central to the establishment of truth. Moreover, it gained the indispensable role of experimentally validating and confirming rational deductions, and stressed experiences available to all people. Even after such validation has occurred, the decisive importance of the empirical requires that the resultant hypotheses or rational explanations be considered tentative rather than final. The special interest of empiricism, moreover, is to identify events for the sake of the prediction and control of perceptual experience, rather than to render them comprehensively intelligible in relation to metaphysical reality (cf. Edwin A. Burt, *Types of Religious Philosophy*, pp. 197ff.).

Once these developments dominated the empirical outlook, philosophy of religion applied the same criteria to theological concerns, and it declared itself increasingly skeptical or agnostic in relation to supernatural realities which could not be confidently validated by empirical tests. For more than two centuries the modern mind has been empirically oriented. Even Kant, in attempting to refute Hume's skeptical empiricism, denied to metaphysical claims the cognitive status he conferred upon sense phenomena. The most influential neo-Protestant theologian of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher, readily abandoned any appeal to a higher than human sanction and based Christian commitments wholly upon religious experience rather than upon revelation. With the rise of modern evolutionary theory and new dynamic models of reality, exponents of the so-called scientific world view predicated on the assumption that the final test of truth is verifiability by sense perception, increasingly deployed the term God to designate the universal World-substance (as did the nineteenth-century [1834–1919] biologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel in *The Riddle of the Universe*) or to some aspect of the space-time process, or merely stated their theories without reference to religious concepts. The modern spirit has opted for empiricism as its way of knowing the externally real world, and the inevitable consequence of this decision is secularity.

It was David Hume who first among the moderns formulated empiricism as the all-inclusive criterion of truth and applied it to theological assertions with an agnostic outcome. Hume's theory struck hard at the Thomist case for Christian theism, which, in contrast to the Scriptures, rests its argument on empirical considerations rather than divine revelation. Hume insisted that effective scientific inquiry is thwarted unless finite effects are correlated with equivalent causes only, rather than with an infinite cause; moreover, he denied any objective status to causality in nature. The Humean assault on Christian theism is therefore specially directed against the Thomistic contention that the existence of God, and the existence and immortality of the soul, are logically demonstrable simply through empirical considerations independent of divine revelation.¹ Hume's contention was that those who profess theological beliefs on empirical grounds have no right to such beliefs unless they produce requisite perceptual evidence, and that in the absence of demonstrative empirical proof, belief is unreasonable.

Schleiermacher boldly identified the empirical method as adequate to deal with religious concerns and decisive for the fortunes of Christianity, yet he sought at the same time to broaden the definition of empiricism so that—contrary to Hume's skeptical analysis of theological claims—an appeal to the religious consciousness could yield a positive and constructive verdict. Schleiermacher considered feeling rather than cognition the locus of religious experience, and he applied the empirical method hopefully to the claims of Christian theism. Rejecting the historic evangelical emphasis that the truth of revelation rests on an authority higher than science, Schleiermacher broke with miraculous Christianity and held that all events must conform to

¹ It is also the case that Hume dismissed the appeal to revelation out of hand on the ground that there are a plurality of revelation-claims, and ruled out miracles in advance on the premise that we can have no experience of them, since our experience of nature is perpetually revisable. Yet he did not unreservedly dismiss the possibility that religious faith might rest upon some valid foundation other than empirical considerations (cf. Demea's speeches in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, which some dismiss, however, as tongue-in-check comment, and *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, pp.137 f., 175). It is noteworthy, however, that Hume felt no compunction to redefine the God of Christian theism in terms conformable to the limits of empirical inquiry.

empirically verifiable law. He shifted the center of theological interest from God as a metaphysical object—asserted by Hume to be incapable of empirical verification (a verdict that would hardly have surprised Moses, Isaiah, Jesus and Paul)—to a correlation of God with inner spiritual experience (an alteration that obscured transcendent divine revelation). Aware that empirical considerations would not yield a fixed definition of ultimate metaphysical reality, Schleiermacher nonetheless believed that experiential considerations can offer tentative and flexible conclusions about God in relation to us.

Schleiermacher's approach involved nothing less, as Burttt remarks, than a profound revolution in Christian dogmatics and religious philosophy. Setting aside the accepted method of expounding Christian theology reaching back to the ancient church fathers, he substituted another methodology. For Schleiermacher the study of theology begins “not with a metaphysical definition of God and proofs of his reality, but with human experience of whatever has religious significance to people” and then defines theological concepts only tentatively in view of these subjective considerations (*Types of Religious Philosophy*, pp. 288 f.). Although God is not objectively defined, nobody can earnestly question his religious reality, since he is viewed as an evident aspect of universal human experience. The essentially tentative character of the empirical method, however, requires that “no concept—not even the concept of God—has any absolute rights, all definitions being liable to revision in the light of continuing human experience.” God's place as the ultimate principle of theology or central datum of religion is now taken by human religious experience. “The religious experience of men and women becomes the decisive fact and final court of appeal by which we test the validity of any theological concept—the concept of God along with others” (p. 288).

Although Schleiermacher did not explicitly identify himself as an empiricist (he speaks of the “religious consciousness” rather than of religious experience as his twentieth-century successors do), yet his method is empirical and his theology empirically grounded. He does indeed criticize the understanding of empiricism regnant in his day for its Kantian limitation of the content of human knowledge to sense percepts. Schleiermacher concedes that we cannot have cognitive knowledge of God as he objectively is, but he insists that the religious consciousness gives us knowledge of God-in-relation to us. He also diverges from Kant in holding that religious doctrines are not certain but—conformably to the empirical approach—are tentative explanations, subject to revision by future experience. Absolute truth is excluded in theological as fully as in all other matters. The finality of any religion is left in doubt, and the Christian religion is shorn of its historic claim for God's transcendent cognitive revelation and of external miraculous attestation.

The “religious consciousness” which Schleiermacher presumes to analyze is actually neo-Protestant Christian in nature. But his orientation of all theological interests to this religious consciousness—more explicitly, as Schleiermacher would have it, to the “feeling of absolute dependence”—means that God is no longer an absolutely revealed cognitive reality but an experiential factor whose meaning is derived from our inner responses. God is not a being whose existence is inferred from otherwise neutral empirical considerations, either as a higher cause or as an explanatory principle; he is a factor disclosed in the unqualifiedly dependent consciousness. While God is held to be objectively real, we lack all knowledge of him as he objectively is. Traditional doctrines such as the Trinity and the divine attributes are taken not as cognitive descriptions of God-in-himself, but as illuminating religious experience or God's relationships to us. The significance of Jesus of Nazareth is no longer found in the incomparable incarnation of the eternally pre-existent Logos and his substitutionary death and bodily

resurrection for sinners, since scientific empiricism cannot validate these. Schleiermacher translates religious feelings into theological language, so that the man's inner stress and disunity become his sense of sin, while the sense of redemption is the feeling of integrated selfhood achieved in following Jesus—a modernist version that divorces the “new birth” from any necessary dependence upon miraculous revelation and redemption.

Increasingly apparent was the fact that no claim at all can confidently be made about God as the religious reality if we can speak definitively only of man's religious consciousness. In *The Christian Faith* Schleiermacher insisted that God is originally experienced in feeling, and never directly apprehended, but is always mediated by some finite element of the world, so that we have no strictly objective cognitive knowledge of him. But how then does one know what he feels, and whether we ought to feel concerning God as we do? F. R. Tennant insisted that religious experience cannot be authenticated unless it rests on well-grounded cognitive assertions about God (*Philosophical Theology*, 1:329 ff.), and he rightly doubts that these can be derived from religious feeling. What firmly grounded cognitive statements about God are to be made solely on the basis of the not-God?

Many erstwhile modernists defected to humanism when it became evident that Schleiermacher's empirical Christianity was decidedly less scientific than he considered it to be. The example of Jesus, Schleiermacher held, more effectively than any other, advances the integration or unification of discordant human personality, by delivering all who follow his religious and moral stance from the sense of inner strain to the sense of serene devotion to God. Yet the empirical method could not consistently be invoked either to limit the religious good to Christ or to vindicate his superiority as a personality-integrating factor. Some liberals, in fact, equated deliverance from inner discord with an intellectual peace assertedly brought about by the modern mind's rejection of supernatural beliefs for empirically testable positions, although it should have been clear that empiricism promises no settled repose even to modernists.

Humanists insisted that the scientific approach disallows any implicit claim of finality for Jesus of Nazareth or for any other religious personality— whether a contemporary figure or one from the biblical past. If God is defined experientially, they contended, then God is whatever in man's experience delivers the distraught self from inner personality tensions and secures its harmonious relationship to man's total cosmic environment. Spiritual experience, they added, often reflects considerable ambiguity and fluctuation, since individuals are prone to interpret similar fortunes and misfortunes in terms of divergent religious prejudices. What Jesus does for devotees in Christian lands may equally well be attained elsewhere by following the way of Buddha or Confucius. Indeed, one's life devotion to some great ideal such as world peace, pacifism, brotherhood or beauty might well be equally productive of a unified self, and might in some cases provide a superior framework for achieving it. Humanists considered the contention that Jesus' person, teaching or example is somehow incomparably final a breach of empirical validation. The openness of scientific empiricism rather requires us to dignify as the religious reality whatever ideal, movement or cause, or personality which exerts upon any human life a maximal integrative influence.

But if humanists were prone to regard modernists as clinging uncritically to facets of a fundamentalist past in view of the centrality they assigned to the Nazarene (albeit the human Jesus), it soon became apparent that humanism too was invoking its empirical appeal in a prejudiced way favorable to its own partisan claims. What empirical facts indisputably bear on the question of religious reality? How is religious experience to be confidently distinguished from human experience generally? Is its essence to be found in cognitive beliefs, or in internal

dispositions, or perhaps in forms of ritual? Mystics in past generations were often charged with social passivity because they located the essence of religious experience in inner ecstatic illumination. Is the essence of religion to be found not in inner satisfactions nor in divine provisions but rather in social activism, in meeting the physical needs of others, as some contemporary ecclesiastics think? Or may not the presently demonic be the authentic wave of future religion? Should scientific empiricism not be wholly open to reality and the future by not closing the door permanently on any possibilities whatever?

Indeed, can scientific empiricism provide any definitive answers at all to religious questions? Can one really validate even the human values on which the humanist insists by the empirical method? That one ought to pursue truth and beauty and to promote brotherhood—these are compelling ideals, yet hardly more so than that one ought to love God with his whole being, and his neighbor as himself. But how does one arrive at a permanently valid *ought*, at fixed norms of any kind, by the empirical method of knowing?

Despite all that has been said about tentativeness as the badge of modern empiricism, it must be noted that some empiricists have been as dogmatically and arbitrarily committed to certainty as have representatives of rational, intuitional, and authoritarian approaches. Nineteenth century scientists like William K. Clifford (1845–74) and Thomas H. Huxley (1825–95) considered the presuppositions of mechanistic science as the absolute truth, and they imputed immorality to theologians whose contrary beliefs they judged to be based on inadequate evidence. Karl Pearson (1857–1936) not only held that “the scientific method is the sole gateway to the whole region of knowledge” but even regarded its results as yielding “absolute judgments” (*Grammar of Science*, pp.24, 6, cited by Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth’s Theological Method*, p.65).

Common sense requires modern man’s recognition of the scientific method as a spectacularly useful instrumentality for transforming our environment. Respect and gratitude are indeed due the scientist for many comforts and conveniences furnished to modern living, often as the fruit of painstakingly sacrificial research and experimentation, although in recent times not often without financial reward. This practical success of science inclines many persons to a tacit acceptance of the scientific world-picture of external reality as a realm merely of impersonal processes and mathematically connectible sequences. Charles H. Malik observes rightly that all too often the highly merited prestige of scientists in their own fields of competence is transferred to areas of publicly expressed opinion in which they are novices. “In the present euphoria about the wonders of science you find many scientists, individually and in groups, arrogating to themselves rights that do not strictly flow from their scientific competence. They pass high judgements on ... God and man, on good and evil, on culture and justice, and on the deepest issues of human destiny. And their prestige as scientists, which is in no doubt whatever, illicitly carries over in the mind of the public to these extra-scientific pronouncements” (“The Limitations of Natural Science,” p.385).

When, for example, A. J. Carlson (“Science and the Supernatural”) arbitrarily assumes that the positivistic context is the only one in which the question of evidence for any and every claim can be resolved (“the method of science” he considers to be in essence—... the rejection *in toto* of all non-observational and non-experimental authority in the field of experience”), we ought not to be surprised that he adds: “When no evidence is produced other than ... ‘the voice of God,’ the scientist can pay no attention whatever except to ask: How do they get that way?” A demand that theology furnish appropriate evidence for its claims, and expound its way of knowing and adduce its criterion of verification, is wholly proper and necessary, but Carlson has made God inadmissible because he will not submit to a test appropriate only to the not-God.

Malik thinks the secret fear of an ultimate judgment enters into the natural scientist's disposition to thrust aside revealed religion as resting on alien and unacceptable principles: "While the Gospel and the great traditions of art, literature, philosophy and spirit are around, even the man to whom all the secrets and power possibilities of nature are unlocked will be judged by them. That is why so many scientists, fearing this inevitable uncomfortable judgement, or rather misunderstanding it (because once they understood it they would welcome and rejoice in it and never fear it), either dogmatically proclaim from narrow existential self-defence, that religion, philosophy and the arts are nonsense, or arbitrarily reduce them to some alien scientific technique" ("The Limitations of Natural Science," p.381).

Logical positivists arbitrarily insisted—and the judgment they passed on others finally returned to their own house—that what is unverified by observation remains merely a hypothesis, and that assertions intrinsically unverifiable by sense observation cannot possibly qualify as truth. Logical positivism not only affirmed the validity of scientific methodology and insisted on the autonomy of scientific empiricism, declaring it to be the sole means for obtaining knowledge about the world disclosed by our senses, but it also further asserted scientific empiricism to be the only valid means of knowing, the exclusive index to the whole realm of cognitively valid statements. It thus tapered empiricism so narrowly that not even its own confidently launched vessel could make it through the sea of human experience. By elevating scientific empiricism as the test of all truth, logical positivism unwittingly destroyed its own basis of credibility.

Not a few important scientists detected in logical positivism a covert extension of scientific method as a promotive cover for cherished anti-metaphysical prejudices. For even the so-called facts of external perception often prove to be far less objective than their empiricist sponsors have made them out to be. Indeed, our perceptions are capable of serving very different principles or explanations, and of supporting divergent conclusions. For those who seek to provide an empirical basis for belief in God, there is in any event the difficulty of any sure inference and transition from internal religious experiences to a transcendent ontological reality as their source. Do not our feelings tell us more about ourselves than about God, and our perceptions more about sense realities than about the supersensible? Indeed, can they tell us anything final and authoritative about God? Taken by itself, the empirical method provides no basis for affirming or denying supernatural realities, since by definition it is a method for dealing only with perceptible realities. It cannot, therefore, validate supraperceptible being; nor can it validate moral norms either or confirm past historical events in present public experience. The empiricist must acknowledge that his method leads finally to one of many possible views, and not to final certainty about anything.

However much the empiricist may boast of a humility that avoids final commitments in order to explore an ongoing clarification of spiritual realities, an empirical religious philosophy by the same token abandons the opportunity of telling us the unchanging truth in respect to religious claims. Concerning "claims of intellectual humility and accusations of intellectual pride" which often color interdisciplinary disputes between scientists, philosophers and theologians, Dorothy Emmet has this to say:

"In my judgment neither pride nor humility is specifically characteristic of either (philosophical or theological) activity; they are characteristics of human nature and may come out in both of them ... There is no immunity against pride in either theology or philosophy" (*The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*, p.154). If God truly exists, especially as a living personal being, are not revelational considerations more significant than our own inner feelings and outer

perceptual probings? And if divine revelation—a possibility still to be considered—provides an authoritative basis for religious faith, does not an insistent reduction of all knowledge to empirical factors become a prideful—that is, worldly wise—justification of unbelief in a transcendent revelation? If there be a God, he could scarcely desire from human beings a commitment only to empirical tentativeness about his reality.

Reason

The superiority of reason over all other proposals for gaining information about the ultimately real world has been asserted from antiquity. The rationalistic method of knowing considers human reasoning as the only reliable and valid source of knowledge.

The rationalist insists that truth can never be self-contradictory, hence he suspects that mysticism has somehow missed the truth in the emphasis on ineffability and paradox. He likewise considers empiricism an inadequate and unstable means of illuminating the true nature of reality, for its conclusions are always tentative; hence the empiricist can never be sure he has found the truth. Even the so-called “facts of experience” on which the empiricist dwells are unintelligible but for the operation of reason. Reason must, in any event, formulate all universal statements, and these are not perceptually verifiable since experience is fragmentary and changing. Sense experience may disqualify the claims of reason, but it cannot actually accredit and justify them. Modern rationalists are more ready to regard sense perception as significant for excluding what cannot be the case about the detailed behavior of nature, and are sometimes ready to take sense experience as a starting point. But they emphasize that empirical data is compatible with a variety of explanatory principles, and that the most significant advances even in modern science have arisen through the mental projection of comprehensive new perspectives that have correlated the data with novel explanations.

The underlying assumption of philosophical rationalisms that the mind of man—simply in view of its latent potentialities, or veiled divinity, or the human mind’s explicit and direct continuity with the mind of God—possesses an inherent potentiality for solving all intellectual problems. This immanent rational capacity is variously explicated by leading philosophers.

Plato held that the eternal ideas innately inhere in the soul of man. The inward eye of reason is a faculty whereby man can grasp the unchanging eternal “forms” and “ideas” that constitute the ultimate world. By this faculty of reason men can rise cognitively to the idea of the Good which is the source of all knowledge. In some passages, God is for Plato an intermediary being distinct from the idea of the Good; in others, the Divine Mind holds ultimate cosmic significance. But man’s reason is considered inherently divine and immortal, an aspect of the divine Mind.

Although Aristotle held that knowledge is won by building upon sense perception, rather than turning away from it, pure form causes reason in man to seek its apprehension and comprehension. God as self-thinking thought lures the active reason in man to the complete actualization of reason’s capabilities; this active reason, crowning the cognitive process, functions as a disembodied universal function unaffected by time and individuality.

There is here no glimmer of the Hebrew view of the transcendent intelligible Creator who actively reveals himself, and who has preformed man for knowledge and service of the Divine, nor of man as a fallen sinner whose capabilities are warped by sin and its consequences. Classic Greek thought prepares the way, therefore, for the rational pantheism of Roman Stoicism, according to which the intelligible order is a necessary part of God, and in which the Logos is

expanded into the World-Soul. Plotinus (205–270) modifies this notion, insisting that the human soul, still conceived as part of the World-Soul, lapsed from contemplation of the eternal forms by shifting its interests to the material realm, so that only mystical or superrational union now can restore man from sensuous desires to his proper vocation.

What is lacking in these ancient representations of reason is any awareness of transcendent cognitive revelation of the biblical doctrine of creation and fall of man and a gracious divine redemption, elements which crowd the discussion of philosophy only after the rise of Christianity. Augustine does not hesitate at all to use reason, but he does so always—after his spiritual conversion—in the context of God as Truth and of man’s dependency on divine revelation in view of transcendent creation and redemption. Aquinas, however, again put medieval philosophy on the side of greater confidence in the powers of independent human reasoning, and unwittingly prepared for a revival of an optimistic view of the intrinsic power of the human mind apart from revelational dependence. Increasingly the scholastics (as for instance Hugo of St. Victor [1096–1141], author of the encyclopedic *Eruditio Didascalica*) emphasize that revelation is necessary only for what is above reason, and that reason on its own adequately deals not only with natural concerns, but with many supernatural themes as well. Human reasoning now becomes the first court of appeal, and establishes all man’s beliefs up to the desperation point where revelation becomes additionally necessary.

The early modern philosophers expound a theistic world view without any significant role whatever for transcendent revelation. If the theme of revelation is retained, the rationalists submerge it in the process of human reasoning. The competence of the mind to know metaphysical truth now means that, apart from any dependence on and necessity for divine disclosure, man is in his present condition able by rational inquiry to arrive at the whole truth about reality and life. On the basis of innate truths held to stock the human mind independently of revelation (contrary to Augustine), mathematical rationalists expected mathematical inquiry to demonstrate the nature of the externally real world and to unveil the secrets of its inner behavior. In Spinoza’s view, man’s clear intuition of truth is the equivalent of divine intuition; not transcendent revelation by a divine Mind but mathematical reasoning, which assertedly penetrates to the essential structure of the ultimately real world, is the decisive criterion of truth.

The turn is now readily made to the view that knowledge gained from human intelligence is more trustworthy than what is presumably derived from revelation. Many philosophers next insist that the legitimacy of metaphysics depends upon the exclusion of divine revelation as a source of truth and reliance only upon reason uninformed by revelation. The eighteenth-century deists elaborated their case for an “Author of Nature” on the ground of rationalistic reflection alone. Religious philosophy henceforth considers revelation a bothersome and discomfiting motif except it be viewed—as by Hegel—as simply another term for human discovery. Unwavering confidence is nourished in the capacity of the faculty of reason to guide man toward a realization of the kingdom of God on earth, without special supernatural assistance; and the practical successes of science are thought to reinforce this view.

Although Kant, like Hume, retains the term *revelation* in its traditional understanding, he does so only to reject it, and allows it no more formative cognitive significance than did Hume. For the philosophical rationalists, knowledge is certain and beyond need of correction revelationally or empirically in view of the secret divinity or intrinsically necessary constitution of the human mind. The historic Christian emphasis that man’s created finitude requires his dependence on transcendent revelation, and that the consequences of the fall for man’s ways of thinking make this dependence all the more imperative, is swept aside.

From the time of Hume forward the pretensions of philosophical rationalism are more and more put in the limelight. The rationalists readily assumed the infallibility of their own postulations, dignifying them as clearly apprehended principles. Such unqualified confidence in the competence of human reasoning was shaken, however, by the empirical contradiction of prevailing interpretations of the cosmos. Many empiricists were now increasingly content if explanation did not presume to render the realm of reality comprehensively intelligible, but rather identified universal laws that permit the dependable prediction and confident control of future events. The excesses of philosophical rationalism therefore encouraged an empirical reaction that boldly substituted a new method of knowledge alternative to reason, but one which was as hostile to transcendent revelation as was the rationalistic option, in view of the emphasis that the content of knowledge is supplied not by human reasoning but by sensation alone.

Kant becomes influentially decisive for a whole movement in philosophy that erases the significance of cognitive reason for metaphysical realities. The categories of thought are correlated only with empirical data. All thought is time-bound and space-bound because time and space are universal conditions of human experience. By the very limits of human reason as Kant stipulates these, man is cut off from any possession of transcendent truth. God is indeed an indispensable postulate, a regulative ideal demanded by the moral nature, contends Kant, but not an objective of cognitive knowledge. The only certainty that man can attain is the moral certainty that every human personality has inviolable worth, but no human being has or can have valid metaphysical knowledge. All claims by the metaphysicians about the objective nature of the ultimate world are considered invalid and outside the range of human knowing.

