NATURAL THEOLOGY: A RECENT HISTORY

Olli-Pekka Vainio
University of Helsinki

Abstract. This article tells the story of Christian natural theology from the late 18th century to our own time by locating the key moments and thinkers, who have shaped how natural theology has been practiced in the past and how it is now being re-assessed and developed. I will summarize certain key elements that unite all forms of natural theology and assess briefly two basic criticisms of natural theology.

> It is doctrine indeed that the human mind can, unaided by revelation, discover that God is, that He is omnipotent, one and personal. But it is not doctrine (and still less is it experience) that every human mind can of its unaided power achieve this feat; and it is quite certain that not one in a thousand attempts it.
> *Hillaire Belloc*

During the last 100 years, several surprising plot twists have taken place in the story of natural theology. In this article, I will locate the key elements of natural theology (or its criticisms or alternatives) by pinpointing the central philosophical and theological presuppositions in the discussion. I shall intertwine these more analytic points with the recent history of natural theology, which goes something like this.

According to the standard definition, natural theology is a project that tries to argue for the existence of God without resorting to special revelation. The story of natural theology is long. The first attempts of providing a philosophical proof for the existence of supreme being predate Plato, and the Christian Church has formulated several versions of natural theology starting from Apostle Paul (Acts 17:23) and the first Church Fathers. (McGrath 2001, 246–306)[1] The key elements in this story are manifold. Natural theology touches philosophical topics such as ontology, epistemology, and philosophy of language, and in theology the doctrines of creation, theological anthropology, soteriology, and political theology.

[1] (Re Manning 2013).

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Here I wish to concentrate on the recent history of theology, that is, on what has happened after the first Vatican Council (1869–1870). This particular period is interesting not only because of its temporal affinity but because we have seen several ideological revolutions within the last 150 years. I take this oddity to be one exemplar of our postmodern times where everything, both ancient and novel ideas, have simultaneously become available for us.

CATHOLIC THEOLOGY BETWEEN PURE NATURE AND FIDEISM

In the 19th century, when the Western world was going through the late industrial revolution and experiencing yet unseen progress of science, theologians welcomed this turn of events as a gift. A throng of popular tracts, written by both scientists and theologians, were printed and read with great enthusiasm and virtually no one, not even atheists, seemed to think that scientific progress should be necessarily seen as an anti-theistic force. This was the golden age of natural theology.

Why, then, did Vatican I have to underline the natural knowledge of God in ways that made it the hallmark for natural theology until our own time? Famously, the First Vatican Council anathematized those who claimed "that the one, true God, our creator and lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason" (DS 3004).[2]

The immediate target of Roman Catholic condemnations were Protestants and those Catholics who thought that there was something wrong in the Thomistic synthesis of faith and reason. At this juncture, the concept of "fideism" was coined to refer to the erroneous views in which faith precedes reason and not vice versa (Vainio 2010, 9–13). Despite the anathemas, 20th century Catholic theology would witness a prolonged and still ongoing debate on natural theology, or to express the issue in Catholic parlance, on nature and grace.

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[2] This view was reiterated in 1910 in the famous "anti-modernist oath", which stated: "I profess that God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the natural light of reason from the created world (see Rom. 1:19), that is, from the visible works of creation, as a cause from its effects, and that, therefore, his existence can also be demonstrated." More recently *Fides et Ratio* and *Catechism of the Catholic Church* confirm the same stance in more or less the same words. However, the later documents are less harsh in their condemnations, whereas Vatican I condemned also the view according to which the existence of God can be deemed as a more probable option. Thus even Richard Swinburne would not have passed the rationality test in the 19th century Catholic Church.

At the turn of the 20th century, Catholic theology was heavily influenced by Thomism and especially its Manualist tradition but the new currents of thought began to challenge it. The challenge is often attributed to the movement known as *Nouvelle Théologie*, which received its name from the pen of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, who was one of the main supporters of the strict Thomist tradition. In his mind, the new theologians were trying to fix something that was not broken. Even if the new theologians were not an organized group and they leaned to different directions (among them were, e.g., Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Joseph Ratzinger), they shared a few common features, such as emphasis on the historical nature of Christian thought, appeal to theology proper to support public claims, and a critical attitude towards some forms of neo-Scholastic thought (Mettepenningen 2010, 8–11).

