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ARTICLES

DISCUSSIONS AND REPLIES

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

GUEST EDITORIAL: THE RETURN OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

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It is customary for philosophical ideas to ebb and flow. Often philosophical views (assuming they are any good) do not get refuted, they merely get run over by other ideas. But reducing philosophy to mere changes in sociological winds and people's tastes would obviously be unreasonable. Arguments count and the progress in philosophy is slow, but possible. Natural theology is a good example of how philosophical ideas are treated by history. There have been times when natural theology has been popular, and times when it has been perceived as obsolete, confused, and even heretical. The reasons for these changes are legion. Acknowledging that other traditions of enquiry have each an interesting story to tell, it is ultimately a task of philosophy to fathom when an argument was in fact refuted and when it was just disregarded for other reasons.

This issue of the European Journal of Philosophy of Religion collects together the papers delivered at the 2nd Helsinki Analytic Theology Workshop (HEAT) that was held in the Faculty of Theology, Helsinki in January 2016 with the support of Areiopagi – project funded by the John Templeton Foundation and the Reason and Religious Recognition Centre of Excellence of the Academy of Finland. In addition to the participants' papers, we have brought in three additional contributors, Trent Dougherty, Brandon Rickabaugh and Kelly James Clark. The topic of our workshop, 'Investigating Natural Theology' was chosen based on the apparent international interest in the theme.

The last golden age of natural theology was in the 19th century, when special attention was paid to biological design arguments. However, Darwin made these arguments obsolete, and later currents in European philosophy and theology made natural theology look philosophically futile and meaningless from the religious point of view. The renaissance of philosophical theology after the 1970s in Europe and the US caused philosophers and theologians to reassess what had in fact happened to natural theology arguments, and they found that the news of its death had been greatly exaggerated. For

example, both Oxford and Cambridge University Presses have recently published large handbooks on the topic. However, contemporary philosophical theology cannot be made equivalent to the project of natural theology since, for example, one major current within it, Reformed Epistemology, has not traditionally considered these arguments of great value within its own epistemological project. Nonetheless, in the wake of the rise of philosophical theology and philosophy of religion in the end of 20th century, countless books and articles have been written that can be classified as natural theology or comments on natural theology.

Our approach in these papers is mostly meta-theoretical. We focus on the project of natural theology, and ask, for example, what kind of arguments are offered against it, what kind of intuitions lie behind it, and what might be the benefits of engaging in thinking about these arguments. The breakdown of the contents of articles is as follows.

Olli-Pekka Vainio provides a recent history of natural theology from the 19th century to our day. During the last 150 years, theologians and philosophers have adopted various attitudes towards natural theology. Roman Catholics have typically been more favourable, whereas Protestants, following the surprising combination of Barth and logical positivism, have been critical towards it. The article offers a simple set of presuppositions that characterize contemporary forms of natural theology and assesses two basic counter-arguments against it.

Rope Kojonen assesses in more detail six types of critiques against natural theology. He shows how natural theology arguments have evolved in response to philosophical and theological critiques of, for example, Hume, Kant, Darwin, and Barth. As a result, contemporary natural theology is a rather diverse phenomenon and in the absence of good counter-arguments against the project, its popularity is not likely to decrease.

Trent Dougherty and Brandon Rickabaugh offer a response to Paul K. Moser's project of religious epistemology that has been critical towards natural theology. They argue, contra Moser, that natural theology does not necessarily involve intellectual vices, such as epistemic pride and arrogance, but can be seen as an act of epistemic humility, which seeks to be attentive to the available evidence.

Ilmari Karimies and Panu-Matti Pöykkö examine two different streams in theology that are typically seen as hostile to natural theology. Karimies analyses the writings of the Reformer Martin Luther, whose thinking has influenced many contemporary thinkers arguing for an anti-metaphysical understanding of religion and against the role of natural theology in religious forms of life. Going against superficial readings of Luther, Karimies argues that Luther, in fact, has room for natural theology in his religious vision.