The one great post-Kantian rationalist is Hegel, who combines philosophical pantheism with an evolutionary view of reality as a developing logical process. The progressively manifested Absolute, he contends, comes to reflective self-consciousness in human minds in a dialectical development that is open to the future. Rudolf Lotze (1817–81) and other personal idealists identify only the cosmos, not human minds, as a part of God, contrary to Hegel, but they nonetheless hold an optimistic view of reason and submerge the priority of divine revelation in evolutionary considerations. Hegel did not view theology as an illicit enterprise; like Kant and Schliermacher, he contended that religion and belief in God are universal and necessary. But whereas the others denied objective cognitive knowledge of God, Hegel held that religion gains rational significance if one translates its otherwise imaginative pictorial representations into idealistic metaphysics. Revelational theology is therefore regarded as a parabolic expression of what the Hegelian philosophy transposes into univocal language and categories of thought. The way is thus prepared for philosophers of religion to hold that theology traffics in religious symbols not literally true, while valid assertions about transcendent reality are reserved for philosophy.

Some philosophical idealists, with an eye on the progressive historical manifestation of Hegel's Absolute, sought to vindicate the legitimacy of theology on the ground that it deals earnestly with the historical facets of religious experience, whereas philosophy expounds the general characteristics of the world and experience. Against those who demeaned historical facets of the Christian faith, William Ernest Hocking (1873–1966) commendably emphasized that Christianity cannot be disjoined from the life of its founder. Yet whoever understood the premise of his argument—that religious affirmations arise in the context of a particular religious history—recognized that Hocking intended no once-for-all claim for biblical religion, since he was saying also that Islam could not be dissociated from the Prophet nor Buddhism from the moment under the Bo tree when Buddha grasped a way of release from finite restlessness.

Idealistic philosophers inevitably subordinated all particularities to a general scheme which disallowed a theology of God's special disclosure, not only because they correlated metaphysical truth solely with the universally immanent activity of the Absolute, but also because they superimposed an evolutionary pattern that tolerated no final differences in the history of religions.

Long after it had peaked in Germany during the nineteenth century, Hegelian influence remained powerful in England, and then in America, its spell stretching over several decades. But new and startling voices appeared—among them Nietzsche, Freud and Marx—to insist that human reasoning largely rationalizes man's underlying biases, whether conscious, or unconscious, or rooted in class interest. As long as the West remained exuberant over liberal-democratic social changes, the influence of these views was restrained. But after the outbreak of World War I, and later with the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, the expansive ambitions of totalitarian communist rulers, and the waning credibility of political democracy, the prevalent trust in reason was deeply shaken, and the hope of social change was more and more correlated with coercion and violence.

The strength of philosophical rationalism lay in its insistence that the principles of logic and the mathematical sciences are not derived from experience, but make experience possible, and that truth is self-destructive unless non-contradictory and governed by the canons of reason. Yet the "impartial truth" which rationalist philosophers extolled was something far more elusive than they thought. Although emphasizing the priority of reason, the most brilliant rationalists had themselves produced a spectacular array of impressively competitive and conflicting world views, each highly consistent with its postulated first principles, yet diverging from the others despite the high claims made for certainty, consistency and coherence. Such disagreements among the early modern rationalists, no less than the correction of some of their contentions by empirical evidence, had already lent force to the counterviews of the scientific empiricists. The early modern era of philosophical theism gave way to the post-Kantian era of philosophical idealism, and that in turn to the age of philosophical naturalism, with its leading thinkers all the while justifying their conflicting schemes by an appeal to the demands of human reason.

It would therefore be uncritical simply to dismiss out of hand the complaint of logical positivists that talk about metaphysics is unintelligible nonsense. By the very test of noncontradiction on which rationalists insist, much of philosophical metaphysics must be false, even if little of it may be meaningless. Idealistic metaphysics even represented man's thoughts as God's thoughts, and man's doings as God's doings, premises all the more difficult after Freud and Hitler illuminated them. Some idealists insisted that time and the world of sense perceptions are unreal, while others identified the structure of the real world with their own mental perceptions. The annals of philosophy include much to provoke the charge that metaphysicians often assert what simply cannot be true. One need only think of the panorama of different divinities strenuously affirmed by eloquent advocates of speculative cosmologies and the diverse views of the ultimately real world soberly propounded in the name of disciplined and systematic reflection on the nature of things. Not only the logical positivist demands for verifiability but the Christian promulgation of revelation as well gains a certain sympathy from this wide-ranging disagreement among rationalistic metaphysicians.

So extensively has faith in the role of reason faltered during the past generation that the champions of philosophical reasoning have in many quarters been put to evident rout. "Confidence in reason among Western thinkers has for a couple of decades or more been steadily undermined," Edwin A. Burt states, "and ... the undermining in many cases has amounted to a

complete collapse. Feeling unable to save himself from impending catastrophe, and no longer trusting reason as a guide to the true and the good, Western man is easily led to hope that a supernatural source of truth and goodness may break in to save him from himself” (*Types of Religious Philosophy*, p. 375). This latter hope Burt decries as an escape to “the cult of unreason.” Yet among those for whom reliance on reason has all but come to an end, the yawning chasm of nihilism widens. The intellectual depletion of philosophical rationalism is an open invitation to despair, if no revealed Word, no truth of revelation, exists to shatter man’s pervasive fear that his noblest beliefs will inevitably be falsified, that all our best effort will empty into ultimate purposelessness, that the good is simply a man-made illusion.

Human reason is not a source of infallible truth about ultimate reality. For human intelligence is not infinite, and left to itself man’s reasoning all too evidently reflects his finitude. All speculative interpretations of reality and life projected on the basis of human insight and ingenuity—modern no less than ancient—are merely provisional in character. Whether arrived at by sustained scientific inquiry or disciplined philosophical reasoning, they are destined inevitably to revision and replacement. So limited is human life that no man has time or opportunity to gather all the information relevant to a comprehensive world-life view, and even if he could, volitional or emotional pressures upon the human spirit prejudice every man’s interpretation of the data. This best explains the fact that brilliant minds using the same canons of reason interpret reality in amazingly diverse ways, and expound competing views with compelling force.

The problem is not one of fundamental intellectual incompetence, or men could know nothing at all. Nor is it that the canons of reason and forms of logic are irrelevant to ultimate reality. Were that the case, we would be doomed from the outset to ontological skepticism. Rather, man the thinker, for whatever reason (Judeo-Christian theology would point to the fall and sinfulness of man) employs his intelligence to formulate comprehensive explanations of reality and life that not only rival each other, but together stand exposed as inadequate, inordinate world-wisdom when evaluated by the transcendent cognitive revelation which Judeo-Christian truth affirms. The human spirit slants its perspectives in a manner that does violence to the truth of revelation, while its very formulations are at the same time made possible because reason is a divine gift whose legitimate and proper use man has compromised.

These speculative world views gain a presumptive power over against the biblical explanation of life and reality in part because of what Christian theologians call the epistemic predicament of finite and sinful man, it being a sign of human unregeneracy that, despite the high mortality rate of all secular conceptualities alongside the ongoing relevance and power of the Christian revelation, intellectual frontiersmen so routinely assume that the scriptural outlook is obsolescent. This prejudice is further nurtured by the circumstance that, however much the numerous speculative alternatives conflict with each other, they conspire as a group to reinforce the leading tenets of the age. Secular metaphysical schemes more often put on parade the spirit of contemporary culture, setting its ruling assumptions in the context of comprehensive theory, than they question the controlling ideas of the present period. When these interpretative formulas are challenged by the premises of revealed religion—in accord with the Christian demand that the presumptions of every cultural era be tested from the standpoint of transcendent revelation—the whole gamut of secular world views (though individually canceling out each other) rallies in mutual support of the reigning tenets of the day. Secular theories falling far short of logical demonstration commend themselves as self-evident to the “mind of modernity” because they are intrinsically congenial to the contemporary mood. It is remarkable how frequently in the history

of philosophy a metaphysician who thinks that he has a revolutionary insight into the true nature of things succeeds only in projecting the spirit of the times on a cosmic scale.

So, for example, Harvey Cox warns us in *The Secular City* against the pitfall of embracing another exclusive world view, a warning that serves to move Christian supernaturalism to the margin and to make way for Cox's vigorous espousal of secular pragmatism. One hallmark of the secular city, Cox writes, is radical openness or tolerance of all viewpoints; no one viewpoint is taken as authoritative, for all inhabitants share a common structure. But this pluralistic tolerance is patently more apparent than real, for as Hendrik Hart incisively notes, Cox offers us "a religious position which claims to be nonreligious and a metaphysical stand which professes to be anti-metaphysical" (*The Challenge of Our Age*, p.114, n. 45). After acknowledging that metaphysical rationalism has lost its lease on life in the current scene, Cox then offers us a subtle version in the form of functional and operational pragmatism, a specious "religious" world view humanistically rooted and intolerant of any religion that challenges human autonomy.

The plight of the reflective man lacking anchorage in revelational realities is reflected in Dorothy Emmet's well-phrased observations: "Our minds seem impelled to seek or to create significance in their world as a whole in terms of concepts originally formed to express relations within experience. But, we ask, what warrant have we to suppose that the world views which result are more than the products of the mind's own impulse towards the creation of forms in which the imagination can rest, and a feeling of significance can be enjoyed? May not such world views, whether metaphysical or theological, prove in the end to be simply word patterns, drawn by developing the implications of ideas, such as the idea of 'Being,' the idea of 'Perfection,' the idea of the 'Good'; ideas which have indeed the power of evoking emotional response, but which are nonetheless merely ideas, and do not say anything about reality transcending appearance?" (*The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*, p.3). Miss Emmet adds: "Religious thinking may well have other concerns besides the epistemological question of the relation of our ideas to reality beyond ourselves. But here, if anywhere, this question cannot be avoided, since religion loses its nerve when it ceases to believe that it expresses in some way truth about our relation to a reality beyond ourselves which ultimately concerns us" (p.4).

The insistence of the classic Greek philosophers that some knowledge is foolproof and unfailingly accurate came to naught in their case, because induction and rational demonstration did not fulfill the high claims made for them. But that is no basis for insisting, as modern empiricism does, that man possesses no fixed and unrevisable truth whatever. Gordon Clark's comment is noteworthy: "It is consoling to know that at least part of the time we cannot be mistaken, if only we knew which part of the time it is" (*Thales to Dewey*, p. 121). The Judeo-Christian view proffers guidance: when divine revelation gets through, man has an ultimate and final word.

The secular withdrawal of reason from revelation shapes the illusion among many modern thinkers that a reliance on revelation implies, as Burt thinks, an enthronement of the irrational. This notion that reason must in principle be antirevelational then gains credence. No profounder misconception of Judeo-Christian actualities is thinkable. A deity related to man only in terms of contradiction and paradox can serve neither the cause of revelation, reason or experience. In the biblical perspective even the role of rational consciousness and cerebral cognition is something more than the life of Reason (capitalized as by the nineteenth-century idealists); that reductive mumpsimus long obscured the transcendent Logos and the intelligible disclosure of the Living God, before technocratic scientism wholly mechanized the life of the mind.

By “reliable knowledge” evangelical theology does not mean universal formulas that are “scientifically sound” because technocratic experts expect reality to respond to a prescribed manipulation with impersonal predictability that is empirically verifiable. Nor does it mean comprehensive schemas about the whole of reality postulated by this world’s profoundest intellectual giants. To be sure, it strenuously insists that reason is the test of truth. But by true knowledge it means nothing more or less than truth as God knows and reveals it, and that will include whatever any philosopher and any scientist says without need of retraction.

Metaphysics is not a matter only of grandiose theories about the interrelationships of all existence; even the barest assertions about reality are implicitly metaphysical. The Christian revelation concerns both the entirety and the minutiae of life and reality. G. C. Berkouwer reminds us that man stands in a universe in which he is addressed—“over against nihilism it must be asserted that human life bears an *answering* character”—and that, whether conscious of it or not, man’s whole life is a reply to the revelation of God (“General and Special Divine Revelation,” pp.16 ff.). In this context we can understand both a generation that ventures positivist “proofs” of God’s nonexistence, and one that mounts ill-advised “proofs” of his existence. The deep skepticism that disowns the meaning-fulness and purposiveness of the cosmos and speaks mainly of the anxiety and anguish of human life can be seen not simply as a human questioning of reality, but as a divine questioning of modern man through an ultimate revelation that forestalls any absolute defamation of created existence.

Yet so influentially have towering theologians in the recent past withdrawn from the rational validity of metaphysical commitments, that their emphases are rightly designated as dialectical and/or existential to emphasize their departure from evangelical rational theism.² Not infrequently the protestations of such theologians against metaphysics coalesced ‘with the negations of the logical positivists,³ and some rejoiced prematurely and uncritically in the discomfiture of all philosophers, little aware that the destructive firebombs dropped on such massive terrain would soon encircle the theological sector also. Worse yet, dialectical and existential theologians unwittingly helped to fortify positivist positions. For their frontline of advance against the claims of metaphysicians was the thesis that man has no cognitive knowledge of transcendent reality; many neo-Protestant theologians, however contrary their ultimate intentions, asserted this as vigorously as positivist philosophers.

Rationalism has swerved between two radical extremes in its attitude toward revelation. There is the widespread present admission that reason is barren as a source of final truth, but that it would be a sell-out to madness to invoke revelational theology. But a very different tradition in the history of philosophy, not without recent representatives, holds that philosophy finds its ideal

² If one restricts the term, *metaphysics* to secular philosophy, as do some recent Christian scholars (e.g., D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, Herman Dooyeweerd, H. G. Stoker), then the biblical revelation offers no metaphysics, and in accord with this approach, Calvinistic philosophy is now sometimes held to offer no metaphysics. But this is highly confusing. Modern theologians, whose stance is antimetaphysical in the sense that divine revelation is noncognitive and that we cannot have knowledge of God as he objectively is, mean something very different when they make similar disclaimers for the Bible and the Reformers—to wit, that they affirm only relational, and not ontological truth about God.

³ While positivism views historic Christianity as simply another specious metaphysics, evangelical Christianity looks upon logical positivism as an updated version of specious rationalism (see chapter 5).

intellectual expression and summit in theology. For Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and even Spinoza, philosophy is at its apex an intellectual love of the Divine. It is this regard for theology as “the inner side of a philosophy,” to use Miss Emmet’s phrase (*The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*, p. 150), that turns some systems of metaphysics into a religious faith, albeit a false one. Such outlooks on the surface eliminate a direct clash between philosophy and theology. But, insofar as theology is viewed as the capstone of speculative philosophy, they do so only by denying the comprehensive intellectual implications of revealed theology, and in principle even deny to theology its own right of survival on the basis of special divine disclosure. Sooner or later—and usually sooner than its advocates think—this view works itself around to the other, in which rationalists suspect and disown all theology, only to discover at last that in doing so they have both idolatized reason and emptied it into a vain thing.

“The nature of metaphysical method and the sense, if any, in which metaphysics can be called knowledge, is an open question as it has been at no time since Kant wrote his Critique,” writes Miss Emmet (*ibid.*, p. 2). Few today, she adds, propose “some positive way of interpreting the nature of things . . . in the full sense perhaps only Whitehead and Alexander, and these belong to the passing generation. Such formulation of a comprehensive world-life view has been out of fashion and favor in the recent past not solely because of philosophical preoccupation with method and analysis, since numerous examples might be given of the exaltation of method itself into metaphysics. Not least of all Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology and logical positivism’s conflation of the question of meaning into that of verification. Nor is this avoidance of a comprehensive system due only to the pervasive modern doubt that man’s cognition can reach to the nature of God and metaphysical realities. It is due primarily to the squandered biblical conviction that the Logos of God is the coordinating reality that holds together thought, life and experience. Through the forfeiture of this mass idea rational philosophy has become impoverished to the point of nihilistic exhaustion.

Christianity depicts itself—essentially theological though it be—not as a supremely constructed metaphysical theory, but as a revelation, differing in kind from secular philosophies grounded in rational reflection. This revelational alternative can lift the philosophical enterprise once again above theories that are essentially irrational, and can restore reason to indispensable importance, without abetting rationalism; it can overcome the current addiction to the nonobjectivity of knowledge, and rout the notion of intellectually fatigued commentators that no coherent coordination of theology, ethics, science, art and socio-economic principles is any longer possible. At the same time, the theology of revelation offers something other than a revival of mere meta-physical dogmatism; Christianity has no desire to play in the same league with communist, logical positivist, or process philosophy theoreticians. Its basic premise is that the living God should be allowed to speak for himself and to define the abiding role of reason and the meaning of revelation. The mystical approach inexcusably shrouds the self-revealed God in ineffability. The empirical approach cannot arrive at the truth because it is committed to an unending search (the New Testament speaks of those who are “ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth,” *2 Tim. 3:7*, KJV). The rationalistic approach subordinates the truth of revelation to its own alternatives and has speculated itself into exhaustion. If we are again to speak confidently of metaphysical realities, the critically decisive issue is on what basis—human postulation or divine revelation?

SPECIAL DIVINE REVELATION AS RATIONAL

by Gordon H. Clark

The handiwork and the glory of God displayed by the heavens and the firmament have been called General Divine Revelation. In this category one may also include the constitution of human personality, for man himself is a creation of God and in some sense bears the marks of his Creator. This “light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation.” It is thus that the Westminster Confession briefly warns us that general revelation is inadequate. This inadequacy is partly a result of the noetic effects of sin, but there is a prior and inherent inadequacy as well.

I. INADEQUACY OF GENERAL REVELATION

The beclouding effects of sin upon the mind as it tries to discover God and salvation in nature may best be seen in the divergent results obtained among the pagan religions. The ancient Babylonians, Egyptians, and Romans looked on the same nature that is seen by the modern Moslem, Hindu, and Buddhist. But the messages that they purport to receive are considerably different. This, which is so evident when these far away religions are mentioned, holds true also within Western civilization. What the humanist and logical positivist see in nature is entirely different from what the orthodox Christian believes about nature. Even if the humanist professes to discover in experience certain moral ideals and spiritual values that are at least superficially similar to those of the Bible, it can well be supposed that he actually learned them from his Christian heritage and not from an independent study of nature and man. The kindly atmosphere of humanitarianism is notably absent from societies to which the Christian message has not been taken.

The existence of divergent concepts of God, of moral ideals, and above all of schemes of salvation show the power of sin in the mind of man; but they also show the inherent inadequacy of general revelation. It is not because of sin alone that man fails to get God’s message. The truth is that nature has less of a message than some people, particularly some Christian people, think.

The planets above and the plants below show some of the wisdom and power of God; that is to say, they show it to those who already believe that God has created them. Even to a devout Christian, however, the universe does not show the full power and wisdom of God, for God has not exhausted himself in his creation. No doubt the stellar systems display a vast and unimaginable power, yet a greater number of stars with more complicated motions is conceivable. Therefore omnipotence is not a necessary conclusion from the stars.

Neither is righteousness. The moral attributes that the Bible ascribes to God are still less deducible from an observation of nature. Indeed, the problem of evil-physical calamities like earthquakes and tragedies caused by wicked men has led some philosophers to deny God altogether or to posit a finite god. John Stuart Mill thought that the universe tended imperfectly toward the production of good; modern humanists are more likely to say that the universe is neutral with respect to the hopes and aspirations of man; while Bertrand Russell and Joseph Wood Krutch counsel bravery in the face of inevitable defeat. These various opinions, though

partly due to human sinfulness, depend as much, I believe, on the inadequacy of general revelation in itself. God's message in the heavens is simply not extensive enough to cover these questions.

Again, the Hebrew-Christian view that "the heavens declare the glory of God" does not, in my opinion, mean that the existence of God can be formally deduced from an empirical examination of the universe. If on some other grounds we believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we can see that the heavens declare his glory; but this is not to say that a person who did not believe in this God could demonstrate his existence from nature. Further reference to this point will be made a little later.

Now, finally, the inadequacy of general revelation is most obvious in the case of ideals or ethical norms. And this inadequacy is not solely the result of sin, but it is an inherent inadequacy. The exposure of infants in Greece, temple prostitution in Babylonia, human sacrifice in Canaan and elsewhere, were not practices which those societies condemned; they had full social sanction. These were their norms, these were their moral ideals. Similarly, contemporary humanism, though some of its values are superficially similar to Christian precepts, diverges more and more from the Biblical identification of right and wrong. Jesus is no longer regarded as sinless, but is accused of minimizing the values of scientific intelligence, of holding inferior sociological views on labor and property, and even of insisting on too rigid a sexual standard.

If, now, someone wishes to argue that this ethical divergence does not indicate the inadequacy of general revelation, but merely the darkness of the sinful mind, the clinching reply, for a Christian, is that God spoke to Adam *before the fall* and gave him commands that he could not have otherwise known.

When Adam was created and placed in the Garden of Eden, he did not know what to do. Nor would a study of the Garden have led to any necessary conclusion. His duty was imposed upon him by a special divine revelation. God told him to be fruitful and multiply, to subdue nature, to make use of the animals, to eat of the fruit of the trees, with one fateful exception. Thus moral norms, commands and prohibitions were established by a special and not a general revelation. Only so could man know God's requirements, and only so later could he learn the plan of salvation.

Such is the Christian viewpoint. Secular philosophers today assert that the story of Adam is a myth and that the idea of special revelation is irrational. Dependence is placed in reason, not in revelation. All truth is to be obtained by one method, the method of science. The Bible is alleged to be self-contradictory and historically inaccurate; its morals are those of a bygone age; and evolution is credited with disproving creation. These themes have been well publicized and widely accepted. Can the Christian therefore face the charge of intellectual dishonesty, frequently brought against him, and meet the objection that revelation is unreasonable?

II. DEFENSE OF REVELATION AS RATIONAL

In the history of Christian thought, the antithesis between faith and reason has been approached by several different methods. The debate, whether among Christians or between Christians and secularists, sometimes generates confusion because the terms are not always clearly defined. Not only do Augustine and Kant differ as to the nature of faith, but the term reason itself has borne different meanings. After providing a minimum of historical background, the writer hopes to avoid such confusion by suggesting a definition of reason that may help in the defense of revelation as rational.

The Medieval Scholastic Attempt

In this brief historical survey, the first method of relating faith and reason to be discussed will be *the Thomistic philosophy* of the Roman Catholic Church. Aside from the personal assent of the believer, faith in this system means the revealed information contained in the Bible, tradition, and presumably the living voice of the Church. Faith then is revealed truth. Reason means the information that can be obtained by a sensory observation of nature as interpreted by intellection. Whereas the rationalists of the seventeenth century contrasted reason with sensation, Thomas contrasts reason with revelation. Truths of reason are those truths which may be obtained by man's natural sensory and intellectual equipment without the aid of supernatural grace.

These definitions of faith and reason make revelation "unreasonable" only in a verbal manner; revelation cannot be called unreasonable or irrational in any pejorative sense. Sometimes one suspects that the secularists seize upon the verbalism to suggest something more sinister.