Henri de Lubac became the central figure in the debate concerning nature and grace (Swafford 2015). In abstract, the goal of the debate was to reconcile two theologically important claims. First, it is part of the Christian faith that nature is created by God and that God participates in it. Second, nature is not God, and the orders of the nature and the grace are distinct. How should we then understand the relationship between participation and distance in creation? The participants adopted two opposite stances. Extrinsicists claimed that nature and grace are two different spheres and there is such thing as "pure nature" (*natura pura*). This is a technical term that refers to the possibility of recognizing the true essence of natural things without the help of revelation. If it is actually possible to understand the essence of nature without revelation, this enables both natural theology and natural moral philosophy, which are based on a Thomistic-Aristotelian reading of human nature and the mechanisms of the universe. An additional reason behind this view is the following. If the world is unintelligible without the supernatural grace, this will destroy true human freedom. Namely, our will needs to have actual freedom to choose between genuine options. Otherwise our choice is forced from the outside, and thus not only fundamentally irrational but also immoral.

Intrinsicists claimed that there is no such thing as pure nature; nature is already "graced" and understanding the nature of the world is dependent on understanding its Christological grounding: everything is created through divine Logos. Therefore, all human actions and knowledge are dependent on grace. Intrinsicists did not deny that nature is ordered but they were less optimistic regarding the capabilities of human reason to recognize it properly.

Two figures not directly related to the nature-and-grace debates are worth mentioning here. Edith Stein (d.1972), who is singled out in *Fides et Ratio* as an example of good Christian philosophical theology, struggled with natural theology. She wanted to stay loyal to Vatican I but as a mystic she did not want to put too much weight on the abstract theological debate divorced from Christian life and practice. She observed that concentrating on mere natural theology will lead us to a wrong kind of Christian life (Stein 2000). Erich Przywara, on the other hand, tried to offer a very minimalistic account of natural theology with the help of the doctrine of analogia entis. I will return to Przywara in a moment but here I note that he, like Stein, struggled with how to combine the doctrine of creation and the clauses of Vatican I without surrendering theology to philosophy (Przywara 2014).

Although Stein and Przywara were not counted among *Nouvelle Théologie*, they too contributed to the rise of alternatives to the Thomistic synthesis, while being favourable towards Thomism. Of the major philosophical movements, personalism, become more and more popular in the 20th century Catholic Theology and the influence of Thomas started to dwindle. Nevertheless, this led to the resurgence of "ressourcement Thomism" as a reaction (Hütter and Levering 2010).

BARTHIAN REACTIONS

Perhaps the most famous symbol of natural theology in the world was, and still is, the Gifford lectures in Scotland, initiated and supported by Lord Gifford's estate since 1885. In his will, Lord Gifford stated "I wish the lecturers to treat their subject as a strictly natural science, the greatest of all possible sciences, indeed, in one sense, the only science, that of Infinite Being, without reference to or reliance upon any supposed special exceptional or so-called miraculous revelation. I wish it considered just as astronomy or chemistry is." Furthermore, the lecturers "…may be of any denomination whatever, or of no denomination at all (and many earnest and high-minded men prefer to belong to no ecclesiastical denomination); they may be of any religion or way of thinking, or as is sometimes said, they may be of no religion, or they may be so-called sceptics or agnostics or freethinkers…" In light of Lord Gifford's will, it is perhaps no wonder that amongst lecturers have been such figures as, on the one hand, atheists and agnostics like James Frazer, Hannah Arendt, Iris Murdoch,

A. J. Ayer, and Steven Pinker, and on the other hand, theists like Karl Barth, Stanley Hauerwas, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, and Marilyn McCord Adams. Over the years, Gifford lectures have demonstrated that people have very different ways of analysing the category of the natural. Nature clearly has hermeneutical potential.[3]

Although the "wax-nose" of nature eventually caused problems for the 19th century natural theology, there was something more ominous prowling in the darkness. People started to realize that there is something wrong with nature: nature seemed to be horrendous. There are natural disasters, animals eat their babies (and ours too), and humans are as cruel and brutish as the other animals. Finally, the malady of the First World War laid waste to the simplistic attempts to use order of the world to argue for the existence of omnipotent and omnibenevolent being (Eddy 2013, 100–117, 114).