Pöykkö offers a close reading of the French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion, who works in a similar framework to many anti-metaphysical Lutherans: in order for revelation to be genuine, it needs to be freed from categories that might turn God into an idol. Pöykkö goes on to show how Marion's attempt to guard God from idolatry and onto-theology does ultimately require some help from the categories he tries to avoid. How can we know that we address God and not an idol, if we lack ways to talk about God? In the end, Marion's project is understandable only within a robust Christian theological tradition.

Amber Griffioen examines the philosophy and phenomenon of religious experience and how it is used in natural theology arguments. In this vein, she argues that natural theology can have affective, aesthetic, moral, and even liturgical functions. Therefore, there is no reason to think about natural theology as a mere intellectual exercise. Griffioen draws our attention to the materially mediated nature of religious experience, which takes seriously our bodily existence and the reality of lived religion.

Helen de Cruz and Johan de Smedt, and Kelly James Clark investigate in their papers the cognitive foundation of our reasoning about natural theology arguments. De Cruz and De Smedt argue that the intuitions that support the natural theology arguments are the same as those we use in our everyday reasoning. This may partly explain their intuitive force although this does not as such settle the issue concerning their epistemic value. They also evaluate the role of cognitive biases and background assumptions at work in the reasoning of natural theology.

Clark offers a critical reading of some of the recent studies that link, on the one hand, atheism and rationality, and, on the other hand, theism and the lack of rational inference. He argues how the relation between intuitions and arguments is often treated simplistically, and how they cannot be neatly separated in human cognition. Therefore, neither atheism nor theism can be

classified ultimately as purely rational or having epistemic advantage since the same intuitions function on the background of all our thinking.

In the final article, we move from the analysis of natural theology to natural theology proper. Mats Wahlberg offers a refined version of the Leibnizian cosmological argument against physicalism according to which either the totality of physical beings have a non-physical cause or a necessary being exists. He argues that physicalism faces a dilemma where it needs to either deny the causal closure of physics or admit the existence of (possibly physical) necessary being.

We hope that these contributions will further the understanding of natural theology and the nature of religious reasoning in general.

NATURAL THEOLOGY: A RECENT HISTORY

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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).

PP. 1–18
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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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NATURAL THEOLOGY, EVIDENCE, AND EPISTEMIC HUMILITY

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Abstract. One not infrequently hears rumors that the robust practice of natural theology reeks of epistemic pride. Paul Moser's is a paradigm of such contempt. In this paper we defend the robust practice of natural theology from the charge of epistemic pride. In taking an essentially Thomistic approach, we argue that the evidence of natural theology should be understood as a species of God's general self-revelation. Thus, an honest assessment of that evidence need not be prideful, but can be an act of epistemic humility, receiving what God has offered, answering God's call. Lastly, we provide criticisms of Moser's alternative approach, advancing a variety of philosophical and theological problems against his conception of personifying evidence.

I. INTRODUCTION

One not infrequently hears rumors that the robust practice of natural theology — "proving" God's existence and that the being so proven to exist has various important properties — reeks of epistemic pride. Paul Moser seems to be particularly apt to report a malodorous scent wafting from the pages of the likes of, say, Thomas Aquinas, Richard Swinburne, and, especially, that scoundrel William Lane Craig.[1] Moser often describes natural theology as "the height of human arrogance"[2] and "prideful cognitive glory,"[3] and the obtaining of such evidence of

[1] Moser's recommendation for Craig's vast project of natural theology is that it, like all traditional natural theology, should be abandoned, so as not to "insult the intelligence or the rationality of the unconvinced theorists" (Moser 2014: 81).

[2] "So it is the height of arrogance for us humans to saunter up to the question whether God exists as if we were automatically in an appropriate moral and cognitive position to handle it reliably" (Moser 2000: 16).

[3] "We thus come truly to know God not in our prideful cognitive glory but rather in our volitional weakness relative to the priority of *God's* will" (Moser 2000: 27).

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God as evoking "self-exalting pride."[4] However, when one looks for defenses of these theses, they are not clearly forthcoming. In this essay we defend the robust practice of natural theology from such contempt. We provide what we take to be an essentially or at least approximately Thomistic approach. But we officially make no claims of correct systematic exegeses of the text of the Dumb Ox. The essay is, as it were, "based upon a true story."