Thomism indeed insists on an incompatibility between faith and reason, but it is a psychological incompatibility. If the Bible reveals that God exists, and if we believe the Bible, we have this truth of faith. It is possible, however, according to Thomism to demonstrate the existence of God from ordinary observation of nature. Aristotle did it. But when a person has rationally demonstrated this proposition, he no longer "believes" it, he no longer accepts it on authority he "knows" it. It is psychologically impossible to "believe" and to "know" the same proposition. A teacher may tell a student that a triangle contains 180 degrees, and the student may believe the teacher. But if the student learns the proof, he no longer accepts the theorem on the word of the teacher, he knows it for himself. Not all the propositions of revelation may be demonstrated in rational philosophy. But on the other hand some truths capable of demonstration have also been revealed to man, for God well knew that not all men have the intellectual capacity of Aristotle. Therefore God revealed some truths, even though demonstrable, for the sake of the greater part of mankind.

The non-demonstrable contents of revelation (such as the doctrines of the Trinity and the Sacraments), though outside the range of reason as defined, are not irrational or nonsensical. Medieval Mohammedans and modern humanists may claim that the Trinity is irrational, but reason is quite competent to show that this doctrine does not contain any self-contradiction and that the objections to it are fallacious. The higher truths of faith do not violate any of the conclusions of reason; on the contrary, the doctrines of revelation complete what reason could not finish. The two sets of truths, or, better, the truths obtained by these two different methods are complementary. Far from being a hindrance to reason, faith can warn a thinker that he is blundering. One should not picture the believer as a prisoner to his faith who should be liberated; faith restricts only from error. Thus faith and reason are in harmony.

Only one criticism of this construction will be made, but it is one which Thomists and objectors alike will concede to be crucial. If the cosmological argument for the existence of God is a logical fallacy, Thomism and its view of the relation between faith and reason cannot stand.¹

¹ Some Romanists take the cosmological argument, not as logically demonstrative, but as a method of directing the attention to certain features of finite beings from which the existence of God can be seen without a discursive process. G. I. Mascall, *Words and Images*, p. 84. But, I judge, this is not standard Thomism.

The difficulties with the cosmological argument recall the earlier comments on the inadequacy of general revelation. If it is assumed that all knowledge begins in sensory experience and that therefore one looks out on nature in ignorance of God, the manifest calamities of men and the finitude and change of nature, vast though the galaxies may be, preclude any necessary conclusion to the existence of an omnipotent God who is good as well.

To these objections which Hume stated so forcefully may be added specific criticisms of Thomas's Aristotelian formulation. Three criticisms will be mentioned. First, Thomism cannot survive without the concepts of potentiality and actuality, yet Aristotle never succeeded in defining them. Instead he illustrated them by the change of phenomena and then defined change or motion in terms of actuality and potentiality. To justify this objection would require too much technical apparatus for the present purpose; and if the reader wish, he need put no stress on this first point.

Second, Thomas argues that if we trace back the causes of motions, still this regress cannot go on to infinity. The reason explicitly given in the *Summa Theologica* for denying an infinite regress is that in such a case there could not be a first mover. But this reason, which is used as a premise to conclude for the denial, is precisely the conclusion that Thomas puts at the end of the complete argument. The argument is supposed to prove the existence of a first mover, but this first mover is assumed in order to deny an infinite regress. Obviously therefore the argument is a fallacy.

There is a third and still more complicated criticism. Inasmuch as this involves material that has recently become a subject of widespread debate, it is worthy of more detailed attention.

For Thomas Aquinas there are two ways of knowing God: first, the way of negative theology, which we shall not discuss; and second, the method of analogy. Since God is pure being, without parts, whose essence is identical with his existence, the terms applied to him cannot be used in precisely the sense in which they applied to created things. If it is said that a man is wise and that God is wise, it must be remembered that the wisdom of man is an acquired wisdom, while God has never learned. The human mind is subject to the truth; truth is its superior. But God's mind is the cause of the truth by thinking it, or, perhaps, God is the truth. Hence the term "mind" does not mean precisely the same thing in the case of God and man. Not only these terms, but the notion of existence, also, is not the same. Since God's existence is his essence, an identity unduplicated in any other instance, even the word "existence" does not apply univocally to God and the world of creation.

At the same time Thomas does not wish to admit that the terms are equivocal. When it is said that playboys lead *fast* lives, while ascetics *fast*, the word has no meaning in common. Though the letters and pronunciation are the same, the intellectual contents in the two instances are utterly diverse. Between such equivocation and strict univocity, Thomas asserts that words may have an analogical use; and that in the case of God and man, the predicates are applied analogically.

If, now, the analogical meanings of 'wise' or of "existence" had a common area of meaning, that common area could be designated by a univocal term. This term then could be applied univocally to God and man. But Thomas insists that no term can be so applied. This in effect removes all trace of identical meaning in the two instances. But if this be so, how can an argument, the cosmological argument, be formally valid, when its premises use terms in one sense and the conclusion uses those terms in a completely different sense? The premises of the cosmological argument speak of the *existence of movers* within the range of human experience;

the conclusion concerns the *existence* of a first *mover*. But if these terms are not taken univocally, the argument is a fallacy.

Therefore the Thomistic attempt to relate faith and reason—more because of its view of reason than its view of faith—must be adjudged a failure, and another attempt must be made to defend the rationality of revelation.

The Renaissance Attack

The dominance of the medieval scholastic viewpoint, of which Thomas was the most brilliant example, ceased with the Reformation and Renaissance. Since this chapter aims to defend the Reformation position, *the Renaissance* will be discussed first. The discussion must be extremely brief: because the Renaissance gave rise to modern secular philosophy, the subject is too vast. Modern philosophy, moreover, is not a method of harmonizing faith and reason, but of denying faith in favor of reason. Nevertheless, something ought to be said to indicate that this modern attack on revelation has not been completely successful.

Certain details of the attack, such as the allegations that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch because writing had not yet been invented in his day, and that the Hittites never existed, are more appropriately treated under the topic of higher criticism. Here only the guiding principles of its philosophy can be kept in view.

These guiding principles were those employed in the crucial problem of knowledge. Epistemology is the attempt to show that knowledge is possible; and modern philosophy is heavily epistemological. Did these schools succeed in establishing rational knowledge apart from faith or revelation?

The first main school was the seventeenth century school of rationalism. Their basic belief was that all knowledge is derived from logic. One should note that by reason these men meant logic as opposed to sensation. Experience, in their opinion, was the source of error. Only that which could be demonstrated as theorems of geometry are demonstrated, i.e., without appeal to experimentation, as trustworthy.

In general these thinkers, of whom Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz were by far the greatest, relied on the ontological argument to prove the existence of God. The ontological argument contends that God has the attribute of existence just as a triangle has the attribute of containing 180 degrees. To deny that God exists is as much a self-contradiction as to deny the geometrical theorem. Thus the existence of God is proved by reason alone, that is by pure logic, without an appeal to sensory experience. Then from the existence of God the rationalists attempt to deduce the laws of science.

Not many contemporary philosophers think that the ontological argument is valid; no contemporary thinker admits that Descartes or Spinoza succeeded in deducing the contents of science in the manner indicated. However stimulating the rationalists may be, however informative on some points, they are universally judged to have failed in the main matter of showing that knowledge is possible. Therefore a Christian can legitimately claim that their attack on revelation collapses with their system as a whole. This is a brief and summary treatment of rationalism indeed, but no one will expect a complete history of modern philosophy in these pages.

Empiricism remains today as a living philosophy. Therefore it may not be said that Locke, Berkeley, and Hume are universally regarded as complete failures. Yet today's empiricism is noticeably different from the eighteenth century variety; and in some cases where it shows

greater similarity, one wonders what answers the empiricist would give to the standard objections against Hume.

There are three chief objections to empiricism. First, the impossibility of discovering any “necessary” connection between events or ideas (i.e., the denial of causality) makes historical and scientific investigation futile. At best, knowledge could not extend beyond one’s own present impressions and their traces in memory. Second, the disintegration of “the self” results in a world of perceptions that no percipient perceives. This in effect annihilates memory. Third and fundamental, empiricism makes use of space and time surreptitiously at the beginning of the learning process, while explicitly these concepts are learned only at the end.

Thus empirical objections to revelation, and in particular Hume’s argument against miracles, are deprived of all foundation.

Immanuel Kant tried bravely to remedy the defects of empiricism by assigning to the mind certain a priori forms. Space and time were supposed to preserve meaning for sensory experience, and the a priori categories were to make thinking possible. Kant’s works stand as a monument to his genius, but hardly had the later volumes been published than Jacobi put his finger on a very sore spot. To enter Kant’s system it is necessary to assume “things-in-themselves,” but the full theory of categories makes the assumption impossible. This conflict between the *a priori* forms of the mind and the matter given in sensation started the advance to Hegel.

During his lifetime Hegel attained the acme of professional recognition, and for seventy-five years more his thought was extremely influential. Yet today we see that two of his students, who completely rejected his absolute idealism, Karl Marx and Soren Kierkegaard, have won the decisive battle against him. There are still idealists, of course; and Hegel may still count a few followers. But the assertion of Hegelian bankruptcy cannot be dismissed as a prejudiced Christian device to maintain a theory of revelation.

However, as long as Hegel has some disciples and as long as remnants of empiricism remain, one might insist that these philosophies have not been conclusively refuted. Therefore, although these viewpoints are not in my opinion the characteristic position of the twentieth century, a Christian defense of revelation is probably under some obligation to show how they should be treated. Unfortunately, not more than one example can be included.

The late Edgar Sheffield Brightman worked out a philosophy of religion along mainly empirical lines, though retaining some ideas from Kant. Values and religious ideals were to be discovered in experience; revelation either plays no part, or, if it is theoretically possible, still it must be judged on the basis of reason. Revelation, he says, must be tested by reason, not reason by revelation. By the term reason, Brightman does not mean the processes of logic as did the rationalists; for him reason is a set of empirically derived principles by which we organize the universe of our experience. He speaks of concrete empirical reason as opposed to bare formal logic. Revelation, he asserts, cannot be used as the basic principle by which to organize experience.

Historically, of course, revelation has been so used; and Brightman never shows why, if there is a living God, revelation could not possibly furnish us with information that would enable us to understand the world and organize our lives. Serious flaws in Brightman’s conception of God I have discussed elsewhere (cf. *A Christian View of Men and Things*, Eerdmans, 1952).

What is perhaps the basic difficulty is one that Brightman shares with the humanists, though generally he and they are in radical disagreement. Their concurrence on this point therefore gives it considerable importance, for it furnishes a test that extends beyond the views of one man.

The vulnerable point of Brightman's empirical method, and of all contemporary empiricism, is the professed derivation of genuine values from experience. That there are factors in experience which people actually enjoy is not to be denied. But the problem is to go from the actual and diverse enjoyments to values that have a legitimate claim upon all people. One man enjoys prayer; another whiskey. One man enjoys the life of a retired scholar; another enjoys being a brutal dictator. Can experience show that these are anything more than personal preferences? Can experience furnish a ground for a universal moral obligation? It is my conclusion, supported by detailed argument in the volume just cited, that this is impossible. For such reasons, then, these remnant philosophies fail to undermine Biblical revelation.

Post-Hegelian philosophy is an important factor in arriving at this negative judgment on the "reason" of Spinoza, Hume, and Hegel. The criticisms of Marx, Nietzsche, and the contemporary instrumentalists have damaged this reason beyond repair. Insofar as these men have signaled the failure of modern philosophy to solve the epistemological problem, their conclusions seem incontrovertible. But since they are violently opposed to revelation, they have been forced to adopt a skepticism so deep that not even reason in the sense of the laws of logic is exempt.

In anticipation of Freud, Nietzsche tells us that all thinking is controlled by biological functions. The distinction between truth and falsity as such is unimportant: a false opinion that sustains life is better than a truth that does not. In fact, truth might well be defined as the kind of error without which a species cannot live. Logic with its law of contradiction is the result of a blind evolution which might have been different. At any rate, logic falsifies nature; it puts different things into the same category by ignoring their differences; and the coarser the organ, the more similarities it sees. The fact that we use logic merely signifies our inability to examine more closely; and the result is that logic holds good only for assumed existences which we have created and not for the real world.

F.C.S. Schiller, A. J. Ayer, Jean Paul Sartre, each in his own way attacks the necessity of logic. Thus the typical philosophic position of the twentieth century is not so much to be designated skepticism as outright irrationalism.

The Neo-orthodox Compromise

Although these men are openly anti-Christian, there is also a twentieth century form of irrationalism, derived directly from Hegel's student Kierkegaard, that clothes itself with Christian terminology and tries to avoid the excesses of Nietzsche by an appeal to revelation. It sometimes claims to be a return to the Reformation point of view. One must ask not only whether this claim can be historically justified, but more particularly whether this philosophy provides an adequate validation of the Christian concept of revelation.

This so-called neo-orthodox or existential movement willingly admits that reason has come to grief. Even inanimate nature is beyond intellectual understanding because there is no motion in logic and no logic in motion. Becoming is open and reality is chance. If logic founders on physical motion, it is all the more impotent in the issues of life. What is needed is not conclusions but decisions. We must therefore make a leap of faith and accept a revelation from God.

To many devout people, disturbed by the popularity of secular scientism oppressed by the deadening influence of modernism, and (unjustifiably) frightened by the negations of higher criticism, neo-orthodoxy seemed like manna from on high. Revelation had now been saved; reason had been defeated!

However, before the heirs of Luther and Calvin can properly rejoice, they must know precisely what this revelation is, what sort of faith is meant, and whether anything of worth remains after reason's defeat. The failure of seventeenth century rationalism causes no alarm; the fate of Hume and Hegel can be taken in stride; Brightman's concrete and empirical reason can well be dispensed with; but what remains if reason in the sense of the laws of logic has to be abandoned? Of what value would be an irrational or illogical revelation?

The chief law of logic is the law of contradiction, and it is this law that maintains the distinction between truth and falsity. If this distinction cannot be maintained, then as the ancient Sophists showed, all opinions are true and all opinions are false. Any proposition is as credible as any other. If therefore Nietzsche or Freud have used reasoning in coming to their position, and if reasoning distorts reality, and if one theory is no more true than another, it follows that these men have no good ground for asserting their theories. To deny reason, in the sense of the laws of logic, is to empty conversation or argument of all meaning.

Now, this is what neo-orthodoxy as well as Nietzsche does. In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard had said that it makes no difference whether a man prays to God or to an idol, provided he prays passionately. Truth, he said, lies in the inward How, not in the external What. If only the How of the individual's relation is "true," then the individual is in truth, even though he is thus related to untruth.

Brunner also abolishes the distinction between truth and falsity. First, he refers to a kind of "truth" that cannot be expressed in words or grasped in intellectual concepts. What this truth is, no one can say. Second, the words, sentences, and intellectual content that "point to" this hidden truth may or may not be true. God can reveal himself (*Wahrheit als Begegnung*, p. 88) through false propositions as well as through true ones. We can never be sure, therefore, that what God tells us is true. Falsehood and truth have equal value.

Surely such value must be very little. For one thing, it relieves us of the responsibility of being consistent. Our creed can contain contradictory articles. Brunner argues that "straight line inference" must be curbed. We dare not follow out our principles to their logical conclusions. Not always, at any rate. Brunner, indeed, points out Schiclermacher's contradiction in insisting both on the absoluteness of Christianity and the discovery of a common element in all religions. He is also consistent when he argues that man must have been created righteous, for otherwise there could have been no Fall. But when Brunner comes to [Romans 9](#) and finds its obvious meaning distasteful, he declares that election is illogical and that if we drew inferences from it, we would conclude that God is not love. One cannot have love and logic both. Hence the Bible is consistently illogical.²

But if the Bible is illogical and if Brunner is illogical, do we not have a logical right to ignore them, for there is no illogical necessity that our faith should leap in their direction?

The purpose of the whole argument to this juncture has been to make three points: neo-orthodoxy's irrational defense of revelation is self-destructive; modern philosophy's rational attack on revelation left itself without an epistemological foundation; and the kind of reason Thomism used to defend revelation was beset with fallacies. But now to continue the argument, the general procedure of Reformation thought provides another possibility for a rational revelation.

² For a thorough analysis of Brunner's thought, see the excellent volume, *Brunner's Concept of Revelation*, by Paul King Jewett, James Clarke & Co., 1954.

The Reformation Way

In this case a *rational* revelation is one that preserves the distinction between truth and falsity. It is in its entirety self-consistent. In other words, reason is identified as the laws of logic. Christianity is under no obligation to justify itself as rational in any other sense, for the history of philosophy has shown that all the other senses result in skepticism. Therefore to claim that election, or the atonement, or any other doctrine is “irrational” is nothing more than to assert that these doctrines are distasteful to the objector. The accusation is not a substantiated intellectual conclusion, but an emotional antipathy. If the Biblical doctrines are self-consistent, they have met the only legitimate test of reason. This test of logic is precisely the requirement that a set of propositions be meaningful, whether spoken by God or man. And if propositions have no meaning, obviously they reveal nothing.

It is now fair to ask whether this construction is historically the Reformation viewpoint. Did Luther and Calvin accept the Bible as self-consistent, and did they recognize the sole tests of logic?

The first of these two questions is the easier to answer. That the Bible presents a self-consistent intellectual system, and that Calvin was convinced of it, has been made sufficiently clear in his *Institutes* and *Commentaries*. The Westminster Confession is additional testimony. The Calvinistic love of logic is well known; and, as has been seen, it was a distaste for Calvinism that led Brunner to reject logic. This point, therefore, is characteristic of the Reformed faith.

The second of these two questions is more complicated because the Reformers did not explicitly discuss logic as the sole test of a rational revelation. Their silence is understandable, however, for irrationalism is mainly a twentieth century phenomenon that they did not anticipate. Nevertheless, that the preceding construction is implicit in their views may be plausibly inferred from their methods. They abandoned the scholastic philosophy; they spent no time attempting to prove the existence of God, much less the sensory origin of knowledge; the contrast between the *Institutes* and the *Summae* of Thomas is unmistakable. Hence they could not have used any “concrete and empirical reason.” Then, too, the principle that the Scriptures are their own infallible interpreter, and that what is unclear in one passage can be understood by a comparison with other passages, is nothing other than the application of the law of contradiction. Logic therefore must have been the only test that the Reformers could have used.

I freely admit that some passages in Calvin seem to allow for a less skeptical reaction to the course of philosophy than this chapter presents. They must, however, be understood in the light of other very definite statements found in the same contexts.

One of Calvin’s most generous acknowledgments of pagan learning is made in the *Institutes*, II, ii, ’4 if. The following summary and interpretation can easily be compared with the original. After rejecting the Platonic pre-existence of the soul, Calvin asserts that human ingenuity constrains us to acknowledge an innate intellectual principle in the human mind. Since this could not possibly be Brightman’s concrete empirical reason, is it not more likely that Calvin had the laws of logic in mind? With this innate equipment Roman lawyers delivered just principles of civil order; philosophers described nature with an exquisite science; those who by the art of logic have taught us to speak rationally cannot have been destitute of understanding; pagan mathematics could not have been the raving of madmen. No, the writings of the ancients are excellent because they proceeded from God.

This is indeed high praise. In fact, it is such high praise that its object can hardly be the absolute theoretical truth of pagan philosophies. Admittedly, Calvin was unaware of how

mistaken the ancient learning was; nor can it be supposed that he had elaborated an instrumental theory of science. Yet his admiration of the physics, logic, mathematics, and other arts and sciences of antiquity can comfortably and more plausibly be divided between the intellectual brilliance displayed and the practical applications made possible. It is the energy, the ingenuity, the exquisiteness of the ancients that he admires, rather than the truth of their systems.

In the immediate sequel, Calvin corrects some misapprehensions of his intention. With respect to the kingdom of God and spiritual wisdom the most sagacious of mankind are blinder than moles. The most apposite of their observations betray confusion. They saw the objects presented to their view in such a manner that by the sight they were not even directed to the truth, much less did they arrive at it. Fortuitously, by accident, some isolated sentences may be true; but human reason neither approaches, nor tends, nor directs its views towards the truth of God.

That Calvin did not base the truth and rationality of Scripture on external supports is better seen in an earlier chapter (I, viii.). The title is: *Rational Proof to Establish the Belief of the Scripture*. In a twentieth century setting this title is misleading. Today such a title would suggest an appeal to the superior authority of, perhaps, religious experience. This was not Calvin's intention.

Without a prior certainty of revelation, he says, a certainty stronger than any judgment of experience, the authority of the Scripture is defended in vain by arguments, by the consent of the church, or by any other support. Faith is founded, not in the wisdom of men, but by the power of God. For the truth is vindicated from every doubt, when, unassisted by foreign aid, it is sufficient for its own support. The thought of this significant sentence is repeated at the end of the same chapter. While there are many subsidiary reasons by which the native dignity of the Scripture may be vindicated, he says, such alone are not sufficient to produce firm faith in it, till the heavenly Father, discovering his own power therein (i.e., in the Scripture itself), places its authority beyond all controversy.

To these words of Calvin I should like to add only that the law of contradiction, or reason, is not an external test of Scripture. Logical consistency is exemplified in the Scripture; and thus the Scripture can be a meaningful revelation to the rational mind of man. Self-contradictory propositions would be meaningless, irrational, and could not constitute a revelation.

III. Some Contemporary Problems

If now Calvin could not have addressed himself explicitly to twentieth century problems, the obligation lies the more heavily on us. Of course, there are many, but there is one immediate attack on the possibility of a rational revelation that ought not to be ignored.

Theories of the origin, nature, and purpose of language have been recently developed that would prevent God from speaking the truth to man on the ground that language cannot convey literal truth. Some writers say that all language is symbolic or metaphorical. For example, Wilbur Marshall Urban (*Language and Reality*, pp. 383, 433) asserts that "There are no strictly literal sentences ... there is no such thing as literal truth ... any expression in language contains some symbolic element." Other writers make more restricted claims and say only that all religious language is metaphorical. From which it follows that if God uses language, he cannot tell the literal truth, but must speak in symbolism or mythology.

Those who defend the Bible as a true revelation must insist that it conveys literal truth. This does not mean that God cannot sometimes use symbolism and metaphor. Of course there is

symbolism in Ezekiel, there are parables in the Gospels, and there are metaphors scattered throughout. God might have used even mythology and fable. But unless there are literal statements along with these figures of speech, or at the very least, unless figures of speech can be translated into literal truth, a book conveys no definite meaning.

Suppose the cross be selected as a Christian symbol, and suppose some flowery speaker should say, Let us live in the shadow of the cross. What can he mean? What does the cross symbolize? Does it symbolize the love of God? Or does it symbolize the wrath of God? Does it symbolize human suffering? Or does it symbolize the influence of the church? If there are no literal statements to give information as to what the cross symbolizes, these questions are unanswerable.