From the Protestant side, Karl Barth is no doubt the main figure in the natural theology debate. He likened his attitude towards natural theology to a snake; "you hit it and kill it as soon as you see it". The main events of Barth's career where this relentless attitude came up were his debate with Emil Brunner on natural theology, his conversations with Erich Przywara and Hans Urs von Balthasar on *analogia entis*, and his Gifford lectures entitled "The Knowledge of God and the Service of God. According to the Teaching of the Reformation", which were delivered in Aberdeen, 1937–1938. In all these occasions, Barth offers a rejection of natural theology, on theological grounds.

I will briefly illustrate Barth's stance through the debate on *analogia entis* with Przywara. John Betz summarizes Przywara's stance: "For as of yet, from a purely philosophical perspective, nothing whatsoever can be made out about who God is or what he has revealed, or even that there is such thing as revelation. All that can be made out metaphysically with any degree of certainty apart from revelation is that creaturely being is not its own ground, that it is not being itself, that it 'is' only in the form of becoming, and that theology, that is, the science of a God of revelation, is a reasonable possibility or to put it in still more minimalist terms, a 'non-impossibility'" (Betz 2011, 35–87, 66).[4] This im-

[3] See www.giffordlectures.org

[4] Also Jacques Maritain (2005, 191), in his exposition of natural theology, offers the following minimal but far-reaching definition: "In other words, being itself is its nature or essence,

plies that the creatures are always, even after the Fall, still directed towards the highest good. This deep-seated inclination cannot be erased from our nature (Przywara 1962, 400–401).

Barth's concern was that *analogia entis* establishes a space that enables us to get a hold of God without theology proper. He also notes that Przywara does not take sin into account, which makes it seem like he speaking about humans *before* the Fall. In Barth's mind, Przywara's model of theological anthropology is not based on actual human conditions.

In his exchange with Brunner, Barth offered also theopolitical reasons (Brunner 1935; Moore 2013, 227–249). Brunner tried to argue that the reception of revelation requires something, a point of contact, from the human subject. This Brunner defined as a passive capacity for God-consciousness. But even this was too much for Barth. Andrew Moore (2013, 234) explains Barth's logic thus: "…Barth objects to natural theology because it would establish some other focus for theology than Jesus Christ and claim a position in our thinking that ought to belong solely to the living Word." Natural theology leads to abstract speculation and away from what is central to theology. Moreover, thinking about the context in which the Gospel is supposed to be proclaimed will corrupt the content of the Gospel.[5]

In *Church Dogmatics*, Barth (1969, 449) makes a strong assertion, "…the supposed philosophical equivalent of the Creator God has nothing to do with Jesus' message of God the Father…" This claim has had a huge influence on later theology and carries with it a heavy philosophical package. More recently, several criticisms of this claim have been expressed while many have defended the claim as well.

When conjoined with contemporary epistemological trends, Barth's thinking has been developed into more refined forms of anti-foundationalist theologies of which Bruce Marshall's creative use of Donald Davidson is a fine exam-

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it is subsistent Being itself, he who is. This conclusion, which for the philosopher involves the most sublime truths of metaphysics, is reached very simply by common sense, for it is in truth the most fundamental natural operation of the human understanding, so that it can be denied only by denying reason itself and its first principles (the laws of identity or non-contradiction, sufficient reason, causality); and as the history of philosophy shows only too plainly, the mind has no other choice than between the alternatives: the true God or radical irrationality."

[5] In fact, not even Barth is as non-contextual as people, or he himself, thinks he is. See (Ward 2005).

ple (Marshall 2002).[6] Anti-foundationalist theologies assume that no natural theology is needed for various reasons. First, if there is no neutral rationality in the first place, it is pointless to try to use natural theology as a starting point. Second, humans do not reason in internalist fashion such that they always evaluate the evidence before they act. Instead, it is more in line with the human nature to act based on what we believe and then move on and revise our beliefs if needed. Third, it is theologically suspect if one needs to give epistemic primacy to something that is not endemic to what one is.[7]

REBIRTH OF NATURAL THEOLOGY IN POST-WAR OXFORD

Almost all major theologians in the beginning of the 20th century wrote long treatises on metaphysics. These included Austin Farrer's *Finite and Infinite*, Edith Stein's *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, Erich Przywara's *Analogia Entis*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Akt und Sein*, Barth's *Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God*, to mention just a few. Then followed a long era of silence. Philosophers considered metaphysics as a topic not worth serious thought and theologians were following Barth in rejecting philosophy divorced from theology. Curiously, A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936) and Barth's *Church Dogmatics* had a similar effect on theology. There was a vivid scene of philosophical theology in the 1920s and 1930s but this fell to disrepute due to rise of logical positivism and Barthianism. This atmosphere has remained to certain extent until this day, mostly among European theologians. But there has always been a resistance.