II. GROUND CLEARING

To get to the heart of the issue, we must first do some ground clearing. We must remove from before our consideration certain red herrings that, though they don't deserve it, do pop up quite frequently in such discussions. This section will not be entirely negative, however, for it will prove an apt occasion for establishing some important epistemological themes. By saying what we are *not* saying, we provide context and content for what we *are* saying.

2.1 Knowing God in Humility

For the purposes of this paper, we understand epistemic humility in the context of religious epistemology and in contrast to epistemic pride. The specific case of intellectual pride we are concerned with is the alleged God-independent power to discover God and important truths about God. By "God" we have in mind of the Judeo-Christian God who is morally perfect and worthy of worship. Accordingly, a religious epistemology arouses intellectual pride by claiming or implying that one can come to know God and important truths about God apart from grace, apart from God's activity to accomplish in us what we cannot accomplish with our own powers. Natural theology, we argue, need not be intellectually prideful in this respect.

2.2 There is Proof and then there is Proof

The first bit of ground clearing concerns two confusions about the notion of proof. The first is a misconception about *proofs*, the second is a misconception about the *use* of proofs.

[4] "Self-exalting pride about having evidence for God's reality can obstruct others from God's curative endeavor, because it can turn people away from considering God as a truly good reality" (Moser 2015: 415).

One red herring in the investigation of the relationship between the robust practice of natural theology (it's about time we start abbreviating this, RPNT) and epistemic humility concerns the notion of a *proof*. Now "proof" is a bit of an honorific term, tending to connote that the thing proved, *quod erat demonstrandum*, is thereby known with certainty. It is therefore thought that, to some degree, inductive argumentation is humbler, less prideful, than deductive argumentation. That, say, Swinburne's conclusions are humbler than those of St. Thomas or Anselm's or Reichenbach's? This is based on a misconception about deduction. What's true is that deductive arguments transfer without losing the probability of their premises to their conclusions. That is, since in a deductively valid argument there is no possible world where the premises are true and the conclusion false, there is no room for probability. If one were certain of the premises, one could be certain of the conclusion.

The misunderstanding in question arises in part because of selective attention to things Aristotle and certain scholastics say about the premises of arguments in the acquiring of *scientia.* It is true that Aristotle thought that some of the first principles of philosophy and logic could be grasped in such a way as one could be certain of them and that a "proper demonstration" proceeded by a grasp of the essence of the thing being reasoned about. But Aristotle also had that little bit about not expecting more precision than is possible in a given discipline (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b24).

Perhaps sometimes one can have certainty (one of us thinks you *never* can (nope, not even *that*)). But most of the time, at least, we cannot have certainty. Therefore, there is no guarantee of certainty in a deductive argument. You only get certainty out if you put certainty in. Deductive arguments are *salva veritate,* truth-preserving. But that only means you get truth *out* at the conclusion if you put truth *in* at the premises. They are also *salva probabilitas*, probability-preserving. So you only get certainty *out* at the conclusion if you put certainty *in* at the premises.[5] Thus, even the R of RPNT isn't necessarily prideful certainty-claiming, deductive arguments notwithstanding.

In light of what we have just said and in light of how often one hears complaints about it, a special case is worth mentioning here. The case in Richard

[5] The rule is that the probability of the conclusion of a deductively valid argument is at least as high as one minus the sum of the uncertainty of the premises.

Swinburne's claim in *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* that the probability that Jesus is incarnate and was resurrected from the dead, on the evidence considered, is 0.97 (Swinburne 2003: 214). The fact is, there is nothing the least bit lacking in humility here, for he is merely reporting his intuitions. You are free to replace them with your own. This is true even if the charge is that the probability estimate is implausibly precise. Swinburne is not claiming any special knowledge or abilities. He is merely saying what seems more probable than not to him and to what degree. Now in some items one might be able easily to see how others could see things quite differently — such as some matter of fairly complex policy — but fail to see how others could see matters very much differently — such as someone ready to vote for Donald Trump. The amazing thing, as Swinburne points out, is that you have to see things very very differently indeed to get the probability of the resurrection to go down very much.[6]