Let a person say that the cross symbolizes the love of God. However, if all language or all religious language is symbolical, the statement that the cross symbolizes the love of God is itself a symbol. A symbol of what? When this last question is answered, we shall find that this answer is again a symbol. Then another symbol will be needed, and another. And the whole process will be meaningless.

This contemporary theory of language is open to the same objections that were raised against the Thomistic notion of analogical knowledge. In order to have meaning, an analogy, a metaphor, or a symbol must be supported by some literal truth. If Samson was as strong as an ox, then an ox must literally be strong. If Christ is the lion of the tribe of Judah, then something must be literally true about lions and about Christ also. No matter with what literary embellishment the comparison be made, there must be a strictly true statement that has given rise to it. And a theory that says all language is symbolic is a theory that cannot be taken as literally true. Its own statements are metaphorical, and meaningless.

Furthermore, a theory of language has to be taken as a part of a more general philosophic system. While some linguists may study a few minute details, a theory that concerns the origin, the nature, and the purpose of language presupposes some over-all view of human nature and of the world in which mankind exists. The contemporary theories are often based on an evolutionary philosophy in which human language is supposed to have originated in the squeals and grunts of animals. These evolutionary theories of language, and some that are not explicitly evolutionary, reveal their connection with epistemology by making sensory impressions the immediate source of language. The first words ever spoken were supposedly nouns or names produced by imitating the sound that an animal or a waterfall made; or if the object made no noise, some more arbitrary method was used to attach a noun to it.

When this view is accepted by Thomists, they inherit the problem of passing from a sensory based language to a proper mode of expressing theological propositions. The logical positivists, on the other hand, conclude with more show of reason that this cannot be done, and that theological language is nonsense. But in any case, a theory of language must be set into a complete system of philosophy. It cannot stand in isolation.

Both the naturalistic evolutionist and the evangelical Christian have their guiding principles. The former has no choice but to develop language from animal cries-no matter what the difficulties may be, and they are insuperable. The latter, by reason of the doctrine of creation, must maintain that language is adequate for all religions and theological expression no matter what the difficulties may be, but they are not very great. The possibility of rational communication between God and man is easily explained on theistic pre-suppositions.

If God created man in his own rational image and endowed him with the power of speech, then a purpose of language, in fact, the chief purpose of language, would naturally be the

revelation of truth to man and the prayers of man to God. In a theistic philosophy one ought not to say, as a recent Thomist has said, that all language has been devised in order to describe and discuss the finite objects of our sense-experience (E. L. Mascall, *Words and Images*, p. 101). On the contrary, language was devised by God, that is, God created man rational for the purpose of theological expression. Language is, of course, adaptable to sensory description and the daily routine of life, but it is unnecessary to invent the problem of how sensory expressions can be transmuted into a proper method of talking about God.

This immediately overturns the objection to verbal inspiration that is based on the alleged finitude and imperfections of language. If reason, i.e., logic, which makes speech possible, is a God-given faculty, it must be adequate to its divinely appointed task. And its task is the reception of divinely revealed information and the systematization of these propositions in dogmatic theology.

To sum up: language is capable of conveying literal truths because the laws of logic are necessary. There is no substitute for them. Philosophers who deny them reduce their own denials to nonsense syllables. Even where the necessity of logic is not denied, if reason is used in some other sense as a source of truth, the result has been skepticism. Therefore, revelation is not only rational, but it is the only hope of maintaining rationality. And this is corroborated by the actual consistency that we discover when we examine the verbally inspired revelation called the Bible.

The Relationship of God to the Space/Time Universe

By Dr. Robert A. Morey

The question of God's relationship to His creation is once again a matter of controversy. Most of the present discussions are inane because they completely ignore the Bible and assume that such issues are to be decided by *sola ratione* (reason alone). Various ancient heresies have been revived and some new twists have been invented as modern rationalists sit in the dark spinning out endless theories on God, time and space.

In the last five years a prestigious amount of theories have come and gone. The game is played as follows: You assert some theory and then sit back waiting for some fellow rationalist to refute you. The points and counterpoints fly back and forth like tennis balls. It is all done with a good sense of fun and there is a gentleman's agreement not to spoil the game by bringing up such killjoys as *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone).

By avoiding *Sola Scriptura*, a truly ecumenical situation is created in which errant Evangelicals join with Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Liberals, Neo-orthodox, processians, atheists, skeptics, cultists such as Mormons, and occultists in playing the natural theology game.

Now, I don't care how people spend their free time. If they want to waste their time pooling their ignorance with a bunch of anti-Christ, that's their business.

But what is disturbing is that they ask me to give them the money to play the game because they are doing "Christian" theology and philosophy. What a joke! Why should a true-blue Protestant give them a thin dime to print up Jesuit book reviews of Evangelical books? Let the Catholics pay for it. Why should Bible-believing Christians pay for the wild and heretical

speculations of far-out liberals who deny the fundamental doctrines of Christianity? Let the liberals pay for their own publications.

Well, enough of my gripes with the way the game is played, who is playing, and why I will not fund it. Humanists have been playing games with “god-words” since the “Golden Age” of Greek philosophy. They will play it until the Lord returns and closes it down (2 Thess. 1:7–8).

A Dialog With A “Christian” Humanist

Theist: I see you have recently put out a lot of new material. What are you trying to accomplish?

Humanist: We are working on solving some of the great issues in theology and philosophy such as the existence, nature, and attributes of God, the problem of evil, and the time/eternity problem.

Theist: Well, those are big issues and I assume that I will find some detailed exegesis on relevant passages in the Bible. After all, Paul warned us, “Do not go beyond what is Written.” (1 Cor. 4:6) If we do not heed his warning, we will end up in vain speculations.

Humanist: Oh, don’t be so stupid! If you brought the Bible into these discussions, the Catholics would walk out, the liberals would rebel, the Mormons would complain, and you would spoil everything. No, we have a gentleman’s agreement that no one is bring up the Bible in these discussions as if it were the ultimate authority. We may quote a proof text here and there but no one is going to do any serious exegesis.

Theist: If the Bible is not the final authority in your discussions, what is?

Humanist: We are all agreed that human Reason apart from and independent of the Bible is the Origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty. Reason is thus the only common ground on which we can discuss issues because it knows no creed or race. Since human Reason apart the Bible can solve these issues, why bring up divisive things such as the authority of the Bible?

Theist: This upsets me because you have asked me and other Evangelicals to pay for your publications when you promote the heresies of people who are absolutely opposed to everything Evangelical theology has historically confessed.

Humanist: I don’t see why you are upset. Yes, we do have Jesuits, liberals and even cultists writing articles for us. Anyone who believes in Reason and freewill is welcome to our group. I hope you are not one of those narrow-minded bigots who think that the Bible and Christianity have a corner on truth.

Theist: If believing in the exclusive nature of the biblical Gospel makes me a bigot in your eyes, so be it. You really think that rebel sinners can find the truth about God apart from the Bible?

Humanist: “All truth is God’s truth” means that we must learn from non-Christian religions.

Theist: I would like to debate you on that issue sometime. Would you be willing to do a public debate on the heathen issue?

Humanist: Yes, as long as you are not going to bring the Bible into the debate. The issue must be resolved on the basis of Reason alone instead of the Bible.

Theist: If I were to agree to *sola ratione*, I would denying *Sola Scriptura*! This I will never do. By limiting the debate in this way, you have excluded those who hold to historic Evangelical theology. Well, I don’t think the Catholics, the pagans, the Mormons, etc. would like what I had to say anyway. I see that you have recently published a lot of material on the issue of “God and Time.” I have studied this issue for over twenty years. Would you be willing to discuss the issue?

Humanist: Of course.

Theist: I see you framed the issue as “God and Time.” But have you framed it right? One of your writers objected to the order of the words and wanted it framed as “Time and God” because he wants to define “time” *before* seeing how it relates to “God.” I myself have wondered if it would not be more correct to begin with “God *or* Time” instead of “God and time.” After all, how we frame an issue may predetermine the outcome.

Humanist: What do you mean by using “or” instead of “and?”

Theist: The word “and” seems to suggest that God and time are being put on the same level. Wouldn’t it be more biblical to begin with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*? Thus the universe was not created “in,” “out” or “by” time but “out of nothing” or “no-thing,” including time.

According to [Gen. 1:1](#) and many additional passages such as [Col. 1:16](#), every “thing” was created by God *ex nihilo*. Surely, you must admit that time is a “thing.” How else would you discuss “it?”

Since the Bible clearly teaches the Creator/creature distinction, every “thing” must fall into one category or the other. Time is either on the Creator or creature side of the ledger. There is no third category found in the Bible. For example, [Gen. 1:1](#) does not state,

“In the beginning God and space”
“In the beginning God and time”
“In the beginning God and space/time”
“In the beginning God and chance”
“In the beginning God and the fates”
“In the beginning God and Chaos”
etc.

[Gen. 1:1](#) says, “In the beginning God” (plus *nothing*)

The historic Judeo/Christian doctrine is that the universe was created *ex nihilo*, i.e. out of nothing. Those who claim that the universe was created “in Time” are denying creation *ex nihilo*. Since that doctrine is part of the core of biblical religion, this is very serious indeed.

Humanist: Wait a minute. I know some fine Christians who teach that Time is as eternal as God and that the world was created “in” Time. Thus Time was not created *per se*. They have no problem saying, “In the beginning God and Time.” Time is neither Creator or creature but a third kind of being.

Theist: But where in the Bible is this “third kind of being” taught? Can you show me anywhere in Church history where this was taught?

Humanist: We are not limited by Scripture, Church history, creeds or confessions. If an idea is in accord with Reason, that is good enough for us.

Theist: But if time is as “eternal” as God, did God exist “in” Time or did Time exist “in” God for all eternity? Which one is the basis of the other’s existence? If God existed “in” eternal Time then Time becomes a “God” above or beneath God. How can you deny the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and still claim to be a Christian?

Humanist: Some of us do not accept the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. But we still feel that we are Christians.

Theist: There is nothing more clear and certain in the Bible than creation *ex nihilo*. Has not Christianity in every major creed professed it and cast out those who denied it? The Bible,

the early Church Fathers and the subsequent history of the Church is 100% against anyone who denies creation *ex nihilo*.

Humanist: Well, I must admit that you have a point.

Theist: Why do you follow the pagan philosophers in abstracting time from space? On what grounds do you absolutize it and then reduce all things to it-including God? I can see why the Greeks did that. They believed in such Time gods as Chronos and Chaos. But how can you, as a professing Christian, talk about Time in the same sense as these pagans? It is bad theology, poor philosophy and even poorer science.

Humanist: Philosophy has always assumed that “time” could be abstracted from space. We are beginning where the philosophers began. What is wrong with that?

Theist: You are assuming that “man is the measure of all things” - including God and time. But God has not been silent. He has spoken in Scripture. The Creator/creature distinction, like the Trinity, is a revealed truth that no philosopher ever imagined.

Humanist: If you limit the discussion to what the Bible says, the philosophers will rebel. They appeal to their Reason, not to the Bible.

Theist: God will humble them in due season. Has not God made foolish the philosophers of this world? (I Cor. 1:19–20) They did not seek God and thus it is no surprise that they never found Him. (Rom. 3:11; 1 Cor. 1:21).

Humanist: Boy, you are becoming mean! Are you saying that Plato and the other philosophers did not find God? That is not how the game is played!

Theist: Theology is not a game to me. It is a matter of eternal life or death. I have a suggestion. It is an intellectual exercise. Would you humor me a little?

Humanist: Sure.

Theist: What if we substituted the word “space” in the place of “time” in every argument for eternal time? For example, suppose someone said,
“A timeless being cannot create a temporal universe.”

It would now read,

“A spaceless being cannot create a spacial universe.”

If the first statement is deemed valid, on what grounds is the second deemed invalid? If the timelessness of God is denied, then the spacelessness of God is likewise denied. Thus God is limited by both time and by space. But who can make a credible claim to be a “Christian” and deny the omnipresence of God?

Again, if someone said,

If you say that God “exists,” this necessarily means that he must exist “in” something as opposed to “in” nothing. Otherwise the word “exist” has no meaning. Thus if God “existed” before the creation, then he must have existed “in” something before the creation. This something must then be as eternal as God himself. This something is eternal time.

Now we change it to read,

If you say that God “exists,” this necessarily means that he must exist “in” something as opposed to “in” nothing. Otherwise the word “exist” has no meaning. Thus if God “existed” before the creation, then he must have existed “in” something before the creation. This something must be as eternal as God himself. This something is eternal space.

To claim that God has to “exist” in something for eternity leaves it open to either space or time or space/time as that “something.” Why arbitrarily omit space from the equation?

Humanist: Well, some of our writers such as the Mormons do believe that the gods are limited by space and time. But I cannot accept the idea myself.

Theist: Let me give you another example. I read somewhere:

If you say that God exists, do you mean that he exists *now* as opposed to some past or future existence? Doesn't the Bible talk about God existing now in his temple? If you believe that he exists *now*, then he must exist in time because the word "now" is a temporally bound term. God is thus limited by time.

Now replace time with space.

If you say that God exists, do you mean that he exists *here* as opposed to some other place? Doesn't the Bible talk about God being "in" his temple?

If you believe that he exists *here*, then he must exist in space because the word "here" is a spacially bound term. God is thus limited by space.

Humanist: I don't go to that extreme. If I applied to space the exact same arguments I use on time, I would end up with a finite god! Some people in our group have gone there. But I accepted Jesus as my Savior when I was sixteen years old and I have to draw the line somewhere.

Theist: I appreciate where your heart is. But your emotions should not be in charge of where you draw the line. You should draw the line where the Bible draws the line.

Humanist: But I think that I do.

Theist: Do you draw the line on creation *ex nihilo*?

Humanist: No.

Theist: Do you draw the line on the inerrancy of Scripture?

Humanist: No. Some in the group openly deny it.

Theist: Do you draw the line on the issue of whether God can know the future?

Humanist: No.

Theist: If someone said that "God can lie" and "God can sin," would you draw the line at this point?

Humanist: No.

Theist: If someone taught that god was a struggling, finite deity evolving into what he/she/it did not know, would you draw the line there? What about the ontological Trinity or the ontological deity of Christ? The two natures of Christ? Eternal punishment? The lost condition of the heathen?

Humanist: Look, I am not about to tell you what I really believe on those issues. They are all "up for grabs" as far as I am concerned.

Theist: That is why I am praying for you. I really think you are on the slippery path of apostasy. Biblical and historic Christianity is like a home-knit sweater. When you start pulling one piece of yarn, the whole thing unravels. All the issues I raised are truths that once you deny any one of them, it is only a matter of time before you end up as apostate as Clark Pinnock.

Conclusion

Well, you get my drift by now. There are those in Evangelical circles who teach in Evangelical schools and even pastor Evangelical churches who deny and even despise Evangelical theology! They are drifting on to the shoals of liberalism where the mainline denominations have already wrecked. The root of this apostasy is humanism, i.e. the idea that man starting only from himself, by himself, and with himself, apart from the Bible, can discover the truth about God and all things. Instead of following the swan song of human autonomy, the words of Paul shine as a light in the midst of darkness.

"Let God be true even if it makes every man a liar." (Rom. 3:4)

The Implausible God of Open Theism: A Response to Gregory A. Boyd's *God of the Possible*

A. B. Caneday

Introduction

The most recent book by Gregory A. Boyd, professor of theology at Bethel College and senior pastor of Woodland Hills Church of St. Paul, Minnesota, is *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*.¹ He designed the book as a primer to make open theism accessible to the general reader. What is *the open view of God*? The term *openness* with reference to God's knowledge of the future seems to have been coined within the last two decades by its advocates who have revived a belief that has periodically thrust itself forward on the fringes of the Christian church.² The open view of God is a belief that seeks to supplant the enduring Christian belief that God knows as certain everything that shall come to pass with the belief that God does not know the future as certain but as *open possibilities*, hence the name, *open theism*. Advocates contend that because God does not know the future with certainty, sometimes God changes his mind, sometimes he cancels prophecies, and sometimes God even becomes disappointed and frustrated. Yet, God is self-confident and secure in his vulnerability to his creatures, for the risks he runs are wise, because things may go his way. Yet, sometimes God must orchestrate events and situations to make his creatures do what he intends.³

Until the release of Boyd's book, the debate concerning open theism has remained rather esoteric and removed from Christian laypeople. Many have concluded for or against open theism with insufficient knowledge of what the view entails. Boyd has filled a gap between the philosophical advocates of open theism and Christians who have attempted to read the fairly

¹ *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000).

² Richard Rice, a Seventh-Day Adventist philosopher and theologian, apparently coined the term in his book first entitled *The Openness of God: The Relationship of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will* (Nashville: Review & Herald Publishing, 1979). Rice's book met stiff resistance from fellow Adventists, so when he reprinted the book, his own Seventh-Day Adventist publisher, Review & Herald, would not renew it. So Rice reprinted the book as *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985). For details, see Robert A. Morey, *Battle of the Gods: The Gathering Storm in Modern Evangelicalism* (C.I.A.: PO Box 7447, Orange, CA 92863: 1989), 109.

³ Greg Boyd is one of several philosopher-theologians who embraces open theism. Others who have also published articles and books to advocate the view are: Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Richard Rice, David Basinger, and William Hasker. All five contributed to the book *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994).

ponderous books previously published on the subject. Boyd has achieved his stated purpose to make open theism accessible to laypeople.

If it had not already become evident, by bringing open theism to the people, Boyd's book puts the onus upon advocates of classical Christian theism to articulate, for this generation, its beliefs concerning God's knowledge of all future events as certain. The fundamental element that advocates of classical Christian theism must address is the figure of speech called anthropomorphism. Critiques to open theism have not offered convincing responses to explain biblical passages that portray God as "regretting" or using expressions such as, "I thought that. . . ." Boyd's book should stir Christian laypeople, pastors, teachers, and theologians to examine the Scriptures with renewed vigor in a fresh consideration of biblical figures of speech applied to God, but especially anthropomorphism.

As Boyd indicates in his introduction, he wants to bring his view of God to the populace by stripping the discussion of its usual technical and sophisticated philosophical jargon, and he wants to vindicate open theism against "the alarmist label 'heresy'" (p. 12).⁴ His plan for the book is simple. It consists of four chapters. Chapter one contends that the classical Christian belief is wrong to hold that Scripture indicates that God knows the future with certainty. Chapter two argues that Scripture requires the belief that the future decisions of God's creatures cannot be known in advance, even by God. The third chapter makes the case that God's not knowing the future with certainty has many practical benefits. Finally, in chapter four, Boyd raises and answers a series of eighteen common objections to his open view of God.

Boyd's thesis is that the beliefs Christians have always held concerning God's relationship to the future, especially the future decisions of God's creatures, became misguided from the earliest days of the church. He thinks that early Christians adopted a Greek philosophical concept of God, for whom "reality is eternally definite, settled, fixed, and certain" (p. 18).⁵ Boyd claims that the classical Christian belief, therefore, is misguided biblically, theologically, and practically.⁶

⁴ He complains that Evangelicals who critique open theism largely ignore use of Scripture. In particular, he claims that Millard Erickson "devotes an entire chapter to refuting the open view, but he never once interacts with any of the biblical arguments that support the open theist position" (in *God the Father Almighty*). However, Erickson designed chapter 4 ("Free Will Theism," pp. 67–92), to which Boyd refers, principally to provide a fair description of open theism, with some analysis, both positive and negative. This purpose of the chapter is evident from the fact that it is placed in Part 2—Challenges to the Traditional Understanding of God. In that chapter Erickson does briefly interact with no fewer than eight Scripture passages to which open theists frequently appeal for support (*God the Father Almighty*, 85ff), but he reserves extensive exposition of numerous crucial biblical passages for chapter 9 ("God's Knowledge," pp. 184–209), which is in Part 3—The Attributes of God. Therefore, it is not readily apparent that Boyd has read the entire book.

⁵ As Boyd has stated his thesis, it satisfies neither his stated concern to divest the discussion of technical and philosophical jargon nor the substance of the book. For, on the one hand, he could hardly defend his thesis without engaging technical and philosophical language. Yet, on the other hand, Boyd does not actually offer any evidence, other than a few brief assertions, concerning Greek philosophy's influence upon early Christian thought. Thus, he overstates his thesis, for he does not prove it, at all.

⁶ Boyd says, "Biblically, God is repeatedly depicted as facing a partially open future. Theologically, several unsolvable problems inherent in the classical view can be avoided when

He does not explicitly tell his readers that one foundational belief governs his own commitment to believe that God has to be variable, vulnerable, and open to novelty with regard to the future. This foundational belief is that future decisions of God's creatures "do not exist (except as possibilities) for God to know until free agents make them" (p. 120). This belief controls Boyd's theology concerning God's knowledge of the future. This control belief regulates how Boyd reads the Bible's portrayal of God, whether it concerns his plans, purposes, foreordination, regrets, changes of mind, or questions. Though *God of the Possible* ostensibly seeks to prove this belief from Scripture, it is evident that the book begs the question throughout. That is to say, the book's argument advances by assuming its own conclusion to be true. Regrettably, the author repeatedly employs faulty arguments to achieve his objective. Therefore, his arguments for the *God of the Possible* are unconvincing. Rather, they lead to an implausible God.

In his introduction, Boyd acknowledges that he may be susceptible, "with some justification," to the charge of oversimplification (p. 13). *Oversimplification* properly describes his treatment of the debate, for his book is filled with many fallacies of reasoning. This review highlights four errors of reasoning due to oversimplification. (1) He literalizes biblical anthropomorphism, and this shapes his theology. (2) He attempts to shift the debate over open theism from a concern about God's attributes to simply a debate about the nature of reality. (3) He turns against classical Christian belief its own claim that open theism diminishes God. (4) He persistently misrepresents both the belief that God knows the future with certainty and the God of this classical Christian belief.

I. Boyd Literalizes Biblical Anthropomorphism:

Boyd Views God as Human

When Greg Boyd summarizes the premise of his book and the principal question he seeks to address he oversimplifies it. He states:

The classical view of divine foreknowledge interprets the first motif as speaking about God *as he truly is* and the second motif as speaking about God only as he *appears to be* or as *figures of speech*. In other words, whenever the Bible suggests that God knows and/or controls the future, this is taken literally. Whenever it suggests that God knows the future in terms of possibilities, however, this is not taken literally (p. 14).

Granted, Boyd could have offered a fuller description of the two categories of passages, but the kinds of passages he has in mind become clearer as one reads chapters one and two. However, lack of clarity in the paragraph cited above and throughout his expansion upon it, is regrettable, if not fatal to his case. For his challenge against classical Christian theism fails to show any serious pondering of the crucial matter of figurative language used throughout both strands of biblical evidence that he addresses in the first two chapters.

one accepts that God is the God of the possible and not simply a God of eternally static certainties. Practically, a God of eternally static certainties is incapable of interacting with humans in a relevant way. The God of the possible, by contrast, is a God who can work with us to truly change what *might* have been into what *should* be" (p. 18).