In UK, the new start centered around Austin Farrer (d. 1968), an Anglican theologian who had strong Thomistic sympathies. Farrer was a member of "The Metaphysicals", a famous company of intellectuals in 1940s Oxford who chose to be called such because metaphysics was considered to be

[6] For the criticism of these kind of anti-foundationalist theologies, see (Rauser 2009).

[7] A Barthian position is defended also by Paul K. Moser (Moser 2010, 151–163). He argues that natural theology cannot establish the existence of the personal God who is worthy of worship and seeks fellowship with humans. Traditional arguments for the existence are misleading because they are not directed towards this particular entity. Moreover, the religious person who has experiential knowledge of God does not need natural theology. For Moser, the generic theism of natural theology seems to be disconnected from Judeo-Christian theism. For an extended response to Moser, see the article of Dougherty & Rickabaugh in this same volume.

outdated, and they (Eric Mascall, Iris Murdoch, Basil Mitchell, Ian Ramsey and R.M. Hare, among others) wanted to discuss whatever topic happened to please them. This openness to ask unfashionable questions revitalized the philosophical climate and enabled new ways to pursue the themes that they saw as central for human existence and which they could not remain silent about (MacSwain 2013).

Farrer became the central figure in the Oxford renaissance of philosophical theology, which tried, on the one hand, to criticise the assumptions of logical positivism and, on the other hand, to avoid the circling of wagons they saw happening in Barthian and dialectical/existential theology. He sought to provide an account of "rational religion", that is, "a reflective cognitive activity appropriated to the knowledge of God from universal grounds" (Farrer 1943, vii). Farrer's style was unlike contemporary analytic philosophy and rather offbeat, at least to our ears. He adopted elements in his thinking that would later be known as both Transcendental Thomism and Reformed Epistemology and acknowledged the embodied nature of human knowledge (religious knowledge is more like knowing a person and less like knowing a proposition even if it involves propositions). Farrer's own style was eclectic and shifting, which made it difficult for anyone to follow him and do the exactly same thing. Nevertheless, he managed to clear a space for philosophical theology in the United Kingdom and many others were able to proceed with similar interests.

Among others, Basil Mitchell (d. 2011), who succeeded Ian Ramsey as the Nolloth Professor of Christian Philosophy at Oriel College, Oxford, continued Farrer's work. Mitchell is perhaps most well known for stimulating the debate on epistemic justification of religious beliefs in the context of contemporary theory of knowledge. He developed the cumulative case argument, which his successor Richard Swinburne would take even further. Mitchell's greatest opponents in the British academia were the positivists and ordinary language philosophy. He insisted that we have no good reason to think that religious beliefs are totally something else compared to beliefs about natural world. We do not need to split the world in two so that here are the things we can prove and over there are those things we cannot. Instead, most of our beliefs are messy in the sense that they cannot be easily classified in either sense. The justification of our beliefs is cumulative and based on common

sense rationality. If theistic beliefs are to be justified, everyone should be able to understand the force of arguments and no prior faith or commitment to the truth is needed (Mitchell 1973, 35, 144).

Mitchell saw in certain forms of Wittgensteinian philosophy a misrepresentation of religious way of life and addressed this issue in many of his works, while simultaneously trying to find ways of connecting Christian philosophy to contemporary secular philosophy.[8] In the UK, Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion never formed a school of its own, probably because no one really knew how to interpret Wittgenstein's remarks on religion, and probably even more so because no one really knew how to interpret Wittgenstein's interpreters' interpretations. Instead, Wittgenstein's thought had various kinds of ripple effects and it shaped many forms of contemporary theology and philosophy yet it never created a major, distinct school in philosophy of religion.[9]

In philosophical theology, 1967 was a watershed moment. Farrer's last book, *Faith and Speculation*, was published, which was not well received due to its dialogical style, and that marked the end of the somewhat experimental postwar period in British philosophical theology. In the same year, Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds* and Kai Nielsen's article "Wittgensteinian Fideism" came out, and Swinburne's first book *Space and Time* was published just a year later. Plantinga's and Swinburne's more strictly analytical model would eventually become the mainstream in Anglo-American analytic philosophy of religion.[10]

However, the mainstream of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion has two different stances on natural theology. Swinburnean internalist evidentialism sees natural theology in a very positive light, whereas externalist Reformed epistemology has traditionally been hostile towards it.