2.3 Paging Dr. Freud

The other red herring regarding proofs concerns their use. Even sometime natural theologian and theodicist Alvin Plantinga occasionally questions the virtue of those practicing theodicy[7] and natural theology. In his groundbreaking *God and Other Minds*, Plantinga asserts that natural theology aims at a standard of success based on "propositions that are obviously true and accepted by nearly everyone" (Plantinga 1967: 4). But of course all people are somewhat irrational and some people seem all irrational. People are full of biases that prevent evidence from having its rightful effect. It is no part of the aim of natural theology to be convincing to every person. That would be a tall order indeed, and it would be totally lacking in humility to think one could do it. And, as Plantinga, some 23 years latter admits, "…no philosophical arguments of any consequence meet *that* standard; hence the fact that theistic arguments do not is of less significance than I thought" (Plantinga 2000: 69).

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[6] See Dougherty and Poston (2008: 99-110). See also Unwin (2003) for a guided tour of how to apply Bayesian reasoning to your own views about the evidence for God.

[7] "…theodicies, as we might call them — seem to me shallow, tepid, and ultimately frivolous…" (Plantinga 1996: 70).

Peter van Inwagen follows suit (with early Plantinga) when discussing theodicy, traditionally seen as a branch of natural theology.[8] He, too, sets forth a standard of success in psychological terms:

> An argument for *p* is a success just in the case that it can be used, under ideal circumstances, to convert an audience of ideal agnostics (agnostics with respect to *p*) to belief in *p* — in the presence of an ideal opponent of belief in *p* (van Inwagen 2006: 47).

For this to ha ve any real meaning, it must be reduced to non-psychological terms.[9] The ideality of the agnostic must be reduced to some kind of basic epistemic concepts. So then perhaps van Inwagen's jury of ideal agnostics is drained of any psychological aspect and is just a cipher for those standards that underwrite or describe the epistemic ideal of an argument. Perhaps, but we don't think so, for the ideal is still the ideal for *persuasion* of an agent who holds to those ideas.

In his own forays into natural theology,[10] Plantinga has sometimes claimed that natural theological arguments have some force to at least establish the *permissibility* of theistic belief[11] and can be of helpful consequence.[12] That doesn't exactly put the 'R' in 'RPNT', but it's a start, and it illustrates something important, something that Swinburne does make quite explicit: the power of cumulative case arguments. Swinburne in fact claims very little indeed for all his natural theological arguments, officially, anyway. The way *The Existence of God* is structured, all Swinburne officially claims is that for all the theistic arguments prior to consideration of religious experience, they make theism more likely than not.[13] Then, the force of religious experience works like this. He argues for a principle according to which if someone claims to experience something, and there are no good reasons to doubt them, and the thing claimed is not all that improbable, then we should conclude

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8 To see why theodicy must be a kind of natural theology, see Dougherty (2014: 51-55).

9 See Feldman (1995: 147-169).

10 See, Plantinga (1967: chapters 2 and 3); and Plantinga (1974: chapter 10). See also, Dougherty and Walls (forthcoming).

11 See Plantinga (1974: 221); and (2000: 131).

12 See Plantinga (2001: 348-49).

13 Of course, on the book's concluding page, Swinburne writes that "An argument from all the evidence considered in this book to the existence of God is a good P-inductive argument" (2000: 342), an argument for the probable truth of theism. Consequently, one can rationally believe theism based on the natural theological arguments he presents. However, remember that the argument is one of probability, not deductive certainty. Moreover, the evidence and its persuasive power is relative to the individual.

they probably experienced the thing in question. All that natural theology serves to do is to satisfy the "not too improbable" clause in the principle of acceptance of experience reports. Of course there is much more to be said about the veracity of religious experience reports. Our purpose here is just to show that you can't paint natural theology with a broad brush concerning its aims. Natural theologians stake claims for a vast array of territory across the probability spectrum. They may well think that at times if someone isn't persuaded, the reasons don't have to do with the force of their arguments. But *everyone* who makes an argument for a conclusion not universally accepted has to think that, so we're stuck with that. Which brings us to the next section.