Boyd's equivocation and confusion concerning the nature and function of biblical anthropomorphism is even more evident in the end note he attaches to the above quoted paragraph, a note that is indispensable to Boyd's argument.

There is, of course, a sense in which *all* talk about God is nonliteral. When we say God "thinks," "loves," or "acts justly," for example, we are saying that God engages in activities that are analogous to what we do when we think, love, or act justly. Given this proviso, however, it still is meaningful to insist that God literally "thinks," "loves," or "acts justly" and mean by this that these statements describe God *as he truly is*. This view would contrast with a view that might hold that God doesn't *really* "think," "love," or "act justly"; it just *looks* that way from our limited perspectives. My only point is that the language about God "changing his mind," "regretting," and so on should be taken no less literally than language about God "thinking," "loving," or "acting justly" (note 2, page 170).

This endnote abounds with confusion because Boyd fails to offer clear definitions for his terms—*literally*, *nonliteral*, and *analogous*. Despite Boyd's assertions to the contrary, it is not at all clear how *figurative* (his term is *nonliteral*) language can at the same time be *literal* (i.e., not figurative).⁷ How can biblical portrayals of God be simultaneously literal and figurative? The only way this can be is if *literal* does not mean *non-figurative*. In such a case *literal* must mean something like *real*. Throughout the book Boyd equivocates concerning his terminology. Hence, he confuses his readers. For example, note the following paragraph.

The open view is rooted in the conviction that the passages that constitute the motif of future openness *should be taken just as literally* as the passages that constitute the motif of future determinism. For this reason, the open view concludes that the future is *literally settled* to whatever degree God wants to settle it, and *literally open* to the extent that God desires to leave it open to be resolved by the decisions of his creations (p. 54; emphasis added).

Lack of clarity dominates for four reasons. First, he uses this paragraph to sustain his allegation that classical Christian theism regards the passages of Scripture under consideration to be *nonliteral* (his own term), a term that confounds both him and readers. For some reason, in his much too brief discussion quoted above, Boyd avoids using the word *figurative*. Second, if his first use of *literally* means *non-figuratively*, at best it is wholly unclear, for the latter two uses of the same word surely mean *actually* or *really*. Third, perhaps without fully realizing it, in the subsequent paragraph Boyd tips his hand, for now it becomes evident that the phrase "should be taken just as *literally*" means "needs to be taken just as *seriously*" (p. 54; emphasis added). Fourth, Boyd's equivocation and confusion becomes conviction, for he says, "I will also argue that the classical explanation—that these verses are *less literal* than those expressing future determinism—is unwarranted" (p. 55; emphasis added). So, the meaning of Boyd's crucial endnote becomes clear. For him, none of the biblical passages he examines in either chapters one or two portrays God *figuratively*. They all portray God *literally*; they portray God just as he is.

It is evident that Boyd settles upon this meaning of literal throughout his discussion of biblical passages in chapter two. However, Boyd continues to equivocate, for as he concludes chapter two, apparently without realization, he introduces a third meaning for *literal*. He claims, "[I]f we simply accept *the plain meaning of Scripture*, we learn that God sometimes regrets how decisions he's made turn out" (p. 87; emphasis added). When he speaks of "the plain meaning of

⁷ Logically expressed, Boyd is saying: Non-A (*nonliteral*) = A (*literal*).

Scripture,” he has shifted the discussion to a completely different plane again. With this connotation, *literal* refers to the ordinary sense that a text itself bears. Literal in this sense means neither *literal* versus *figurative* nor *literal* versus *not real*. Rather, literal in the sense of “the plain meaning of Scripture” accounts for both figurative and non-figurative language.⁸

So, throughout his book, but especially in chapter two, Boyd homogenizes three distinct meanings for the word literal and it serves his purpose well. Boyd’s advancement of open theism trades upon his inattentiveness to definitions of terms, especially *literal*. Among Evangelicals, acceptance of Boyd’s argument depends upon literary and biblical illiteracy, particularly how figurative language functions. Worse still, is the fact that Boyd’s inattentiveness to proper definitions causes him to misrepresent in two ways those who embrace classical Christian theism. First, he does not properly define or explain the figure of speech, *anthropomorphism*. He incorrectly charges that classical Christian theists have believed that anthropomorphism portrays God “as he *appears to be*.” Second, Boyd trades off his own inadequate definition of anthropomorphism to imply doubt concerning commitment to Scripture on the part of those he opposes. In the following comments concerning [Jeremiah 18](#), note carefully Boyd’s persistent confusion of terms and his appeal to force of threat for anyone who disagrees with his simplistic reading of the Bible.

[W]e must take very seriously the Lord’s word in [Jeremiah 18](#) that he will “change [his] mind about the disaster that [he] intended to bring” on the nation. ... Classical theologians usually argue that texts that attribute change to God describe how he *appears* to us; they do not depict God as he really is. It *looks* like God changed his mind, but he *really* didn’t. ... Unfortunately for the classical interpretation, the text does not say, or remotely imply, that it *looks* like the Lord intended something and then changed his mind. ... There is simply no reason to interpret language about changeable aspects of God *less literally* [emphasis added] than language about unchangeable aspects of God.... Suppose, for the sake of the argument, that God wanted to tell us in Scripture that he *really does* sometimes intend to carry out one course of action and that he *really does* sometimes change his mind and not do it. How could he tell us this in terms clearer than he did in this passage?... I suggest that if this text isn’t enough to convince us that God’s mind is not eternally settled, then our philosophical presuppositions are controlling our exegesis to a degree that no text could *ever* teach us this. People who affirm the divine authority of Scripture do not want to be guilty of this charge (pp. 77–78).

It becomes apparent that Boyd believes all analogical portrayals of God in terms of human characteristics (not form) should be taken literally in the sense that the analogy is *not figurative* but a portrayal of God *as he actually is*. On this basis, Boyd says that God is *analogous to*

⁸ Because Boyd does not define his terms, throughout his book, he lacks caution that could embarrass him when he realizes his mistake. For example, as if there were no history of brilliant, God-fearing scholars who have labored intensely and extensively to be biblically accurate to define the various ways we may use the word *literal* in speaking of the Bible, Boyd charges forward in his comments on [Jeremiah 26:2–3](#): “If *in truth* God never changes his mind, is he not lying when he tells the Israelites that he might do so? Is there not something odd going on in evangelicalism today when certain believers (open theists) are labeled heretical *for taking God’s promise* (‘I may change my mind’) *literally*?” (p. 84; emphasis added). These two questions pose four problems.

humans, which is to say that God is in the image of man rather than humans exist in the image of God (p. 170). This means that he believes God thinks, loves, acts justly, changes his mind, regrets, plans, and determines like humans do. This belief that *God is analogous to humans* is the taproot of open theism, for God's sovereign actions toward and relationships with his creatures are limited by the "free-will" of his creatures.⁹ That is why the designation "free-will theism" (open theists' self-designation) so well describes this system of belief concerning God.¹⁰ What is at stake for Boyd and other open theists is their passionate belief that humans must be absolutely self-determining or else they are not free in any sense. This belief concerning creatures determines Boyd's view of God.

So, Boyd believes that biblical portrayals of God as sovereign, purposing, planning, determining, intending, foreordaining, having knowledge of the future, and predicting future events with detail are properly understood only if *God's relationship to the future is analogous to human restrictions concerning knowledge of the future*. Boyd too easily dismisses the fact that every one of these biblical portrayals of God is figurative (i.e., anthropomorphic), just as the descriptions of God that he finds in his second set of biblical passages but also does not accept as anthropomorphic. This second group of passages portrays God as regretting, asking questions about the future, not receiving what he expected, expressing disappointment, dialoguing with Moses and yielding to his protests, seeking but not finding, testing humans to determine their character, speaking of the future with expressions of projection and anticipation, desiring all to be saved, as a potter who alters his crafting of a vessel on the wheel, and as one who changes his mind concerning things he has already announced will take place. For Boyd both categories of passages portray God literally, which is to say *as he actually is*, and that means that God is like humans when he plans or regrets, when he purposes or asks questions, when he foreordains or tests humans. Anything God does with reference to the future is analogous to a human's knowledge of the future. For God the future is full of possibilities and uncertainties. If there is anything about the future that God has already settled concerning specific individual creatures, it is because God occasionally steps in to "orchestrate" a specific result and override a creature's free-will.¹¹

Though he initially acknowledges, "all talk about God is nonliteral [i.e., figurative]," Boyd quickly reverses this as he literalizes or reifies figurative portrayals of God in both categories of passages. When I say he literalizes figurative language, I mean simply that Boyd makes God out to be human, for he holds the notion that God is analogous to humans, that the human is the determining feature in the analogy. On occasions, I am known to say that I am analogous to my son, but I do so with a twinkle in my eye and with a wry smile. With a twist of irony, I invert the proper order to underscore how much my son is like his father. Likewise, the reason God reveals himself to us with form and characteristics that are human is that we are made in his image, not that he bears our likeness. The figure of speech that describes God's self-disclosure in human form and characteristics is *anthropomorphism*.¹² Anthropomorphism's function, throughout the

⁹ Boyd claims as much on page 54.

¹⁰ For example, see David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996).

¹¹ Even Calvinists do not believe that God overrides or coerces humans to accomplish his will.

¹² Some want to distinguish *anthropomorphism* (i.e., God's self-disclosure in human form) from *anthropopathism* (i.e., God's self-revelation in human passions, feelings, and attitudes).

Bible, hangs upon the fact that the analogy it depicts runs from God to us. For God himself established this relationship when he said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness” (Gen 1:26). Yet, Boyd inverts the proper order. For him, the analogy runs from the human to God, so that God turns out to be like the human. His God is analogous to us. Though he denies it and accuses classical Christian theism of it, Boyd’s open theism hangs upon the assumption that God bears the human’s image.¹³ Boyd believes that God behaves, thinks, acts, plans, and changes his mind like humans do.

Therefore, Boyd believes that God *actually* exercises his sovereignty with the kind of limitations we humans have on our sovereignty. God *actually* does not know with certainty what his own creatures will decide or do in the future, not merely the remote future but the immediate future—the very next decisions his creatures will make. God predicts the future with limitations like those humans have, for he may project with effective determination *that* a certain thing will take place in human history but he cannot determine the details of any event, including the individual persons who will be involved (p. 31). This is because he cannot predetermine nor can he know with certainty what any free creature will do in the future. God is also like humans in that he changes his mind concerning things he has already announced will happen. Like humans, God does not know with certainty how humans will respond to him, whether they will obey or disobey him, whether they will choose this or that. Therefore, when the Bible depicts God as changing his mind, it portrays God as he *actually* is. He is like humans who change their minds, with a notable exception. “God’s mind is unchanging in every way that it is virtuous to be unchanging but open to change in every way that it is virtuous to be open” (p. 81).

Six examples of Boyd’s reification or literalizing of biblical figurative portrayals of God must suffice. Examination focuses upon three from each of his two categories of biblical passages. Famous in the debate with open theists are biblical passages that portray God as “changing his mind.” Brief discussion of Boyd’s handling of those passages will be offered. However, first it is crucial to note that when he explains biblical passages that portray God’s purposing and determining figuratively in the form of a human, Boyd literalizes this portrayal. That is, he makes God out to be human.

A. God Anticipates and Outmaneuvers His Creatures to Settle Some Aspects of the Future

In chapter one, Boyd takes readers through a number of familiar biblical passages that have led God’s people to rest confidently in the belief that because God has determined the end from the beginning, therefore God knows all that shall come to pass, that while his creatures face the

However, anthropomorphism bears a broader use to include any ascription of human characteristics to that which is not human. I use the term in the broader sense (1) to eliminate wordiness; and (2) anthropomorphism and anthropopathism, narrowly defined, do not exhaust all the biblical metaphors applied to God. Cf. G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster 1980), 172–182.

¹³ Boyd says, “In my view, every other understanding of divine providence to some extent diminishes the sovereignty and glory of God. It brings God’s wisdom and power down to the level of finite human thinking. *We* would need to control or possess a blueprint of all that is to occur ahead of time to steer world history effectively. But the true God is far wiser, far more powerful, and far more secure than we could ever imagine” (p. 68).

future with uncertainty, we entrust ourselves to the One who is certain concerning the future. However, as Boyd explains these biblical passages, it turns out that none of them portrays God in this manner at all. Rather, for Boyd, God’s purposing and determining must be measured and checked by the human standard, for human “free-will” can thwart God’s intentions. However, God’s will cannot determine human intentions, choices, or actions. So, Boyd concludes this chapter by saying, “We have seen that Scripture portrays God as the omniscient, sovereign Lord of history. He decrees whatever he wishes to decree. He controls whatever he chooses to control. He is never caught off guard or at a loss of options. He anticipates and ingeniously outmaneuvers his opponents” (p. 51). However, according to Boyd, God’s omniscience includes only the past and present perfectly, but the future he knows as *possibilities*. His sovereignty is strange, for while God may decree whatever he wishes or he may control whatever he chooses, he cannot ordain choices and actions of his creatures without violating their free-will, for the free-will of his creatures determines the limits of the King’s sovereignty. Whatever the King of Heaven decrees or purposes that entails any of his creatures can only be *open possibilities*, for his lowly creatures have veto power over the King’s decrees.

1. God Actually Plans Like Humans Plan-Isaiah 46:9–10

Boyd charts his course through this text by rejecting the classical Arminian “Simple Foreknowledge” explanation and by adopting a basically Augustinian-Calvinistic explanation of verse 10—“My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (NIV)—as he states: “The Lord is not appealing to information about the future he happens to possess [*sic*]; instead, he is appealing to *his own intentions* about the future” (p. 30).¹⁴ However, this agreement with

¹⁴ It is important to note that Boyd correctly recognizes that the text does not depict God as having knowledge of the future by way of *observing* the end from the beginning. Rather, God knows the end from the beginning because he has plans and purposes. The reason that one must note this is that Boyd seeks to establish a third view, distinct from either Arminianism or Calvinism, and in doing so, he will find some agreement with each when and where it serves his purpose to discredit the other. This is what he does in *Isaiah 46:9–10*. Where classical Arminianism maintains that the biblical text portrays God as having exhaustive knowledge of the future, he knows it in advance by observation, Boyd needs to discredit this “Simple Foreknowledge” view. However, where Calvinism contends that God knows the future exhaustively because he has purposed it exhaustively (e.g., *Isaiah 46:9–11*), Boyd acknowledges that the text does speak of God’s *intentions* and *purpose*, but then he restricts the purview of God’s purpose and intentions to preserve the autonomous self-determination of God’s creatures. Likewise, when Boyd discusses *Romans 8:29*—“for whom he foreknew—he rejects the traditional Arminian “Simple Foreknowledge” view that “God foreknew that certain individuals would believe and then predestined them to be conformed to the image of his Son” (p. 47). He rejects this for the same reasons Calvinists reject it: “Paul doesn’t specify that God foreknew certain individuals would believe” (pp. 47–48). Rather, the passage “clearly contrasts ‘those whom God foreknew’ with others God did *not* foreknow” (p. 48). Paul’s concern is not God’s prior knowledge of information but God’s foreknowing is his fore-loving. Then Boyd suddenly cheats, without offering any justification for his claim, he simply asserts: “Paul is saying that the church as a corporate whole was in God’s heart long before the church was birthed. But this doesn’t imply that he knew who would and would not be in this church ahead of time. ...

Augustinians and Calvinists is short-lived, for his concept of human autonomous freedom functions as the aperture through which he reads the text. Thus, he restricts the Lord's declaration ("My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.") by the "free will" of God's own creatures. Boyd claims the words, "The Lord's announcement that he declares 'the end from the beginning' must be understood" within the restrictions he finds in verse 11. By this, he means that God "tells us that he is talking about *his own* will and *his own* plans" over against the will and plan of his creatures (p. 30). Therefore, as far as God is concerned, "He declares that the future is settled to the extent that he is going to determine it, but nothing in the text requires that we believe that *everything* that will ever come to pass will do so according to his will and thus is settled ahead of time" (p. 30).

For Boyd, with a smattering of agreement with Augustinians and Calvinists, God "foreknows certain things are going to take place because he knows *his own purpose and intention* to bring these events about. As sovereign Lord of history, he has decided to settle *this much* about the future" (p. 30). Yet Boyd believes God's *own will* and God's *own plans* must be kept isolated from his *creatures' wills* and his *creatures' plans*. God knows what he intends to do but he cannot know the future with certainty to the extent that the future depends upon his creatures' choices. Whatever God intends to bring about cannot impinge upon angelic or human self-determination. Regrettably, Boyd's appeal to [Isaiah 46:11](#) to explain God's claim, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come." ([46:10](#)), fails to

[W]hether particular individuals receive Christ and thus acquire this predestined image depends on their free will" (p. 48). Boyd simply ignores the fact that the object of the verb "foreknew" (*PROEGNŌ*) is the pronoun "whom" (*HŌUS*), referring to chosen individuals. This is insufferable, for he simply forces the text to serve his theological system of open theism, a system that will not tolerate either belief in simple divine foreknowledge or belief that God predestines individuals. Why is this? It is to protect his own commitment to his notion of autonomous "free-will."

When discussing other biblical texts, if it serves his purpose, even if it is contrary to reason and conventions of human language, Boyd believes the text says what he needs it to say. For example, consider when the Lord asks Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?" ([Numbers 14:11](#)). Boyd believes this passage indicates that God really did not know how long Israel would continue to spurn him. So, confident that God does not know the future free actions of his creatures, Boyd insists that the question is one that indicates that God does not have the information about the future which he requests. One might think that Boyd surely must believe the same concerning God's sequence of questions to Adam in the Garden ([Genesis 3:9–13](#)). Someone has already questioned him about this so he has prepared an answer, implausible as it is. Without offering any explanation why the questions of [Genesis 3:9–13](#) are rhetorical, he asserts, "Unlike God's questions about location in Genesis, there is nothing in these texts or in the whole of Scripture that requires these questions to be rhetorical" (p. 59). He doesn't pause to explain what he means by "rhetorical." "Rhetorical," being a generic category, offers little help. Actually, the questions of [Genesis 3](#) and the questions of [Numbers 14:11](#); [Hosea 8:5](#), [1 Kings 22:20](#) and so forth are questions cast in the form of anthropomorphism. God becomes a speaking character in the story line of the Bible. How else should we expect God to dialogue with humans? God inquires of Adam, "Where are you?" or "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

account for the fact that the Lord says, “I summon . . . a man to fulfill my purpose.” Isaiah’s passage unambiguously asserts that the Lord will accomplish his will and purpose through a human, and not just any human but a king—Cyrus. A moment’s reflection reminds one that all of human history entails human choice and action. Therefore, if Boyd and open theists insist that the free-will and purposes of his creatures must be independent and separate from God’s will and purposes for the future, then it would seem evident that there is very little that God has settled concerning the future, very little indeed.

2. *God’s Plans for Infants In the Womb—Cyrus, David, Jeremiah & Paul*

Given Boyd’s beliefs, how could the Lord guarantee that *his own* plan to summon “a man to fulfill [his] purpose” will be successful? Wasn’t Isaiah prophesying concerning Cyrus, of whom the Lord said, “He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please.” (Isa. 44:28)? If Boyd believes the things God ordains do not necessarily come to pass, then aren’t his comments on Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Cyrus overstated? This becomes evident when he affirms, “The notion that what God ordains is necessarily unalterable is foreign to the Hebrew mind” (p. 42).¹⁵ This is the conclusion he draws when he discusses God’s intentions and plans concerning three other male infants, yet in their mothers’ wombs. Boyd affirms, “God had a life plan for Jeremiah and Paul before they were born” (p. 39). However, even though God “intended a course of action” for both male infants in the womb, he could not “guarantee that it would come about” (p. 40). Why couldn’t he guarantee his plans? Boyd explains, it is because both Jeremiah and Paul were “free agents, despite God’s unique calling on their lives” (p. 40). Therefore, God’s plans for unborn babies are little more than whimsical intentions that are entirely subject to human decisions and therefore may never come to pass.

Boyd makes this even more explicit concerning David’s words: “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:16). Throughout his discussion of this verse, he lapses into fallacies to advance his beliefs. First, he begs the question by assuming his conclusion to be true as he attempts to prove it true. For example, he argues, “even if this verse said that the exact length of our lives was settled before we were born, it wouldn’t follow that *everything* about our future was settled before we were born, and certainly not that it was settled from all eternity” (p. 40). Second, to guard against a conclusion contrary to his own, he appeals to “the fact that the literary form of this verse is poetry” (p. 41). He continues by saying, “The point of this passage is to poetically express God’s care for the psalmist from his conception, not to resolve metaphysical disputes regarding the nature of the future” (p. 41).¹⁶ This is special pleading with a twist. For if the poetic form of a text poses a difficulty for drawing doctrinal conclusions, and especially philosophical inferences, then why does Boyd exempt himself? What warrant does he have to presume his conclusion, that even if

¹⁵ It is not clear whether Boyd uses “Hebrew mind” to refer to the way the Hebrews think or to refer simply to the beliefs expressed in the Old Testament. Either way, it is apparent that Boyd needs to explain what he means and then he needs to make some effort to substantiate his assertion.

¹⁶ Boyd speaks more truth here than he realizes, for classical Christian theism accepts the psalm as a poetic expression of God’s care over the psalmist from his conception through all his days. It is Boyd who attempts to make the psalm serve his metaphysical and philosophical commitments.

the verse speaks of the psalmist's days being planned, "this does not require us to believe that the length of his life was unalterable" (p. 42)? Furthermore, Boyd didn't raise the poetic form factor when he pressed his conclusions concerning [Jeremiah 1:5](#) or [Isaiah 46:9–11](#). Yet both passages are poetic in form. Does he turn to special pleading over poetic form in his discussion of [Psalm 139:16](#) because he recognizes the potency of the passage against his own view? Is that why he seeks to remove this passage from the discussion table on the basis of poetic form? A moment's reflection uncovers how misguided such an attempt is to nullify poetic passages from determining doctrine. Which portion of the Old Testament do the New Testament writers most frequently cite? Isn't it the Psalms? Doesn't the author of Hebrews build his argument in chapter one almost exclusively upon the Psalms? Isn't [Psalm 110](#) indispensable to his chief doctrinal argument in [Hebrews 7–10](#)?

Does Boyd resort to begging the question and to special pleading in his attempt to persuade readers to adopt his explanation of [Psalm 139:16](#) because of desperation and weakness in his case? His discussion of the verse leaves one astonished, for he contends that David refers to nothing more than "God's *intentions* at the time of the psalmist's fetal development, not an unalterable decree of God" (p. 42).