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[8] These included, e.g., his inaugural lecture: "Neutrality and Commitment", which tackled the question whether a Christian can be a genuine philosopher if he cannot seriously doubt his commitments? Mitchell argued that Christian cannot be shielded from arguments and critical inquiry, and consequently it is possible that religious claims can be refuted by reason.

[9] It is peculiar that Wittgenstein's philosophy has been used to support very different kinds of theologies, such as liberal anti-realism (Don Cupitt), realist postliberalism (George Lindbeck) and agnosticism (D.Z. Phillips, Anthony Kenny). See (Kerr 1988).

[10] In the USA, a bridge figure between Oxford philosophy and Reformed theology was Diogenes Allen (d. 2013) of Princeton Seminary, but he adopted a more apophatic and moderately fideistic approach: faith is needed for proper reasoning about God. See (MacSwain 2013).

Contemporary analytic theology, which brings together scholars from both traditions, does not as such have a take on natural theology but focuses more on methodological concerns. Some analytic theologians are card-carrying natural theologians, some are a bit more hesitant (McCall 2015). However, basically everyone in this camp shares a suspicious attitude towards Kant (or certain interpretation of him), but they have to some extent diverging ways of getting past him.[11] This is where we turn next.

WAKING UP FROM DOGMATIC SLUMBER 1: SWINBURNE

It is beyond doubt that both Hume and Kant had a significant influence on natural theology in the 20th century. You still sometimes hear claims that Hume and Kant showed that natural theology is not possible. However, Hume and Kant have not really bothered contemporary natural theologians for some time. When the positivist movement started to die down and metaphysics became again a legitimate philosophical subject and when the philosophy of science developed towards critical realism, it became obvious that Hume's and Kant's criticisms were build on philosophical assumptions that were not self-evident and dependent on claims that could be challenged on good grounds.

It is not possible to go through all the arguments by Hume and Kant; I just briefly note Richard Swinburne's basic criticism of them (e.g. Swinburne 2013). According to Hume, we cannot have knowledge on things that are unique because we can observe only particular events. This, in his mind, prevents us from making claims about, say, the creator of the universe (Hume 1948). But this also prevents us from making claims about many other features of the universe as they too are unique (Swinburne 2014, 134). Secondly, Hume's theory of perception and knowledge makes it impossible for him to reason about unobservable events, but we have no good reasons to adopt this theory of perception, Swinburne claims. Instead, we are well within our

[11] Andrew Chignell points out that the "hardline" reading of Kant that makes metaphysical statements void of meaning is not necessary and Kant can be used to support also metaphysical realism. Thus, the problem might not be that much Kant himself but his interpreters. See (Chignell 2009, 117–135; Firestone 2009).

epistemic rights to reason about both unobservable and unique events if our hypotheses are rendered probable by the available evidence.

Both Hume's and Kant's anti-natural theology campaign is based on limiting human understanding and our possibility of having knowledge. Kant takes Hume's ideas even further. Kant argues that noumenal reality is unknowable and our knowledge is only about (physical and sensible) phenomena. Kant puts on a straightjacket that limits what counts as conceivable experience, and metaphysics and natural theology are thus ruled out as sources of knowledge. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, he offers so called "antinomies" that purportedly demonstrate how metaphysical knowledge leads to contradictions as we have good reasons to believe either of two opposite views. But why we should accept this, Swinburne asks? Often we might have good reasons to favour some view over another; this cannot be presupposed in advance. Moreover, in trying to avoid metaphysics, Kant's own model is built on heavy assumptions concerning ontology. For example, why should we think that the knowledge of the categories of understanding are somehow less ontologically problematic than the knowledge about God?

Moreover, both Hume and Kant share a common, theological criticism: natural theology does not give us the Christian God but generic theism at best. Yet again, why this should be a problem? The possibility of the existence of a theistic god (or something close to it) increases the likelihood that Christian God exists. Natural theology does not have to go all the way. Swinburne acquiescently admits that philosophy can demonstrate Christian truths "in some respect" but it does not have to prove everything that Christians believe (Swinburne 1993).