2.4 Natural Theology and Disagreement

If you make an argument that persuades you and not someone else, one of you is in error. Which of you it is may be hard to figure out at times. So long as one conciliates somewhat, there's nothing prideful in continuing to hold one's view.[14] And notice that disagreement among practitioners of natural theology can, as in other fields, actually increase one's rightful confidence in the conclusion. So consider the diversity of arguments for God's existence. People's methodological differences influence which arguments they proffer. Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant[15] all have very different arguments for theism and important variations among what is concluded from them. However, it would be absurd to conclude from this that the lesson of natural theology is that one should claim much for it on pain of epistemic pride. On the contrary, the fact that so many people of such diverse cultures, times, and methodologies all think that there must be something supernatural "at the back of it all" is very good evidence that they are on to something, that there is some kind of being with a kind of fundamentality to it "holding the whole thing up." They all seem to be responding quite naturally[16] to something in nature or human nature.[17] Trying to work out the best expression of this natural response is

[14] For a fully general account of the epistemology of disagreement, see Dougherty (2013: 218-238).

[15] Even Kant had an argument for God's existence. See Kant (1979).

[16] For the naturalness of theistic belief, see Evans (2010), and Barrett (2004).

[17] Think of something somewhat broader than Kant's "starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" (Kant 1998: 161–2).

the philosopher's way of explicating an extremely widely shared intuition that the limitedness or contingency or what have you of nature calls out for supernatural grounding. Disagreement about the precise explication is trivial compared to the impressiveness of the consensus concerning the intuition that drives the research project. Neither the affirmation of the broad consensus nor the attempts to provide a philosophically precise explication are rightly considered prideful. Yet that is at the base of RPNT. A broad term for the phenomena that evoke natural theological reflections is "natural revelation." To that topic we now turn.

III. YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVELATION

What is natural theology? As we have characterized it in broadly Thomistic grounds, natural theology is reflection about God that uses as material for reflection items of general revelation. What's general revelation? General revelation is distinguished from special revelation. What's special about special revelation? It wouldn't be far from the truth to say that natural/general revelation consists in the information conveyed about God through the natural world and human nature and that special revelation is anything else. It's easier to state within a religious tradition than it is to give a general characterization. In most forms of evangelical Protestantism, special revelation consists in the Bible — conceived of without the deuterocanonical books, the so-called "apocrypha" — and nothing else. Other forms accept the words of certain prophets as containing special revelation concerning God. Judaism recognizes a subset of the Christian bible as sacred scripture. Islam has the Koran. Catholics have the Bible — including the deuterocanonical books — and both the ordinary and extraordinary magisterium. On some interpretations, these other groups have non-scriptural magisteria as well, and for most of them the revelation consists more primitively in the words of the prophets than in the record of those words.[18] Here is roughly the breakdown that Saint Thomas gives at the beginning of the *Summa Theologiæ* (Ia.1).

[18] Some forms of evangelical Protestantism actually give priority to the record over that which was being recorded as the revelation.

3.1 By Reason Alone?

One characterization of natural theology is that it is achieved "by reason alone." However, it should be understood that "by reason alone" must be tied to "with special revelation." This is because all knowledge of God is via God's self-revelation. And God has chosen to reveal himself in different ways. Aquinas speaks of "the natural light of reason" (*ST* IIa-IIæ 4.8, ad 3) and Aristotle says, "God kindled our reason to be a lamp within our soul" (*Rhetoric* 1411b). Reason is the organ of evidence, which when used rightly works in harmony with our affective and volitional aspects. It is that by which we perceive something as evidence in general and as evidencing something in particular.

Of course, reason is a gift from God and as such is itself a witness to God. Reason is "tinged with the divine" in that reason reflects the divine and does not fit into a naturalistic universe.[19] In this sense, there is no such thing as "neutral reason." The mere existence of reason is evidence for the existence of God. The same is true of consciousness, which is antecedent to knowledge, and so too for theology, philosophy, and the natural sciences.[20] Furthermore, had God withheld granting certain conceptual abilities, we wouldn't be able to reason to our own existence, much less his. All knowledge is grace — God's activity to bring about effects we cannot do so on our own. All knowledge of God is a great grace. Nevertheless, given that God *has* granted certain conceptual abilities and that he *has* made a world that contains objects which point to or aid in draw those who are willing toward him (all created objects point to a creator, but some contexts make it more clear than others), natural theology is a fitting extension of natural revelation.