Boyd's inversion of God's creation of humans in his likeness is the root of his open theism. His insistence that we must understand God to be analogous to us compels him to literalize biblical portrayals of God with human-like qualities, such as planning, purposing, or intending. The result is that there is no assurance that anything God plans, purposes, or intends that has anything to do with his creatures will ever come to pass. According to Boyd, God's knowledge of the future is analogous to our knowledge of the future. Therefore, biblical passages that have forged the very foundation of trust in God that he will accomplish every one of his purposes, including those that entail his creatures, actually say only that God has good intentions but every one of them is subject to creatures who have the capacity to thwart them. It turns out, therefore, that the things of the future that God has determined are simply "a realm composed of open possibilities that will be resolved only by the decision of free agents" (p. 54). Thus, his open theism cuts the ground out from under our faith in God's promises for the future. According to open theism, the reason to hope that God's intentions for the future will succeed is that in the past he has been fairly successful in overcoming his creatures' efforts to thwart his purposes. How different this is from Isaiah's words: "I declared the former things long ago. And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass" ([Isa. 48:3](#)). How different is Boyd's portrayal of God from Isaiah's!

To whom will you compare or count me equal?

To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? ...

Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels.

Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.

I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.

I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose.

What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do ([Isa 46:5, 8–11](#)).

3. God Predicts Predictable Behavior—*Matthew 26:33–35*

Boyd argues that to the degree a person's character has become solidified, to that degree one's future behavior under certain circumstances will be fairly predictable, even to humans. How much more is this true, he reasons, for the Creator who perfectly knows us. On this basis, Boyd explains that God the Father revealed to Jesus that Peter would deny him. "Anyone who knew Peter's character perfectly could have predicted that under certain highly pressured circumstances (that God could easily orchestrate), he would act just as he did" (p. 35). So, he concludes, "[W]e do not need to believe that the future is exhaustively settled in God's mind to make sense of Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial" (p. 37).

There is a stubborn detail of the story that requires Jesus' prediction to be far more than a prediction of predictable behavior. For Jesus predicts, "I tell you the truth, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me *three times*." Predicting predictable behavior is one thing, but to predict that it will happen three times and not twice nor four times is an entirely different matter. Did Boyd anticipate this criticism when he parenthetically explained "that God could easily orchestrate" "highly pressured circumstances" to make sure that Peter would deny three times? That, however, will only injure his case, because then God would be playing a role which Boyd perceives belongs to the God of classical Christian theism. Boyd's God can have nothing to do with ordaining sin or evil, much less prompting it. For in that case God would be entrapping Peter in sin, not once, but three times. So, Boyd's conclusion is wholly inadequate: "We need only believe that God possesses a perfect knowledge of the past and present and that he revealed some of it to Jesus" (p. 37). Perfect knowledge of Peter's past and present will not satisfy the demands of Jesus' prediction that Peter would deny him three times, that very night, before the rooster would crow in the early morning.

Despite the fact that Boyd believes God knew Peter's past and present perfectly, he has a predicament. Because his God cannot know the future, either by way of simple foreknowledge (seeing what will come to pass) or because he ordained all that shall take place in the future, Boyd's God could not predict Peter's triple denial, unless he orchestrated the circumstances three times before the rooster would crow, in order to squeeze Peter into three separate lies. Such a God is made in the likeness of humanity. Such a God is truly a fiend.

How did Boyd come into this predicament? He did so by inverting the God—human analogy. Though God may know the past and present perfectly, not knowing the future infallibly puts him at the same disadvantage his creatures bear. Such a God could not predict how many times Peter would lie, unless he manipulated Peter into a trap like sinful humans are known to do. Boyd's problem began when he inverted the proper order so that God now bears human likeness.

B. God Faces The Future As Humans Do, As Open Possibilities

After he has argued that the classic biblical texts allow for believing that God faces a future of possibilities, Boyd closes the chapter by affirming: "In the next chapter, we will argue that Scripture not only warrants this conclusion, it requires it" (p. 51). However, when he begins chapter two, he seems to make a more modest claim: "I will argue that the passages that constitute this motif [future openness] strongly suggest that the future is partly open and that God knows it as such" (p. 54). So, in chapter two he guides readers on an excursion through many

selected Scripture passages that portray God as regretting, asking questions concerning the future, testing human character, or changing his mind.

1. God Regrets How His Plans Turn Out—Genesis 6:5–6 & 1 Samuel 15

After he has already told readers that all the passages he plans to address in chapter two are to be taken *literally*, Boyd excludes any discussion of anthropomorphism from his very brief consideration of [Genesis 6:5–6](#). Therefore, if the biblical text says, “And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.” it has to mean that God did not realize that when he created humans that they would fall into this state of sinfulness (p. 55). Likewise, God did not expect King Saul to disobey him. God’s plan changed when Saul’s heart changed. Boyd hasn’t proved his case. He simply begs the question. Because in his own thinking Boyd has already made God out to be human, he concludes *a priori* that neither [Genesis 6](#) nor [1 Samuel 15](#) portrays God with human-like qualities (anthropomorphism) but exactly the way God is. God *really* changes his mind the way humans do, which means that God sees the future the way humans do. He saw possibilities only. Therefore, humans frustrate and thwart his plans, so God regrets, even to the point of wanting to begin all over. In other words, God does not guide the course of events in his creation by a plan that is sure to succeed in all its details. Rather, God is a player in this drama, so that he and all his creatures are making up the story in the process as it winds here and there through an unknown future toward an undetermined time when it achieves God’s objective.

Readers who anticipate a definitive open theist explanation of biblical passages that portray God as regretting or changing his mind will be disappointed because Boyd dismisses the legitimacy of anthropomorphism as a figure of speech at work in passages such as [Genesis 6](#) or [1 Samuel 15](#). Boyd’s God turns out to look like we do, without sin of course, and with a perfect knowledge of the past and present and with the added dimension of knowing all future possibilities. Yet, that seems to be of little help to this God, for even though he could anticipate the possibility that his autonomous human creatures would rebel against him, he could not project with any certainty that his creatures would fall into such a low state of wickedness ([Gen 6](#)). Nor could he predict with any certainty whether or not Saul would change his heart or remain steadfast ([1 Sam 15](#)). Autonomous and independent from God, because God does not exercise any determinative will over them, his creatures really have the capacity to catch God regretting his plans and decisions.

It is not until his final chapter that Boyd actually explains his rejection of classical Christian theism’s appeal to anthropomorphism to explain the biblical portrayal of God as “changing his mind.” He offers two reasons for his rejection. First, he states his interpretive principle: One can recognize anthropomorphism “because what is said about God is either ridiculous if taken literally (e.g., God has an ‘outstretched arm,’ [Deut. 4:34](#); God as ‘our husband,’ [Hosea 2:2](#)), or because the genre of the passage is poetic (e.g., God has ‘protecting wings,’ [Ps. 17:8](#)).” Therefore, Boyd reasons “there is nothing ridiculous or poetic about the way the Bible repeatedly speaks about God changing his mind, regretting decisions, or thinking and speaking about the future in terms of possibilities” (p. 118).¹⁷ Boyd wrongly supposes that all who believe that

¹⁷ Regrettably, Boyd shows no engagement of nor reflection upon discussions concerning figurative language and especially anthropomorphism in standard or classic textbooks on biblical interpretation, such as, Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of*

God's change of mind is anthropomorphism do so because they "bring to the text a preconception of what God *must* be like" (p. 118). Such a verdict surely requires evidence to support it, but he offers none. In its place he offers a contrary assertion, also without supporting evidence: The biblical portrayal of God's change of mind "is not at all on par with a figure of speech in which God has an outstretched arm or protecting wings" (p. 119).¹⁸

"Second," he correctly argues, "even when the Bible speaks anthropomorphically and figuratively about God, it is *speaking truthfully* about God" (p. 119; emphasis added). Correct as this is, Boyd yields to confusion and equivocation because he gives up too easily on understanding how anthropomorphism functions when the Bible depicts God as regretting. No doubt, the truth about God portrayed with his arms outstretched is easier to grasp than the truth depicted in his regretting or changing his mind. Boyd wrongly infers that those who believe that [Genesis 6:5–6](#) or [1 Samuel 15:11](#) indicate that God changes his mind are anthropomorphic because they "have already decided that God *can't* really do such a thing" (p. 119). It is not a preconceived notion of what God must be like that governs us. Rather, the biblical text itself demands that we understand these portrayals of God as anthropomorphism.¹⁹

Understanding biblical figurative language, especially ascribed to God, must begin at [Genesis 1:26–31](#) with the fact that God made man in his image and likeness. It may require a radical shift in our thinking, for we are but creatures, we're analogs of God the Creator. However, there is a right and a wrong way to think of God as he reveals himself in human form and likeness. God has adorned us with his image, his likeness. Right and biblical thinking is to recognize that in some profound way, we humans reflect something of God's revealed glory. For whatever an "outstretched arm" or "change of mind" conveys concerning God, they do so not because God borrows them from us, for he does not. Rather, the Lord loans his own qualities to us and invests them with significance so that our outstretched arms reflect something of God, so that our change of mind reflects something concerning our God. Surely, we would be mistaken to think that God searched his creation to find suitable illustrations that might be useful for him to reveal himself to his creatures. Rather, God invested his creation, including humans, to show the splendor of his glory ([Romans 1:18–20](#)). It is by design that God adorned his own creation, in all its parts, to declare his glory and to announce the work of his hands ([Psalm 19:1](#)). Of all his creation, God clothed humans to wear his image and likeness, as no other created element. So, the outstretched arm reflects something about God, as does the capacity to change the mind. However, we would be mistaken to reason from ourselves to God, that he is like we are, so that our *outstretched arm* or our *regret over decisions* is the standard by which we should measure God when he reveals himself with these human qualities. Rather, the fact that he clothed us with

the Old and New Testaments, reprint first printed 1890 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) or A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 4th printing 1972 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

¹⁸ So, Boyd asserts, "All the evidence indicates that the verses signifying divine openness should be interpreted every bit as literally as the verses signifying the settledness of the future. Only a preconception of what God can and can't be like would lead us to think otherwise" (p. 120). Again, does Boyd's use of the expression *interpreted literally* mean non-figuratively, as real, or in the plain sense of the text?

¹⁹ Boyd states, "If God never changes his mind, saying he does so reveals nothing; it is simply incorrect. If God in truth never anticipates that something is going to happen that turns out not to happen, his telling us that he is sometimes surprised or disappointed ([Jer. 3:6–7, 19](#); [Isa. 5:1–7](#)) tells us nothing true; it is simply misleading" (p. 119). His confusion is profound.

his image and likeness demands that we always keep this in the forefront of our thoughts. Thus, to reason that when God reveals himself as one who “regretted that he had made man on the earth” and that “it grieved his heart,” it would be wrong to conclude that God did not know with certainty that his own creatures “would fall into this state of wickedness” (p. 55).

In reality, it is open and evident that [Genesis 6:6](#) figuratively portrays God in the form of a human. This should be obvious to Boyd, also, for his own interpretive principle for identifying anthropomorphism makes this clear (see p. 118). The text says, “it grieved his *heart*.” Wouldn’t this be ridiculous, “if taken literally”? Indeed, it would be. Why does Boyd not adhere to his own interpretive principle, simplistic as it is? Now, admittedly, “heart” is a metaphorical use of an inner organ to depict the core or inner self of the human. [Genesis 6:6](#) takes this metaphorical use and ascribes it to God, thus it is anthropomorphism.

We must neither evade nor literalize Scripture that candidly says, “I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not carried out my commands” ([1 Sam 15:11](#)). To evade the anthropomorphism is to ignore God’s self-disclosure concerning things that we need to know about him. On the other hand, to literalize the anthropomorphism is to humanize God; it is to forge an idol. Lest he commit idolatry, Samuel chastised Saul by saying, “He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind” ([1 Sam 15:29](#)). Likewise, the Lord used Balaam to rebuke Balak’s pagan concept of God: “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” ([Num 23:19](#)). In the same way, the prophet Isaiah repeatedly rebuked Israel’s idolatry, for the Israelites were prone to create God in their own image. So, Isaiah says, “You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?” ([Isa. 29:16](#)).

2. God Encounters Things He Does Not Expect—Jeremiah 3

Boyd believes that [Jeremiah 3:6–7, 19–20](#) is strong evidence to support his case that God does not know the future free acts of his creatures and therefore faces unexpected behavior from them. Jeremiah’s text reads,

The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and played the whore there? And I thought, “After she has done all this she will return to me”; but she did not return, and her false sister Judah saw it.

Boyd reasons, “If God tells us he thought something was going to occur while being eternally certain it would not occur, is he not lying to us?” (p. 60). He continues,

Since God is omniscient, he always knew that it was remotely possible for his people to be this stubborn, for example. But he genuinely did not expect them to actualize this remote possibility. He authentically expected that they’d be won over by his grace. God wasn’t caught off guard (for he knew this stubbornness was possible), but he was genuinely disappointed (for he knew the possibility was improbable and hoped it wouldn’t come to pass) (p. 61).

One is tempted to think that Boyd cannot mean what he has said and then busy oneself with his distinction without a difference when he says that God “authentically expected that they’d be

won. ... God wasn't caught off guard." This is inexplicable, but his treatment of Jeremiah's text is incredible for one fundamental reason: he has *a priori* swept anthropomorphism away from every biblical passage he considers, including this one. Boyd fails on his own principles of recognizing anthropomorphism, for he says it would be ridiculous to take it literally when God portrays himself as a husband (p. 118).

Yet, the prophet Jeremiah punctuates the whole passage with markers to indicate that God is disclosing himself anthropomorphically *as a husband*. The prophet casts the entire passage in anthropomorphic terms. This means that God reveals himself through the prophet by appealing to the God-human analogy as he takes to himself human qualities and conventions to convey the extent of his patience and loving kindness toward Judah, the wife that he woos, as a faithful and loving and patient husband. Note the anthropomorphic markers throughout the text: (1) The Lord converses as a man with Jeremiah within history. (2) The Lord talks with Jeremiah concerning Israel, his former wife, and inquires whether the prophet has taken note of her adultery. (3) The Lord plays the role of a husband who was married to but divorced from his wife, Israel, because of adultery and now contends with Israel's adulteress sister, Judah. (4) The Lord later portrays himself as a father with Judah as his sons. (5) The Lord also represents himself as a wooing husband to unfaithful Judah.

The text is teeming with anthropomorphic indicators. Therefore, the Lord's words to Jeremiah must be anthropomorphic: "I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me.'" For Boyd to conclude, on the basis of these words, that God did not know that Israel would rebel against him, reflects his own short-sightedness to recognize how humans use the same expression. It infers no ignorance either on God's part or ours when we use this conventional expression: "I thought. ...". Nor is there a hint of disingenuousness by one who uses the expression. Its function is to rebuke or to elicit change of behavior. A loving husband may use such an appeal to an unfaithful wife to call her to repentance and to return to him. Parents use this kind of rebuke with children, as when I was a child. After breaking another window, my father would say, "I thought you would have learned not to throw a ball near the house." Surely my father was not saying anything about his own knowledge; he was not admitting ignorance of anything. He was using a common human convention of speech to rebuke me, to correct my behavior. It was my knowledge, my memory, my judgment, that was in question, not his. When God adopts this kind of language for himself, this *is* anthropomorphism! What is true of [Jeremiah 3:6–7](#) is also true of [3:19–20](#). Anthropomorphism throughout the passage instructs us concerning God, but it does not tell us that God does not know future actions of his creatures. Rather, anthropomorphism in [Jeremiah 3](#) instructs us that God is not like ordinary husbands; the Lord is a very patient husband, full of compassion, who holds back his wrath with extensive long suffering. All these statements are anthropomorphic descriptions of God, also. They are truthful statements, but the truth they reveal concerning God must be handled carefully. We must not make God out to be human by inverting the analogical relationship that God established by creating Adam in his image. For if we reify one aspect of the anthropomorphic portrayal of God, such as "I thought...", one must be consistent and humanize God *as an actual husband* to Israel and to Judah—literally, then, God is a polygamist. Plainly stated, we must not reason from the creature to God and impose human categories upon him as if he were human. To do as Boyd has done is to regard the Lord as a creature, a human. To do as Boyd has done is to glory in the image, rather than in the Creator whose likeness we bear.

3. God Tests Humans to Discover their Character—[Genesis 22](#)

Greg Boyd believes that passages such as [Genesis 22](#) are the strongest biblical evidence that God does not know the future in terms of human choices and actions. This is so, he argues, because “God frequently tests his covenant partners to see if they will choose to follow him or not” (p. 63). Concerning God’s testing of Abraham, Boyd insists that love “cannot be preprogrammed,” as if believers who embrace classical Christianity believe that God *preprogrammed* Abraham to pass the test. Boyd shows no indication that he has lingered over the opening verse of the chapter, a verse that accents that the whole episode is one in which God *plays the man*, for the text plainly says, “After these things *God tested* Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’” Here is God, as a man, intending to test Abraham. This is knowledge that readers of the episode have, but Abraham himself did not know that it was a test. Again, God, as a man, converses with the man Abraham. Not only that, but the Lord calls out to Abraham, as one looking for him but not yet locating him. And Abraham answers, “Here I am.” God enters the story as a character, but God does much more than play a role at the opening of the episode. God also *directs* the whole event: (1) he gives commands; (2) he identifies the place where the drama should unfold; (3) he provides the substitute for Isaac; (4) he has the Angel of the Lord present on the mountain where Abraham goes to offer Isaac; (5) he swears a divine promise to Abraham at the close of the episode. God does not experience the story as Abraham does. Abraham is the one who has nothing more to go on than three unexplained imperatives from God: (1) take Isaac; (2) go; and (3) offer him. Abraham is the one whom God tests.

With no indication that he has reflected upon the ancient Christian belief that the narrative of God’s testing of Abraham must be understood self-evidently in terms of God’s self-portrayal in human form (anthropomorphism), Boyd simply asserts that the traditional understanding cannot be correct. So, according to Boyd, after the Lord tests Abraham and says, “Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ([Gen 22:12](#)), this “verse has no clear meaning if God was certain that Abraham would fear him before he offered up his son” (p. 64). Boyd, with other open theists, insists that the Lord’s test was not for Abraham’s benefit but for his own, for he *actually did not know* whether or not Abraham would pass the test.²⁰ Evidently, for God, Abraham’s character was not as predictable as Peter’s.

To add weight to his brief explanation of [Genesis 22](#), Boyd appeals to the testing of Hezekiah in [2 Chronicles 32:31](#)—“So also in the matter of the envoys of the officials of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order *to test him and to know all that was in his heart*” (emphasis added). Boyd exclaims, “Unfortunately for the classical view, however, this is exactly what the text says” (p. 64). Boyd’s use of this passage shows how profound his bias is against acknowledging anthropomorphism, for he fails to recognize the grammar of the verse. The text does not say what he thinks it says, that God tested Hezekiah *to know how he would respond* to the visit of the Babylonian envoys. The orientation of God’s test is not future; it is present. The text plainly says God tested him “to know all that was in his heart.” The expression *to know all that was in his heart* speaks of God’s testing Hezekiah’s *present* character. The passage offers no assistance to Boyd’s explanation of [Genesis 22](#). Rather, the verse poses a massive problem for Boyd, because it indicates that God doesn’t fully know Hezekiah’s character, if one insists upon literalizing the imagery. Thus, here was something about which God did not have exhaustive present knowledge. Boyd has proved too much, yet he fails to recognize his doctrinal predicament.

²⁰ Cf., e.g., John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 1998), 50–53.

It should be rather evident that Boyd creates his own predicament because he inverted the divine-human analogy. He insists upon reading God's human-like self-revelation—regretting, expressing surprise, and testing humans—as if God really is in the position of the creature, not knowing the future choices of humans and in some cases not even fully knowing their present character. Boyd's commitment to literalizing biblical figurative portrayals of God impels him to turn narratives upside down. So, despite the fact that [Genesis 22:1](#) expressly says “God tested Abraham,” Boyd believes that the test was for God's benefit, not Abraham's. He claims, “Except in cases in which a solidified character or God's predestining plan makes people predictable ..., Scripture teaches us that God literally finds out *how* people will choose *when* they choose” (p. 65).²¹

II. Boyd Attempts to Shift the Debate from God's Attributes to the Nature of the Future

In his introduction, Boyd claims that the debate open theism has prompted among Evangelicals is not about God's attribute of omniscience, but it is about “the nature of the future” (p. 15). He reasons, “The issue is not whether God's knowledge is perfect. It is. The issue is about the nature of the reality that God perfectly knows. More specifically, what is the content of the reality of the future?” (p. 16).

Open theists ... hold that the future consists partly of settled realities and partly of unsettled realities. Some things about the future are *possibly* this way and *possibly* that way. Hence, precisely because they also hold that God knows all of reality perfectly, open theists believe that God knows the future as consisting of both unsettled possibilities and settled certainties. In this sense, open theists could (and should) affirm that God knows the future perfectly. It's just that they understand the future *as it is now* [sic] to include genuine possibilities (p. 16).

His particular concern is to argue that, though God knows all reality, he cannot know future free decisions and actions because they “do not exist (except as possibilities) for God to know until free agents make them” (p. 120).²² So, Boyd argues that God can only know as *possibility*

²¹ Boyd's statement is remarkable, for to concede “God's predestining plan makes people predictable” undercuts the two primary pillars upon which open theism rests. First, if Boyd accepts that God exerts some kind of coercion, as he seems to do, this subverts his commitment to belief in the autonomous self-determining free-will of creatures. Second, tolerance of any coercive orchestration by God, such as in the case of Peter's three-fold denial, puts Boyd's God more on the level of Christ of who manipulated Truman Burbank's staged life in the movie *The Truman Show*. Isn't God besmirched with culpability for Peter's sin? Not even Calvinist theologians accept the notion that God coerces people.

²² In his award-winning book *Letters from a Skeptic* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994), Greg Boyd argued this same point: “*If we have been given freedom, we create the reality of our decisions by making them. And until we make them, they don't exist. Thus, in my view at least, there simply isn't anything to know until we make it there to know. So God can't foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until He creates these people and they, in turn, create their decisions*” (p. 30). It is noteworthy that Mr. Edward K. Boyd, Greg's father, responded: “It seems like your view of God is much more ‘human’ than what I've always thought God was supposed to be. I'm no authority on the Bible, but isn't God here seen as knowing the future?” (p. 32). It is also worth noting that Greg's reply letter poses a logical and

not as *reality* that which does not yet exist. Of course, in one sense it is true that the future does not exist, but in that same sense the past also does not exist, though components from the past are extant.

Boyd's terminology is crucial. What does he mean by *reality*? What does he mean by *does not exist*? It seems evident that Boyd believes that reality, as humans know it, also defines reality for God. He offers some insight concerning his view when he says,

If God does not foreknow future free actions, it is not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It's because there is, in this view, *nothing definite there for God to know!* His lack of definite foreknowledge of future free actions limits him no more than does the fact that, say, he does not know that there is a monkey sitting next to me right now. As a matter of fact, there is no monkey sitting next to me, so it's hardly ascribing ignorance to God to insist that he doesn't know one is there. In just the same way, one is not ascribing ignorance to God by insisting that he doesn't foreknow future free actions if indeed free actions do not exist to be known until free agents create them (pp. 16–17).