WAKING UP FROM DOGMATIC SLUMBER 2: REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY AND RADICAL ORTHODOXY

Kant has never enjoyed such a stature in Anglo-american philosophy compared to continental Europe. Instead of him, the philosophical currents were affected by the Scottish Enlightenment, especially Thomas Reid (Murphy 1996). In direct opposition to Kant, Reid held that we are entitled to believe that we experience the world more or less as it is, unless we have good reasons to believe otherwise.

Reformed Epistemologists, like Nicholas Wolterstorff, have offered a response to Kantianism with the help of Reid (Wolterstorff 1998; Wolterstorff 2001). He argues that Kant's theory of knowledge is one possible construct but we have no overwhelmingly good reasons for accepting it. First, Kant complicates unnecessarily the knowledge acquisition from the get-go: why should we start with a skeptical premise concerning the possibility of knowledge if we seem to do quite fine without it?

Second, Wolterstorff argues that Kant's notion of perception is unnecessarily complicated, and Wolterstorff rejects Kant's view of mental representation. Instead of being aware of some input of an object, we could as well claim that our perceiving an object means being aware of a particular thing, such as a dog or an eagle. But isn't our perception always mediated through concepts? Wolterstorff does not deny this. When we see a thing, we automatically place it within a conceptual framework (this table: table: furniture: brown things and so on). But according to Wolterstorff and Reid, there are no good arguments for thinking that these concepts somehow hide the reality as it is from us. Moreover, tables and houses already have a structure; they do not became structured when we observe them. Concepts do not bar us from the reality but they link us with the reality. To have a concept is to grasp a property of an object.

For Reformed Epistemologists, rejecting Kant means only salvaging our common sense world of experience. However, choosing an epistemological strategy that is not Kantian does not result in a uniform stance on natural theology, and Reformed epistemologists have been traditionally critical of natural theology.

If our knowledge is understood in externalist fashion, we do not need to be able to provide arguments for our beliefs unless we are challenged with good reasons. Alvin Plantinga has argued that this is the classical view of Reformed Theology but he has received criticism for this interpretation (Plantinga 1980; Sudduth 2009). The critics of externalism have claimed that even an externalist needs to rely on public evidence if she wishes to defeat the defeaters aimed at her view. The difference seems merely to be at what point should natural theology arguments be introduced.[12]

[12] Kevin Diller has argued that Plantinga's views are in fact in line with Barth (Diller 2014). They both admit that no one does theology without presuppositions and our knowledge of God

Another important but very different movement, Radical Orthodoxy, also shares the suspicion of both Kant and natural theology. As James K. A. Smith (2004, 147) states "Both Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed tradition are suspicious of epistemologies that assume neutral or objective criteria for determining what counts as rational or true. All pretended autonomous accounts of human nature or social life are funded not only by biases or prejudices but also by religious, even quasi-religious, commitments." Radical Orthodoxy people argue that few thinkers have been able to escape the treacherous dualism of faith and reason. Aquinas, traditionally understood, leaves a neutral space for natural reason where some preliminary facts, such as the existence of God, can be found and established without supernatural revelation. The Aquinas of Radical Orthodoxy is perceived through *Nouvelle Théologie* so that even simple perception becomes theologically grounded. You do not perceive things correctly, if you do not perceive them in relation to their final end (Milbank and Pickstock 2000).

Radical Orthodoxy is critical of all forms of natural theology; whether it means finding correlations between the culture and theological language (Tillich) or arguing for the existence of God from allegedly neutral principles (classical apologetics). This means that apologetics and natural theology are futile. All stories are ultimately founded on different myths and you cannot really argue with myths; you can only expose and out-narrate them. This is what Smith calls "negative apologetics". In these cases, natural theology is not given the place that Swinburne and his kin grant to it. Nevertheless, in Radical Orthodoxy something like natural theology is still being done, but it takes place in the different phase, as a way of faith seeking understanding.

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is always less than absolute. Having disordered epistemic machinery, humans are radically dependent on God for knowing God. They both start with the presumption of truth. But a hardcore Barthian could still claim that Plantinga surrenders too much, or requires too much from the human side. If the revelation is received completely without any internal requirements, we do not need the *sensus divinitatis*, or that the revelation should arrive at us according to the "design plan". Moreover, if natural theology is needed after the conversion, it is not *natural* theology anymore, it is just *theology*. See also Amber L. Griffioen's article in this volume.