3.2 The Width and Breadth of Natural Theology

Our conception of RPNT is characteristically broad. Natural theology tracks general revelation. The range of evidence is far beyond the phenomena at work in the cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments. In the *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology,* Charles Taliaferro notes, "philosophical arguments about the evidential value of religious experience now are treated in

[19] See Lewis (1978: chaps 3-6); Reppert (2003); and (2009: 344-90); Hasker (1999: 64-74); Plantinga (1993: chapter 12); and (2000: 227-40, 281-84, 350-51).

[20] See Moreland (2008), and Swinburne (2013).

the domain of natural theology" (2009: 18). Moser's characterization of natural theology is far too thin, picking out only a portion of what natural theologians are up to.

If we take seriously what John Coe calls "pneumetological realism"[21] — that we can gain knowledge of and about God and life in his kingdom by observing God's activity in human history and our own life — then such a project falls under the category of general revelation and by extension natural theology. For example, Proverbs contains examples of empirical observations that can be known apart from special revelation, in nature (6:6, 30:24-28) and in human life (24:30-34, 30:21-23). We might think of much of Augustine's *Confessions* as providing evidence of God's activity in human life that we can test ourselves. Dallas Willard embraced the Pascalian notion that we could come to know the truth of Christianity by testing the teachings of Jesus in everyday life. He writes,

> To come to know him [Jesus] and to clarify who he really is, people have only to stand for what he stood for, as best they can, and to do so by inviting him to take their life into his life and walk with them. If they do just this with humility and openness — which everyone knows to be his manner of life — they will know him more and more as they take his life to be their life (Willard 2009: 147).

Elsewhere, Willard argues that analyzing the logical form of argument used by Jesus as presented in the Gospel's can give us good evidence to take him seriously as one who might very well know what he is talking about, which helps strengthen our confidence in him.[22] Understood in the full sense, general revelation includes the evidence available in the practice of spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, and prolonged self-examination. Such a life of discipleship attends to the general revelation of one's life, which aids in producing knowledge.[23] As we'll see later, this is closely akin to Moser's account of "personifying evidence," so it turns out that Moser himself might be a practitioner of RPNT.[24]

Often these inferences are based on intuitive notions of something like the principle of sufficient reason. We think this is plausible to understand

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21 See Coe (2009).

22 See Willard (1999: 605-614).

23 See Porter (2008: 134–38). For the spiritual aid natural theology can provide in discipleship, see Porter (2007: 189-202).

24 This would not be the first time Moser's own actions were less radical than he'd hoped. See Dougherty's review of *Sever God* in Marginalia Review (Dougherty 2014c).

the argument given by Paul with Barnabus in Acts 14. Their audience sees them as gods. Paul acts to remove this obstacle by arguing that they are not a sufficient cause of the universe, only the God they are speaking of can bring the universe into existence (14:15).[25] Similarly, in Acts 17: 22-31 Paul makes great use of the natural theology of the Greeks, who worship "an unknown God." Paul does not dismiss their natural theology as failing to establish the existence of the specifically Christian God, as Moser does (more on this below). Rather, Paul builds upon the evidence they already have.[26] Revelation, general or special, is always from God. If it is used in a complex argument, commonsense inference, or simply seeing things as the revelation of God, it is *all* a response to God's self-revelation.

Understood this way RPNT recognizes the universe and human experience as soaked with non-coercive evidence of God's reality and activity.[27] This is not arrogant, although rejecting this might very well be. Consider H. R. Mackintosh, whom Moser is fond of quoting.

> It looks very devout to argue that God is so great, so sublime, so ineffable that He is utterly beyond the reach of human apprehension, but the doctrine has implication very often overlooked. It limits the power of God in a preposterous degree. For obviously it implies that God cannot reveal Himself to man, cannot get through to the human spirit; and this is quite incredible if the God we believe in is real and wise and loving (Mackintosh 1929: 40).