Boyd's reasoning is circular, but it is a broken circle. His premise that future free decisions could only be definite for God, if they already exist as certain, depends upon one unstated premise and upon his undemonstrated conclusion that God does not have definite foreknowledge of future free decisions of his creatures. Boyd neither states nor demonstrates his unstated premise that God knows the future in the same way his creatures know the future, as possibilities. Where has Boyd demonstrated the veracity of his premise? He may answer that he has proved his premise in chapters one and two of his book. However, it is evident that his whole discussion in both chapters begs this very question, for his argument in both chapters assumes as true the very position he seeks to prove.

Though he does not demonstrate his case, Boyd argues that to claim that God foreknows his creatures' future free decisions is akin to claiming that God knows there is a monkey sitting beside Greg Boyd, when in fact there is no monkey beside him. Boyd insists that both claims are disagreements "about the content of reality, not about the omniscience of God" (p. 17). Therefore, he asserts, "They [his theological opponents] shouldn't accuse a person who denies there is a monkey next to me (or that future free actions are settled ahead of time) of denying God's omniscience simply because we disagree about the content of reality" (p. 17). Translated, Boyd is saying, "If I say that there is no monkey next to me and that future decisions of free creatures are uncertain, don't accuse me of denying God's omniscience when I say God knows that neither one exists." One might simply smile at Boyd's creativity and touch of impertinence, if his reasoning were sound. However, our disagreement is not merely about the content of reality. Rather, Boyd has not demonstrated but has only assumed as true, that God's knowledge of future free decisions depends upon his creatures making those decisions.

Despite Boyd's efforts to argue that the issue he is addressing "is not really about God's knowledge" but is "a debate about the nature of the future" (p. 15), he contradicts himself, for he has already stated *on the same page*: "As I hope to show ... far from being 'beneath' God,

philosophical inconsistency for his earlier statement, noted above. He says, "*If there are aspects of the future which are already determined, either by present circumstances or by God's own will, these God would know for they are presently there to know. Future free acts, however, aren't*" (p. 33).

Scripture describes the openness of God to the future as *one of his attributes of greatness*. I will argue that a God who knows all possibilities, experiences novelty, and is willing to engage in an appropriate element of risk is more exalted than a God who faces an eternally settled future” (p. 15; emphasis added). So, is Boyd’s concern about one of God’s attributes or not? Which is it? It is apparent throughout his book that, though he makes the claim, both in his introduction and final chapter, that the issue is about the nature of reality and not about God’s nature, he continually undercuts his own claim.²³ The next section will demonstrate this with considerable evidence.

III. He turns against Classical Christian Belief Its Own

Claim that Open Theism Diminishes God

One of Boyd’s recurring arguments throughout his book is not really an argument at all but simply an assertion. Regrettably for some readers, his repeated assertion may fill the void of demonstrable argument. Boyd tries to gain an advantage with readers by reversing upon his opponents the charges he knows they will bring against his view of God. So, before readers hear these counter charges from those with whom he disagrees, Boyd tries to prejudice their thoughts concerning the God of classical Christian belief. He attempts to forestall consideration of arguments from classical Christian theism against open theism by turning against classical Christian theism its own claim that open theism diminishes God.

Because Boyd’s own words make the case clear, I simply offer the following sequence of quotes. This theme begins in his introduction and does not end until the final sentence of his final chapter.

[F]ar from being ‘beneath’ God, Scripture describes the openness of God to the future as one of his attributes of greatness. *I will argue that a God who knows all possibilities, experiences novelty, and is willing to engage in an appropriate element of risk is more exalted than a God who faces an eternally settled future*” (p. 15; emphasis added).

While it may be difficult to imagine ourselves carrying out a providential plan so masterfully without a meticulous blueprint ahead of time [sic], *there is no reason to bring the Lord down to our level*. If we grant that God is all-powerful and infinitely wise, we should have no trouble seeing how he could weave free agents into his plan while allowing them to resolve for themselves a partly open future (p. 39; emphasis added).

Some scholars have argued that it is not possible for God to predestine an event without predestining or at least foreknowing the people who would carry out the event. *There is no justification for limiting God in this fashion, however* (p. 45; emphasis added).

In my view, *every other understanding of divine providence to some extent diminishes the sovereignty and glory of God. It brings God’s wisdom and power down to the level of finite human thinking* [emphasis added]. We would need to control or possess a blueprint of all that is

²³ In chapter four Boyd again contends, “The issue is not about God’s knowledge at all. Everyone agrees he knows reality perfectly. The issue is the *content* of the reality God perfectly knows...” (p. 125).

to occur ahead of time to steer world history effectively. *But the true God is far wiser, far more powerful, and far more secure than we could ever imagine* [emphasis added] (p. 68).

Remember whom we are speaking about [sic]. This is the omnipotent Creator who ‘flexes his omnipotent muscle,’ as it were, by being born in a stable, growing up with the stigma of being an illegitimate child, hanging out with sinners, and dying a God-forsaken death on the cross! To the natural understanding, this is foolishness, but to the apostle Paul, it is the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 1:18). This demonstrates that the normal human way of thinking about sovereignty only as control is misguided (see Matt. 20:25–28). God is *so* sovereign he chooses to save the world by allowing himself to become weak (p. 68).

Isn't a God who is able to know perfectly these possibilities wiser than a God who simply foreknows or predetermines one story line that the future will follow? And isn't a God who perfectly anticipates and wisely responds to everything a free agent might do more intelligent than a God who simply knows what a free agent will do? Anticipating and responding to possibilities takes problem-solving intelligence. Simply possessing a crystal ball vision of what's coming requires none (p. 127; emphasis added).

If the classical view of divine foreknowledge is correct, there are positive things humans can do that God cannot do. ... Though the Bible is explicit in ascribing many of these experiences to God ..., the classical view rules them out. *Is this not limiting God?* (p. 129; emphasis added).

Everything we read in Scripture and everything we observe in the world around us suggests that *a God who is frozen in an eternity of perfectly certain facts is inferior to the God of the possible*, who is capable of discovery, risk, novelty, and adventure (p. 131; emphasis added).

I grant that it takes an incomprehensibly wise God to be sovereign over a world populated with a myriad of free agents, each having a degree of say-so in what transpires. *I can thus appreciate the natural inclination to bring God down to our limited comprehension and assume that he must meticulously control or at least foreknow all that is going to take place in order to protect his sovereignty* (p. 145; emphasis added).

The world is still scary. It is in a state of war, under siege by the enemy of our souls, and this is not a comforting thought (1 John 5:19). The open view grants this. Even God takes risks. *But the world is less scary in this view than if we try to find consolation in the belief that everything that occurs is controlled by God and thus reflects his dubious character* (p. 156; emphasis added).

In the present culture, self-absorbed with the affective dimension, patience with intellectual rigor and careful reasoning is often not evident among writers and readers. In such a climate, Boyd's book, *God of the Possible*, has already gained strong endorsement from those who strive to change the shape of Evangelicalism.²⁴ Likewise, his book will likely gain a popular foothold.

²⁴ Roger E. Olson affirms, “Greg Boyd presents a powerful argument for the open view of God as omnipotent, sovereign, and yet vulnerable. Boyd's God is alive and personal as well as infinite and perfectly wise. The portrait of God drawn here is unrecognizable compared to the caricatures of openness theism's God crudely crafted by many of its critics. It is much more majestic and beautiful as well as biblical. Inquiring Christian minds will love this book for its creativity and clarity. Closed minds will despise it for the same reasons. Those who have been merely ‘open to the openness of God’ will find its arguments difficult to resist. Everyone who reads it will be challenged to reconsider traditional ideas of God in the light of a fresh reading of Scripture. Baker Book House is to be commended for living up to its Reformed commitments by

For instead of offering a well-reasoned argument, he attempts to persuade readers to adopt open theism by appealing to their strong emotions and to popular sentiments about God.²⁵ Boyd does this throughout his book, and nowhere is it more evident than in the sequence of block quotes above. Not only does he play to the gallery with his emotional appeals for his open God and against the God of classical Christian theism, he endeavors to secure his readers for the cause of open theism by making it appear that his God is superior to the God Christians have worshiped throughout church history. To accomplish this, Boyd does three things. First, he asserts that it is those who believe and advocate classical Christian theism who diminish God's sovereignty and glory, who limit God, who bring God down to the human level, whose God is less intelligent than his God, who yield to natural and human inclination to bring God down to the limitations of human understanding and conceive of him as manipulative, and whose God has a dubious character. Second, he fails to offer substantive evidence to support his assertions. Yet, what is so disheartening is that many readers will receive his unwarranted assertions as truthful, for many in his audience have been conditioned by post-modern culture not to evaluate arguments and also to conceive of God in their own post-modern likeness. Third, Boyd's effort to bias readers against those he opposes exploits another flawed argument—the straw man or caricature fallacy. The following section demonstrates this.

IV. Boyd Misrepresents and Caricatures the God of Classical Christian Belief

publishing this book. To be 'Reformed' is to be open to new light from God's Word: 'reformed and always reforming.'"

Clark H. Pinnock claims, "A stunning book—on the biblical truth of an open future and the revolutionary benefits of believing it. What a great way to begin the new millennium theologically with the open view of God. I only hope that his witness is heard before the self-styled guardians of the tradition marginalize him." For further comments see <http://www.bakerbooks.com>.

²⁵ It should be noted that on April 24, 2000, *Publishers Weekly*, the major trade journal for both publishers and booksellers offered a starred review of *God of the Possible*.

Concerning popular sentiments, see Gene Veith, "A God in Their Own Image: A Return of the Really Old Religions," *World Magazine*, 15:18 (May 6, 2000): 16. Veith says, "Even many ostensible evangelicals are showing signs of pagan flirtation. The 'openness of God' theologians are jettisoning the attributes of the transcendent God who has always been worshipped by Christians in favor of a lesser god who is not all-knowing, outside of time, or all-powerful. Just as the warlike Greeks projected their cultural values into deities constructed in their image, this new god turns out to be very similar to the contemporary intellectuals who are making him up—omni-tolerant, liberal-minded, soft-hearted about human suffering, though wholly ineffectual in doing anything about it. This god is a far cry from the transcendent, incomprehensible Holy One of Israel who became incarnate in Jesus Christ.

"Christianity can handle the competition from paganism. It has centuries of experience at this sort of thing. But paganism in the church is a more dangerous infection. The main danger is not from the idols that are invoked but from the uncomfortably holy Deity who declares that He is a jealous God."

The sequence of quotations from Boyd’s book in the previous section show how dependent he is upon caricaturing the classical Christian belief he opposes. Consider Boyd’s verbal caricature of the God of Christian theism. He is an insecure God who is weak and not “self-confident” (p. 149). Because this God is insecure, he is also not “vulnerable,” a quality highly prized by modern, sensitive humans (p. 149). This God selfishly clings to all his authority without sharing any of it with his creatures. He is not unlike the playground bully. He controls every creature and every situation so that he gets his way all the time. The God of classical Christian theism operates his creation according to a “meticulous blueprint” that he drew up ahead of time. Having settled every detail of history in advance, this God finds himself bound to carry out his predetermined story line with no risks, without vulnerability, devoid of self-confidence, and lacking spontaneity and freedom. The classical Christian God is less intelligent than Boyd’s God, for while the God of open theism “perfectly anticipates and wisely responds to everything that his free agents might do,” the God his opponents worship lacks “problem-solving intelligence” (p. 127). The God of classical Christian theism gets his way because his creatures are “perfectly robotic” (p. 134). This God is incapable of “discovery, risk, novelty, and adventure” (p. 131). The God of classical theism also derives from philosophy, but not just any philosophy; it originates from Plato’s philosophy.²⁶

Admittedly this portrait of the God of classical Christian theism seems more grotesque than it does in *God of the Possible*, for Greg Boyd does not paint his verbal sketch all within one paragraph, as here. Instead, he stretches his portrait over the full canvas of the book, so that the shock of its impact is softened. Will readers recognize the disfigurement of classical Christianity’s God and be repulsed by the God of open theism? Will readers be swept away by Boyd’s reasoning, mistaken as it is, and cast aside the God of classical Christianity as an idol and turn to the God of open theism?

If Boyd’s portrayal of classical Christian theism were true and not a caricature, such a God would be utterly repugnant, for he has the appearance of detestable qualities found in sinful humans. But we who worship the God who foreknows all things that shall come to pass do not find that Boyd has accurately portrayed our God. Again, Greg Boyd has yielded to temptation to faulty reasoning. Perhaps his most persistent and egregious fault of reasoning is his misrepresentation of the theological beliefs of those he opposes. For, not only has he misrepresented their beliefs, his verbal sketch distorts their God, portraying him to be wretched and reprehensible.²⁷

²⁶ Boyd contends, “Classical theology cannot escape this conclusion because of philosophical preconceptions of what God must be like: He must be in every respect unchanging, so his knowledge of the future must be unchanging” (p. 86). Elsewhere he insists “classical theologians believe on philosophical grounds that the motif of future openness is ‘beneath’ God if it is taken literally. In their view it demeans God’s sovereignty to suggest that he does not foreknow everything that will ever take place” (p. 14). Of course, Boyd reduces classical Christian theists’ understanding of Scripture to prior philosophical commitments, but he claims that his own reading of Scripture owes nothing to philosophy. On his comments concerning Plato’s role in forging the God of classical Christian theism, see pages 85, 130–131.

²⁷ By way of reminder, here are a number of fallacies noted in this critique—equivocation, a priority, circularity, false disjunctions, appeal to force of threat, playing to the gallery, oversimplification, innuendo, question-begging, special pleading, and poisoning the well.

Books on logic and reasoning call upon us to govern our argumentative reasoning by the “Principle of Charity.” This principle of logic urges us to represent our opponent’s argument in its strongest possible form.²⁸ This means that, without trying to improve the opponent’s argument, we should grant the benefit of the doubt and supply any missing parts that are implied as part of the original intent of our opponent. It also means that we should not exploit the poorest representatives of the opposing viewpoint but the best representatives. For, if our own position is superior, in that it explains all the evidence better, what have we to gain by going up against the weakest representatives of the opposing view? What have we to gain by misrepresenting the opposite point of view? If we were to adopt this approach, whomever we would secure for our viewpoint would not be gained on good and reasonable grounds.

Among Evangelicals in this present culture, it is not only awkward to point out faulty reasoning; it is also regarded to be bad manners. In fact, one gets the sense that to point out an erroneous viewpoint or faulty argument is not only a case of bad etiquette but also a sin far greater than the fallacy noted. At the risk of being so charged, it is needful to say that Greg Boyd is less than charitable to his opponents and to their beliefs. He also imputes beliefs to them that they will not be able to find among theologians who assist them to articulate their Christian beliefs faithfully.²⁹

When we endeavor to describe our own theological beliefs and those of others, the metaphors we use have considerable power. Therefore, we must not only select them wisely but also fairly. Regrettably, Boyd’s caricature of the classical Christian belief concerning God exploits the power of metaphors to gain an advantage with readers. Boyd exaggerates what he finds so detestable about the God of classical Christian belief and portrays this God with *mechanistic* metaphors. By doing this he evokes strong aversion to the God of classical Christian belief. To sustain an advantage for open theism, Boyd portrays his own God as relational and human. Boyd’s two favorite mechanistic metaphors to portray the classical Christian belief concerning God’s knowledge of the future are the architect’s blueprint and the programmed computer.³⁰

²⁸ Consider, e.g., T. Edward Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning*, 2nd ed. 1987 (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1980), 11–12.

²⁹ Sadly, it needs to be pointed out that, though Boyd is a Professor of Theology, he fails to describe accurately either the Arminian or Calvinist beliefs concerning how God knows the future. He claims, “Some follow Augustine and Calvin and maintain that the future will be a certain way *because God foreknows* it this way. Others follow Arminius and argue that God foreknows the future a certain way *because the future simply will be that way*. In other words, classical theologians disagree about what comes first. Does God’s foreknowledge determine the future, or does the future determine God’s foreknowledge?” (p. 23). Boyd’s second statement, here, hardly finds support from his first statement. Though his second statement is accurate, his first fails to describe either view in such a way that anyone from either view would accept Boyd’s description. Note that later on page 23, Boyd more accurately depicts Augustinianism or Calvinism by saying “Open theists agree with some followers of Augustine and Calvin that future events cannot cause God to know them. We agree that if God foreknows a future event, it must either be because he determined it or *because it is an inevitable effect of past or present causes*” (emphasis added). Yet, this statement, also, corrupts a proper understanding of Augustinianism or Calvinism.

³⁰ Watch for Greg Boyd’s book, *The Myth of the Blueprint* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, forthcoming). Boyd’s projected title for the book already indicates, to perceptive people,

Boyd argues that humans find it difficult to comprehend God's "creative, wise, and lovingly powerful sovereignty. And this, perhaps, explains why many are inclined to assume that God needs an exhaustive blueprint of what is coming in order to accomplish his purposes" (p. 68). To characterize the God of classical Christian theism as one who operates according to a *blueprint* reflects Boyd's effort to prejudice readers against the belief he opposes. But knowledgeable Christians who believe that God foreknows everything that shall come to pass do not portray God's plans for the future in terms of a blueprint. Therefore, then, when Boyd adds his modifiers to the term, such as *exhaustive blueprint* (p. 68) or *meticulous blueprint* (p. 39), he is being doubly unfair to those he opposes and to their God. Boyd would have been wiser if he had simply said that he *understands* the God of classical Christian theism to operate by an exhaustive or meticulous blueprint. Then, his error would only be that he *misunderstands* his opponents and their God. However, as it is, he not only misrepresents but also rejects both the belief and the God in whom they believe.

Likewise, Boyd sets up a false disjunction between choosing his God, to whom the future is open, or the God of classical Christian belief, to whom all humans are simply "preprogrammed automatons" (p. 31).³¹ So, Boyd contrasts the God of classical Christian theism with the God of open theism by his carefully chosen imagery.

One beats a computerized chessboard because he knows how it was programmed and thus knows every move it *will* make. The other beats a person by anticipating every possible move he *might* make. Which is the more praiseworthy champion? Clearly the latter, for the first victory took very little intelligence. Why, then, should we regard a God who knows all that *will* happen to be wiser than a God who can perfectly anticipate and respond to all that *might* happen? (p. 128).

Who would not side with Boyd's deity, if these were the only two choices one had? Who could doubt that Boyd is correct that the one is far more praiseworthy than the other? Yet, Boyd's two deities are both unworthy of worship. His two options are wholly lacking, for he has not portrayed the God whom Christians have worshiped throughout the history of the church. He has only portrayed his own defective perception of this God.

Contrary to Boyd's caricature, thoughtful Christians, who believe that God knows as certain everything that shall come to pass, do not portray God mechanistically. Deism's fondness for portraying God's providence with the clock metaphor taught Christians to avoid metaphors of science to portray how God operates his creation. Therefore, when Greg Boyd characterizes the God of classical Christianity as a computer programmer who beats his own preprogrammed computer at a chess game, he unfairly misrepresents classical Christianity. Wise and thoughtful Christians will reject the validity of Boyd's computer metaphor because it portrays God's sovereignty as mechanistically manipulating his living creatures. The metaphor entirely fails to represent fairly either the beliefs of those he opposes or the God in whom they believe.

Anyone who will accept Boyd's caricatured God of classical Christian theism ought to read how carefully Christian theologians avoid mechanistic imagery. These Christian theologians have always observed that the Bible primarily portrays God with five relational metaphors: (1) king and subject; (2) judge and litigant; (3) husband and wife; (4) father and child; and finally (5)

something concerning the prejudice that will mark the book. His *blueprint imagery*, though powerful to provoke aversion, is an unfair caricature of the beliefs he critiques and rejects.

³¹ Boyd uses the imagery of robots and computer chips again on pages 134–135.

master and slave.³² Biblical imagery ascribes human likeness to God because the God who made his creatures in his own image, discloses himself to them in keeping with the Godlike adornment he gave Adam and his descendants. This is the essence of anthropomorphism. In Christian theology books these five anthropomorphic portrayals of God's relationship with his worshipers dominate the discussion of God's relationship with his creation. God reveals himself to us in human terms. Otherwise how would we know him? Yet, we would be seriously mistaken to suppose that any of our creature limitations belong to God. We must learn to recognize that Scripture, itself, restricts its own use of anthropomorphism to portray God. "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind" (1 Sam 15:29). Whatever passages such as 1 Samuel 15:11 mean when they say God grieves, regrets, changes his mind, asks questions, plans, purposes, or makes predictions, we are wrong to impute our human restrictions to God.

Classical Christian theism does not embrace a mechanistic God. We embrace the one true God who has revealed himself in human form and likeness, precisely because he made us in his image. Therefore, we must never shy away from openly acknowledging God's self-disclosure in human form and likeness, for that is precisely how God makes himself known to us. However, we also must never literalize biblical anthropomorphism, for to do so is to make God out to be human. To do so is to commit idolatry. For a deity who is fashioned after our likeness and in our image is an implausible God. He would be a God that is not believable and certainly unworthy of our trust and our worship.

Conclusion

According to Greg Boyd, "In the light of all that Christians share in Christ, the disagreement between the open view of God and the future and the classical view is minor" (p. 89). However, when one reads *God of the Possible*, it is not at all evident that Boyd believes the differences to be minor. Throughout his book, he has set up a strong antithesis between the God of classical Christian theism and the God of open theism. He has done this with vocabulary and rhetoric that makes it evident that he regards his own God to be superior. For example, he claims that he worships "the true God," whom he contrasts with the God of classical Christian theism by describing him as "far wiser, far more powerful, and far more secure than we could ever imagine" (p. 68). This does not sound like a theologian who disagrees with a subtle point of theology in a theological seminar or ordination council. This vocabulary and rhetoric has the ring of war to it. It sounds much more like the battle of the Gods, when Elijah mocked the god Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:16–46).

Greg Boyd claims, "Scripture describes the openness of God to the future as one of his attributes of greatness" (p. 15). He decries the God of classical Christian theism as a deity forged after the likeness of humans (p. 39). He belittles him as a God whose sovereignty and glory as well as his wisdom and power have been diminished by human minds that have framed God after their own thinking. He regards the God of Christians as a deity who is less intelligent than his own, as a God who "is inferior to the God of the possible" (p. 131). Boyd contends that his God "who knows all possibilities, experiences novelty, and is willing to engage in an appropriate element of risk is more exalted than a God who faces an eternally settled future" (p. 15). In the

³² Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, 177. These are the most commonly used metaphors from which various anthropomorphisms arise.

end, Boyd claims that the classical Christian God who controls everything and in whom Christians continue to seek consolation, is a God with “dubious character” (p. 156).

Boyd has made it obvious that the contest is between the God of open theism and the God of classical Christian theism. Despite Boyd’s protests to the contrary, this is not a squabble about the nature of creation or the nature of the reality of the future. This is a battle between two Gods. Boyd believes that his God who faces an uncertain future full of possibilities is superior to and exalted over the God whom Christians have worshiped for two millennia, precisely because he is God and no other god is like him who declared the end of all things from the beginning ([Isa. 46:10](#)). We who worship the God who knows all things that shall come to pass and those who embrace the God of open theism agree on one thing: they are two different Gods. Whom will you worship? To whom will you bow your knee? “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD who declares the end of all things from the beginning is God, then follow him. But if the God of the possible is God, follow him” (cf. [1 Kings 18:21](#)).