WHOSE NATURE? WHICH THEOLOGY?

It is apparent that the project of natural theology rests on certain presuppositions. To conclude my paper, I will present five central claims, which seem to me to be foundational for contemporary natural theology.

a) metaphysical realism: at least some entities are mind-independent

b) linguistic realism: human language can (at least analogically) refer to these entities

c) ontology and explanation: some of the world's features make the existence of a creator plausible.

d) a positive view of human reason: it is possible for us to recognize these aspects and features as a form of revelation without divine illumination.

e) spiritual worth: natural knowledge of God has some positive value for religious life

Natural theology, in the ordinary sense of the word, will become impossible if one or more of these claims is denied. To cut some corners: Postmodernists or hardcore Kantians deny at least (a) and (b). Reformed epistemology denies at least (d). Lutherans and Barthians traditionally deny at least (e). Some postfoundationalists might reject (d) and argue that nature can be seen as creation only from the point of view of special revelation.[13] If one rejects the first two claims, then one has a priori reason to think that natural theology is not a task worth undertaking. Rejecting the next three claims suggests that there is something spiritually suspicious or dangerous in natural theology: e.g., it presupposes a theologically problematic view of the post-Fall human person and her relation to the world.

The differences in accounts of justification notwithstanding, a significant portion of contemporary philosophical theology thinks that natural theol-

[13] This seems to be the case with Alister McGrath's theology of nature. See Rope Kojonen's article in this same volume.

ogy is indeed a task worth undertaking, or at least that there are no good arguments that would make the enterprise as such irrational or futile. But as noted, there are concerns regarding the place, benefits and possible harms of natural theology. I identify two polarizations, which help us to locate the most important concerns.

(1) *Generic theism vs. Trinitarian theism*

(2) *Credibility vs. integrity*

(1) concerns the aims of natural theology. Of contemporary systematic theologians, Wolfhart Pannenberg has argued that to make plausible case for their faith, the early Christians had to argue that the God of Israel is, in fact, the one God conceived by the ancient philosophers. But in our own time, Christian theology should not make any compromises that would make Trinity an exotic add-on to more generic theism, which they share with Jews, Muslims, and other monotheists. Pannenberg claims that the philosophical theology employed by the Christian Church should be done so that it aims for this triune God (Pannenberg 2007). In Pannenberg's case, his theological method blurs the lines between natural theology and theology proper: particular historical events can be both open for everyone and instances of special revelation.

A version of Pannenberg's theological method is C. Stephen Evans's account of natural signs (Evans 2010). Signs in general are not "conclusive" but they merely point towards something. Evans argues that this "pointing" is what makes natural theological arguments valuable. They do not necessarily compel assent or belief but they direct our inquiry so that that some options become "live" for us.

From this perspective, the limited nature of natural theology is not necessarily a theological problem. Let us assume that natural theology offers a proof for the existence of God, who has properties x, y, and z. Trinitarian revealed theology argues for the existence of God, who has properties x, y, z, b, and d. Does natural theology offer a twisted account of God? I do not think so. Just like I can acquire knowledge about Bruce Wayne without knowing that he is also Batman, it should be possible to use natural reason to acquire knowledge about the God of theism — without the doctrine of Trinity. I think

that the Barthians have the burden of proof in this case, that is, they would need to offer an argument how the Theistic God is *fundamentally* different from the Trinitarian God.

(2) also touches the way theology is done: how important is the way we communicate faith? People have had different intuitions about this. De Lubac claimed that the inability to recognize the imago Dei in fellow human beings, and not recognizing that everyone's ultimate destiny is the union with God, led to the horrors of WWII. Contrary to this, Barth argued that granting even a tiny bit of god-likeness to the human realm will lead to abusing it for advancing an anti-Christian agenda.

Who is right? I believe that one simple answer cannot be given. Human actions are always too complex to be analysed using a simple set of criteria; they have too many causes and reasons. Therefore, using merely theopolitical arguments for advancing or rejecting natural theology does not seem warranted (of course, this does not mean that these could be forgotten altogether). The credibility/integrity question appears to be ultimately context-dependent. We need to decide case by case what is the proper course of action. In my view, the theological concerns are real and natural theologians should keep those in mind. Nevertheless, they do not seem to be so serious that they would rule out the possibility of natural theology.

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