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[25] Although he does not make the same philosophical observation we do, New Testament scholar, Craig Keener, in his recent tome on Acts explains the apologetic nature of Paul's speech in Acts 14:15, noting that Paul omits direct quotations of Scripture because of his audience. Keener draws correlations to the thought of Paul in Acts 4 and 17 as well as his epistles which show a pattern of natural theological argument about God from nature (Rom. 1:20) with implications concerning idolatry (1:25). See, Keener (2013 vol. 2: 22157-2168.

[26] Regarding the relation of Paul's speech to natural theology, Craig Keener explains, "Also, despite arguments to the contrary…many scholars contend that Paul's natural theology in Rom. 1:18-32 is compatible with that in Acts 14:15-17 and here [Acts 17:22-31]. When the discussion of natural theology in each passage amounts to less than a paragraph, the fact that both the Lukean Paul and the epistolary Paul employ natural theology is far more striking than arguments from silence about which motifs present in one are absent in the other…Indeed the given range of diverse arguments concerning natural theology in antiquity, it is the parallels that appear most significant..." (Keener: 2013, vol. 3: 2620-2621).

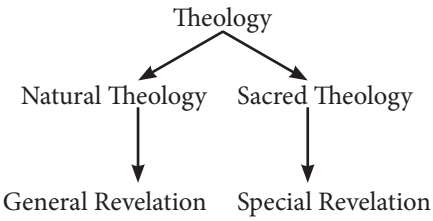
[27] This of course does not deny that there might be coercive evidence of God made available in certain kinds of direct encounters with God, for example. Theoretically, for one who saw certain propositional evidence, then the evidence could in some sense be coercive.

This at least highlights the tension between God's transcendence and his eminence. It is not at all clear that Moser is able to maintain this balance. Conversely, it doesn't seem difficult for the natural theologian to maintain this balance. So long as they realize that just as all truth is God's truth, all revelation is God's revelation.

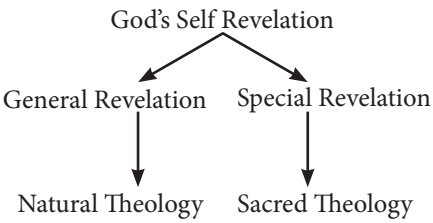
Since, on our view *all knowledge of God is via revelation,* there is no such thing as revelation apart from God. This point seems lost on Moser when he states, "I break rank with most friends of natural theology, because I do not see how the created world by itself is evidence for a personal God worthy of worship" (Moser 2012: 310). Unfortunately, Moser merely implicates natural theologians in general. So we are left wondering if there are advocates of RPNT who are accurately portrayed by Moser.

Moser does not use the terms "theological" knowledge or "philosophical" knowledge. But they are apt because any philosopher *qua human* has access to general revelation (Rom. 1:20). For example, Plato had so much to say about God that coincided with the Christian tradition that the Neo-Pythagorean Numenies of Apamea (quoted in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I.22.150.4) exclaimed, "For what is Plato, but Moses speaking in Attic Greek?" And Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, bk. Lambda) has an interesting doctrine that bears important resemblances to Saint Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed, *theologikê* is used in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and rightly translated "theology." Nevertheless, at this stage in history, "theological" connotes work in a confessional tradition, but it is important to note the lines of continuity between the natural theology of the pre-revelatory and extra-revelatory communities and confessional Christian theology. To "other" someone's reflections on God, based on their acquaintance with God's self-revelation in nature or human nature, because they don't appeal to one's own holy books is just theological chauvinism.

The standard scholastic diagram for the main divisions in theology is as follows.



Here theology breaks down into distinct species and their starting points. With the points we have made above in mind, consider what happens when we turn the above diagram on its head.



This diagram nicely depicts our thesis that all theological knowledge is grounded in God's gracious self-disclosure.

IV. MOSER-EVIDENCE

What is Moser's alternative picture? At the base of his picture is the notion of "filial knowledge" (2010: 209-216). There's no knowledge without evidence of some sort, and the key kind of evidence for Moser is "personifying evidence" (2010:36-40). Moser calls the kind of evidence that RPNT works with "spectator evidence" and asserts that it "makes no demand or call on the direction of a human will or life…" (2010: 37). We argue that personifying evidence and spectator evidence reduce to the same kind of evidence used across the disciplines. Moreover, this distinction, which motivates his rejection of RPNT, devalues the role of prevenient grace. So, while Moser's notion of personifying evidence is reducible, those features that are distinct render his view problematic.