1. Boyd’s first question (“If in truth God never changes his mind ...”) sets up both himself and his readers for profound and unnecessary confusion. For as he poses the question, his use of the phrase “in truth” necessitates that the word “literally” of the phrase in the second question, “for taking God’s promise literally,” be understood in the sense “for taking God’s promise *truthfully*.”
2. Therefore, it is evident that Boyd either does not recognize how slippery the term *literal* is or he purposely exploits the slipperiness of the term for his own advantage. (I make this observation, for in June 1998, I spoke with and corresponded with Greg Boyd about his failure to clarify how he was using the word *literal* in his various contexts.) Attentive readers will recognize that Boyd’s phrase, “for taking God’s promise literally,” could mean either to “take God’s promise to be literally, not figuratively, portrayed” or “take God’s promise as truthful or real.” But what Evangelical, who believes that Jeremiah portrays God’s conditional promise figuratively (that is anthropomorphically), does not also take God’s promise as truthful? Because of his persistent confusion, Boyd has again set up a false disjunction, as if those who understand that the text portrays God figuratively could not take the text literally, that is as truthful or real. In reality, it is precisely because Christians, throughout the centuries, have believed that they should receive the biblical text *literally* (i.e., as truth and not fictional), they also have believed that Jeremiah’s portrayal of God *must* be understood as *figurative*, that is anthropomorphic, for otherwise the portrayal would not be *truthful*. This, of course, is not a contradiction. Rather, the historic commitment to literal interpretation of Scripture compels us to acknowledge that the biblical portrayal of God’s “change of mind” is figurative, in order to account for the biblical testimony that God does not change his mind as humans do. Whether the biblical anthropomorphism portrays God as “changing his mind,” asking questions of humans concerning the past, the present, or the future, or the anthropomorphism depicts God as having body parts, literal interpretation demands proper recognition of figurative language.
3. Because he fails to reflect adequately upon his term *literally*, Boyd attempts to establish his position as irrefutable by using his question-begging definition. He seems to think that his logic is airtight and impervious to counter evidence. But, as noted above, Boyd resists correction on his failure to define his terms.
4. Sadly, because of his failure to reflect properly upon his own terminology, Boyd’s questions show that he implies innuendo, here. He implicitly impugns the sincerity of

those with whom he disagrees. Do not his two questions imply that anyone who believes that [Jeremiah 26:2–3](#) portrays God figuratively cannot claim, at the same time, to believe that Jeremiah’s portrayal is truthful and should be believed as the plain meaning or sense of Scripture? Anyone who does not take God’s word *literally*, in the sense of the plain meaning of Scripture, may be heretical. On the other hand, anyone who takes as *literal* Scriptures’ figurative or anthropomorphic portrayals of God is heretical, even idolatrous, for those who do this end up with a deity carved out in the likeness of humans and not the God of Scripture.

- G. 8. Caird has said, “No doubt in any community there will be someone who takes everything literally, someone whose leg you dare not pull for fear that it will come away in your hands” (*The Language and Imagery of the Bible* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980], 184).

Ecumenical Jihad,

by Peter Kreeft (Ignatius:1996) Reviewed by Dr. Robert A. Morey

I rarely read a book that frightens or alarms me because I am not an emotional person by nature and tend to take things in stride. But Peter Kreeft has managed to stir me from my dogmatic slumbers more than any other writer in the last five years. The back of the book has endorsements by Chuck Colson and J. I. Packer. I reproduce their endorsements below so that you can make up your own mind what they said about Kreeft’s book.

“Peter Kreeft is one of the premier apologists in America today, witty, incisive and powerful. On the front lines in today’s culture war, Kreeft is one of our most valiant intellectual warriors.”

Chuck Colson

“This racy little book opens up a far-reaching theme. With entertaining insight Kreeft looks into the attitudes, alliances, and strategies that today’s state of affairs requires of believers. Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox alike need to ponder Peter Kreeft’s vision of things—preferably, in discussion together. What if he is right?”

J. I. Packer

The first question that comes to mind is, “Who is Peter Kreeft?”

1. Academically, he is a professor of philosophy at Boston College, a Roman Catholic Jesuit institution. His discussion of pagan religions reveals that he is well-versed in pagan philosophy.

2. Personally, he is a dedicated Roman Catholic whose manifest agenda is to destroy Protestantism and to exalt the Pope and his church as the one true Church. This agenda runs throughout all his articles, books and lectures.

3. Psychologically, the reason why he is such a zealous Protestant-basher is that he was raised as a Protestant. He even attended Calvin College before converting to popery! Just as many ex-Catholics have an axe to grind against Rome, Kreeft has an axe to grind against Geneva. On page 80, he plainly states that Luther was a “heretic.” While Kreeft tells us that such

pagans such as Confucius, Buddha, Muhammad, etc. are now in heaven, he nowhere tells us that Luther or any of the other Reformers made it. It is clear that he believes that the Reformers are now in hell.

4. Spiritually, Kreeft is an apostate who has turned away from the Gospel of free grace and now preaches a works-based salvation. As a modern Judaizer, he is a false brother according to the Apostle Paul and is under the anathema of God for preaching a false gospel ([Gal. 1:8–10](#)).

5. Given the above facts, it is truly amazing that Kreeft speaks at Evangelical colleges and universities and is touted as a “Christian” apologist. His books are even used as textbooks in some Evangelical institutions and various campus ministries!

InterVarsity Press, at one time an Evangelical publisher, printed one of his books. In the book, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, (IVP, 1994), Kreeft and co-author Tacelli, (also a Jesuit), argue that it is not necessary to believe in or even hear of Jesus Christ to go to heaven. Pagans like Socrates made it to heaven without repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ (pgs. 323–335).

It is sad to remember that at one time IVP published books giving the pure Gospel to lost students such as Roman Catholics. But, since IVP now publishes books that deny eternal conscious punishment, justify abortion, reduce God to a pagan finite deity, and call for a “new” attitude toward sodomy, that it would now publish an apostate Protestant turned papist, seems par for the course. Let us pray that the leaders of IVP will become Christians and return to the Gospel.

6. Given these facts, who in his right mind would invite a Romanist zealot who preaches a different gospel with another way of salvation to lecture Evangelical students? What professor would recommend books written by Kreeft to his students? Only a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” or someone who is incredibly ignorant or naive.

7. The issues raised above cannot be avoided. The following propositions emphasize the radical nature of these questions.

Proposition #1: At the Reformation, the Council of Trent made it clear that the Protestant Gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone was NOT the gospel of Rome.

Protestants and Romanists have two contradictory gospels that present two different ways of salvation. If one is true, the other is false. The Protestant blood shed by the Catholics during the Inquisition and the Thirty Years War sealed the contradiction forever.

Proposition #2: The wars waged by the Pope against Protestant nations had as their goal to bring all Christians under obedience to him.

Proposition #3: When it became clear that violence could not accomplish reunification with Rome, the Jesuit order was created to undermine the Reformation by philosophic sophistry. They were sent forth to build universities and colleges throughout Protestant nations. These Jesuit

schools (like Notre Dame) would promote reunification with Rome through natural theology and natural apologetics that are antithetical to the Protestant doctrine of sola scriptura.

Proposition #4: Vatican I established natural theology as the official position of Roman Catholicism. There is a painting in the Cathedral of Piza that depicts this dogma. St. Aquinas is standing with rays of light entering his mind from his left and from his right. On the right side, beams of light from the Bible shoot into his mind. But on his left, beams of light shoot into his mind from Plato and Aristotle. Thus Roman Catholic theology is a mixture of pagan thought and ideas from the Bible. As we shall see, Kreeft not only admits this, but boasts of it.

Proposition #5: Naive Evangelicals have converted over to Roman Catholic natural theology and philosophy. Some of them have become professors in Evangelical colleges and universities. They have even been invited to teach at such Jesuit schools as Notre Dame. Note: The Jesuits have NEVER hired a historic Reformation scholar to teach at their schools. Nor would they let a Protestant theologian evangelize their students.

Proposition #6: Using the pagan philosophy of Aristotle via Thomas Aquinas as a Trojan Horse, Jesuit-influenced Protestant professors introduced “natural” theology in Evangelical circles as a substitute for the Sola Scriptura of the Reformation.

Instead of going to the Bible for apologetics, theology, and philosophy, these professors follow the standard Catholic methodology of relying on their own reason, experience, and feelings. Such Jesuit doctrines as “Middle Knowledge” have become a fad in some evangelical circles because natural theology has always been hostile to the sovereign grace of God as well as to Sola Scriptura.

Proposition #7: Some of these Jesuit-influenced professors have lately become quite bold in their support of the ecumenical movement. They openly teach that Roman Catholicism is a true church. Catholics such as Kreeft are embraced as “brothers” and any Protestant who objects is condemned as “mean” or “unloving.”

Hank Hannegraff and CRI are a good example of this. While they have embraced Jesuit priests as “Brothers,” they attack Dave Hunt and all faithful Protestants. In his book on the *Resurrection*, Hannegraff even refers to Kreeft as his authority! My two-hour debate with CRI on whether Roman Catholicism is a true or false church can be obtained by calling 1-800-41-TRUTH. It is called the “Ecumenical Debate.”

Proposition #8: The heresy of UNIVERSALISM has now gained popularity in many Evangelical circles. Universalism teaches that there is not just one way of salvation. People can be saved without ever hearing or believing the gospel found in the Bible.

The Bible states that the ONLY WAY to heaven is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. You must repent of your sins and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. But now some say that the Roman Catholic gospel of works will save you just as much as the Protestant gospel of grace. It does not matter that they are contradictory ways of salvation and thus different gospels. They are just different ways of salvation.

Proposition #9: The “Evangelical and Catholic Accord” was the first visible attempt to begin the process of reunification with Rome. The Reformation was abandoned and the gospel of the free grace of God was denied. This Accord was also endorsed and promoted by Chuck Colson and J. Packer.

Proposition #10: Evangelical leaders such as John Ankerberg, James Kennedy, John MacArthur, and others saw the danger of the Accord and denounced it as heretical. It was a Trojan Horse that had, as its hidden agenda, the yolk of Rome.

Proposition #11: Kreeft and other Roman Catholics should be viewed as non-Christians who need to be saved. They should be refused the opportunity of infecting our students with popish heresies. Since Catholics do not allow us to evangelize their students, why should we allow them to evangelize ours? Kreeft and those like him need to be saved from the wrath to come. We should pray for their salvation.

Proposition #12: The ultimate agenda of Rome is not limited to making Protestants bow before the Pope, but to unite all religions into a one-world religion with the Pope as its head. Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Protestants, Orthodox, the cults, the occult, native religions and witches have all been invited to meet with the Pope in joint prayer meetings at the Vatican. These prayer meetings have already taken place and included representatives from all religions. The Pope went so far as to kiss the Qur’an!

Proposition #13: Kreeft is an eloquent spokesman for this new form of universalism. His vision includes all religions worshipping Mary and the Eucharist. That this is his agenda is clear from what he wrote in *Ecumenical Jihad*.

Proposition #14: The time has come for Bible-believing Christians to stand up and be counted against universalism. Did our Protestant forefathers die in vain? Was their blood shed in vain? The Bible you hold in your hand came from the Reformation, not from Rome. Religious freedom did not come from Rome but from the Reformation. It is at your own peril if you forget these historical realities.

Kreeft’s Vision:

“God’s people” is composed of all human beings who attempt to live a good life. Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, New Agers, witches, native religions, cultists, the occultists, and even sincere atheists and agnostics are all part of the “City of God” and they all have the same Commander (God)-even if they do not acknowledge this while on earth. Once they reach heaven, they will all join with Catholics in worshipping Mary and the Eucharist.

Kreeft relates on pgs. 85f an occult experience in which he left his body and went to heaven. Who should he find in heaven but Confucius, Buddha, Muhammad and other pagan religious leaders. He relates how these spirit guides led him to see that they all followed God in their own way. Now in heaven, they see the full light of the Eucharist and worship Mary.

The following citations will demonstrate the accuracy of our analysis of what Kreeft believes.

“my heroes Jesus and Socrates” p. 9

“many of our former enemies (for example, Muslims) are now our friends” p.9

“The first millennium was the millennium of Christian unity... The second millennium was the millennium of Christian disunity ... the third millennium will be the millennium of the resurrection of unity, reunification.” p.26

“Allah is not another God ... we worship the same God” p.30

“Islam, our ancient foe, is beginning to become our friend.” p.37

“Why is Islam expanding so spectacularly? ... because God keeps His promises and blesses those who obey His Laws and fear Him and punishes those who do not.” p.38

“the emergency is so great that prudence dictates a moratorium on our polemics against each other and our attempts to convert each other” p.38

“Protestant, Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish-practice islam: total and absolute submission and surrender to God’s will” p. 39

“Islam is growing faster than Christianity in America because Muslims want to be saints more than Christians do.” 60

“The same God! The very same God we worship in Christ is the God of the Jews-and the Muslims-worship.” p. 160

“we can and should investigate and learn from the wisdom in other religions” p.79

“medieval Scholastic philosophers, especially Saint Thomas, studied and used the pagan philosophers.”

“The result of this open-minded yet critical attitude was the rich synthesis, or marriage, of faith and reason that we know as Christian philosophy.” p.80

“Many Christian writers who thoughtlessly rejected all non-Christian writers as dangerous to the faith eventually became heretics themselves and left the Church (for example...Luther)” p. 80

“Brother Socrates” p.118

“Catholicism agrees with paganism more than with Protestantism in being robustly sacramental. Catholicism is more like African religion than Scandinavian religion ... Catholics believe pagans are right and Protestants are wrong” p.150

“Perhaps in heaven the most ardent worshippers of the Eucharistic Christ will be the “outsiders,” like pious Muslims.” p.164

“The power that will reunite the Church and win the world is Eucharistic adoration.” p.164

“the distinctly Catholic devotion of the Eucharist (and to Mary) may prove to be the key to victory in ecumenicism and in the “culture war.” p. 172

Conclusion

Kreeft and those like him are deluded as well as heretical. They are not Christians in the biblical sense. We do not really have much in common with them. By their idolatrous doctrine of the Eucharist bread, they deny the incarnate humanity of Jesus. Thus we do not even worship the same Christ!

If Kreeft comes to speak at your school, make a fuss and let people know that he is antichrist. If his books are used as textbooks, go to the Board of your school and reveal that heresy is being taught at your school. All you have to do to see the antichrist’s one-world religion take over your church or school is to sit back and do nothing.

Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended (2nd edition) by Greg Stafford Reviewed by Dr. Robert Morey

Having dealt with Jehovah’s Witnesses for over 40 years, I have come to the firm conviction that they are pathological liars by religious conviction. Dealing with them is like listening to President Clinton say, “I never had sex with that woman.”

I wondered for many years why they lie with such boldness. Then the book, *Aid To Bible Understanding*, was published by the Watchtower Society. In the article under “Lies, lying, etc.,” I finally found the reason why Jehovah’s Witnesses could look me in the eye and say, “We never said anything about 1975.”

According to the article, a “lie” is not telling the truth to someone who deserves it. Someone who is not a Jehovah’s Witness does not necessarily deserve the truth. Jehovah blesses JW’s when they lie to those who are fighting against the Society. At last I had documented proof that the Society taught its troops to lie whenever they were backed into a corner.

Once an organization states in print that it will lie whenever it feels it is in their best interests, how can you trust anything it says? I decided to put this insight to the test each time I dialoged with Witnesses. I put two sheets of paper on the table and wrote on my sheet, “I, Robert Morey, promise to tell you the truth and not to lie to you at any time,” and then signed it. I pushed the other sheet toward the Witnesses and ask them to write and then sign a statement that they promised not lie to me.

How many Witnesses have been willing to sign such a statement? In twenty years, not ONE Witness would promise not to lie to me! Not one! I then pointed out that by refusing to promise to tell me the truth and not to lie to me, they are telling me that they will lie to me if it will serve their god.

This is what makes a review of Stafford's book difficult. The individuals behind this book feel it is their religious duty to lie whenever it is in the best interest of the Society. This means that you cannot take anything they say at face value. Everything they say is suspect. Nothing can be taken for granted.

Of the author, we are told nothing. Since the book is self-published, do we have any guarantee that his name is really Greg Stafford? Did he even graduate from high school? Did he go to college or university? If so, where and when? What was his major? Does he have any graduate degrees? Did he take any college level courses in Hebrew or Greek? This does not seem to be the case from his book. He is too dependent on secondary sources for the most part. For all we know, he is a fictional person or a "front" who represents a committee of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Forward is supposedly written by someone by the name of Rolf Furuli. All we are told about him is the phrase "University of Oslo." Does this mean that he is a student at this University? Or that he graduated from it? If so, what major did he have? Or does this mean that he teaches at this University? If so, what subject does he teach? Pottery? Basket weaving? Greek? Hebrew? Logic? Philosophy? History? What is his area of competence? Oslo is sufficiently far enough away that these questions cannot be answered easily. Was this deliberate?

Rolf, if he exists and that is his name, praises Jehovah's Witness for "preaching the gospel of the kingdom" and Stafford for "delivering logically sound argumentation." He gushes like a schoolgirl in heaping adulations upon Stafford. In our opinion, the book fails to deliver the goods as promised by Furuli.

One interesting development that has transpired since this book appeared is that the Watchtower has forced Stafford and other Jehovah's Witnesses off the internet. Thus there is now no way to dialog with any of the author(s) of the book. The cultic power of the Society is now revealed. A Witness cannot even dialog on the internet without their permission!

Given this situation, we will review the book on the basis of logic, hermeneutics, philosophy, linguistics, and exegesis.

Observations

As I read the book, I looked in vain for a positive presentation of Watchtower theology. There was no discussion or defense of the finite god presented in *Aid To Bible Understanding* who chose not to know the future. A god not quite omniscient is an interesting oddity reminiscent of the pagan gods of Greece and Rome. The philosophical and theological implications of a limited deity are staggering. I trace the history of limited deities in my book, *Battle of the Gods*.

I then looked for a discussion of the epistemological principles upon which the book is based. In a limp response to my book, *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues* (World), there is a brief discussion of this on pages 78–80. He claims that he does not begin with a "preconceived view." This is, of course, a lie. He is a self-confessed Jehovah's Witness who is writing in defense of the Society's teachings. He assumes as his *apriori* that the Society speaks for Jehovah and thus the Trinity is a false doctrine.

That this is the case is clear from page 87 where he sweeps aside my exegesis of [John 10:30](#) with these words,

“Morey imports a post-biblical view into [John 10:30](#)...”

If you begin with the assumption that the Watchtower is the prophet of God and thus true in its doctrines, then the Trinity doctrine is “post-biblical,” i.e. it was invented centuries after the close of the New Testament. Then, using circular reasoning, you end up with the following syllogism:

Since the Trinity is a post-biblical concept,
Then it cannot be found in the Bible.
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Then the Trinity is a post-biblical concept.

In this sense, Stafford’s entire book is an exercise in circular reasoning. Behind every discussion of every text is the *a priori* assumption that whatever that text says, it CANNOT teach the Trinity because the Society teaches that the Trinity is not biblical. Pretended neutrality is nothing more than veiled deception.

Stafford’s claim not to have any preconceived assumptions is just another example of lying for Jehovah and his Society. A first year philosophy student understands that when someone claims not to have any presuppositions, he has just revealed one of his presuppositions!

I then looked in vain for a discussion of the hermeneutical principles that guide his interpretation of Scripture. Again, I was met with disappointment. But this is to be expected, as a cultist must follow the inspired interpretation given by his “prophet,” hermeneutics goes out the window.

Since I devoted a large section in my book to the exegetical evidence for OT theophanies, i.e. when God appeared in human form, I assumed that he would deal with this vast exegetical evidence. But he avoided any discussion of theophanies in general and only gave a brief shallow discussion of [Isa. 6:1](#) (pgs. 174f). He quotes the Watchtower’s interpretation of [Isa. 6:1](#) and [John 12](#) as the final word on the issue.

How could he omit the theophanies from his review of the arguments used by Trinitarians? The only reasonable explanation is that the evidence is too strong to bring up. He simply cannot handle it.

In terms of logic, I began a list of the fallacies he commits and when it reached several pages, I gave up. He commits so many logical fallacies so often that it would take an entire volume just to list them!

Another problem is his failure to understand how real publishers work. When you have books published by mainline publishers, there is a time lag between when you give them the manuscript and when they publish it. The normal time lag is two years. This means that any research that was written between when you sent in the manuscript and when it is published will not be found in your book.

Scholars understand that you cannot criticize an author if a source he quotes changes after he has sent in his manuscript. Evidently, this is not understood by Stafford.

Seeking to avoid having to deal with the major arguments given in my book on the Trinity, Stafford decided to focus on one minor intertestamental evidence for the deity of the Messiah and turned it into an *ad hominem* attack against my character. In the Aramaic “Son of God” Scroll there was a reference to the Messiah as “a great God of gods.”

Some translators use the lower case and put it as “a great god of gods.” Whether you translate it with a capital “G” or lower case “g” is not in the text but in the judgment of the translator.

Since I had already stated that I would use my own translations at times, I had the freedom to use capital “G” because it fit better with the context. Since I am the translator of the Psalms for the International Standard Version, my qualifications for using my own translations cannot be questioned.

Stafford chose this minor point to utilize two logical fallacies.

First, one of scroll scholars I cited changed his translation AFTER my manuscript was finished and sent in to the publisher. Stafford used this later translation to imply that I was dishonest! But if the scholar later changed his translation, that does not mean I was dishonest since my comments refer to his earlier translation.

Second, one of the laws of logic is that the attributes of a part cannot be attributed to the whole. If later research on a scroll reveals that earlier translations were in error (This happens all the time!), this is fine with me. I can change my book when it is reprinted. But what does Stafford do? He uses this minor point, on which Scroll scholars still disagree, to broad brush my entire book as unreliable!

I must also point out that he omitted any discussion of the mass amount of intertestamental material I cited. Evidently, he did not deal with those quotes because he could not figure out a way to wiggle out of them.

I personally think the scholar changed his translation for theological reasons. The liberal zeitgeist has exerted this power before. Thus his change of translation does not logically imply that my entire book is erroneous. Stafford only reveals that he could not handle my book and decided to dismiss it by using character slurs.

Now, if I wrote a book in which I stated that I believe in lying when it serves my purpose, then he could question my honesty. But I don’t believe in lying. I must speak the truth in love. Since Stafford is in a Society that teaches lying when it serves its purposes, he is suspect.

The same holds for his partial quotations and misrepresentations of Trinitarians in general. Witnesses have a long history of doing this. He twists what Trinitarians write and does not tell people what they really said on an issue. But this is what I have come to expect from Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Over all, I was disappointed with the book. The same old tired arguments developed by 19th century Unitarians were regurgitated by Stafford. Same old, same old ... boring!