4.1 Of Evidence in General, the Non-Neutrality of Our Rational Capacity

Given the importance of evidence to this inquiry, it is well that we say a few things about evidence as such. Two upshots will be that, first, whatever Moser's notion of evidence, it will be a species of evidence that is continuous in important ways with evidence on any other topic, and, second, that our most basic rational capacities themselves are the result of God's guiding hand.

First, consider the various kinds of evidence one might have for any given proposition. Our typical sources of evidence are the five senses each of which have quite different modalities of introspection, memory, testimony, and insight. Via the senses we gain sensory evidence about the external world as it is now[28]; via introspection we gain introspective evidence about the current contents of our own minds; via memory we gain memorial evidence about the way the world appeared to us in the past; via testimony we gain testimonial evidence about the way the world is outside our direct observational abilities; via rational insight we gain what philosophers sometimes call "a priori" evidence ("from before" or "apart from" experience) about truths in abstract matters like mathematics, logic, fundamental metaphysics, *et al*.[29]

Sometimes in the natural sciences we refer to "empirical" or "experimental" evidence. This is a complex of the primitive forms of evidence just canvassed. We see a needle on a meter move to a certain point; we remember seeing the needle move to a different spot at a past time when there were different inputs, etc. Testimonial and memorial evidence is also of course reducible to sensory and *a priori* evidence. We hear certain sounds when people speak to us, and then we break that down into informational components; we respond to visual cues we have learned to or are hard wired to associate with trustworthiness or untrustworthiness, etc.

What the basic kinds of evidence have in common is that each source of evidence gives to certain propositions in its own way what Locke called the "evident luster", a "clarity and brightness to the attentive mind."[30] The most basic kind of

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28 Or as it was very, very, very recently, given the slight delay in transfer of signal.

29 We need not detain ourselves here with the so-called "synthetic *a priori*."

30 The Locke reference is from Earl Conee (1998: 849). Conee (1998) ridicules Locke as does Plantinga (1993: 191). Both later seem to do an about face. See Conee (2012); Conee (2013). Plantinga sensibly recognizes this category as "impulsional evidence" (Plantinga 1996).

evidence is a phenomenal quality a proposition has in virtue of "lighting up" as true, in virtue of which we are attracted to it.[31] At rock bottom, we've got nothing else to go on. Our evidence is, most generally, what we have to go on in forming beliefs. At the foundation of our evidential structure is some kind of phenomenal conservatism[32] which we distill into the following principle.

> Reasons Commonsensism (RC): If it seems to *s* that *p*, then *S* thereby has some reason (in proportion to the seeming) for *p*.

This generative principle, stating a sufficient, not necessary, condition, is compatible with both internalism and externalism about justification or knowledge. It is also perfectly general, applying to all disciplines and capturing the reasons-giving features of each sources of justification (perceptual seemings, rational seemings, memorial seemings, introspective seemings). So evidence in the humanities — evidence that some text has some author, say, or that some passage has some meaning — evidence in the hard sciences, soft sciences, evidence in religion, etc., all come down to this. Or so the natural theologian may reasonably hold.[33] So if Moser's "personifying evidence" is evidence, it's ultimately reducible to the same kind of evidence used across the disciplines. This calls into question Moser's heavy reliance on the distinction between personifying evidence and spectator evidence in two ways (which we don't have room to develop fully here). First, it shows that in the end, his distinction isn't so radical, because all evidence ends up working the same way. Second, it threatens the very distinction as he makes it, because all evidence as characterized here — in line with that of leading natural theologians like Richard Swinburne — is normative. All evidence ultimately consists in experiences with assertoric force, experiences that assert that the world is a certain way, which therefore put normative pressure on us to accept their claims. No evidence is mere spectator evidence. When, in general revelation,

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[31] See Feldman (2004), for a nice, careful explication of some of the important features of this story.

[32] See Conee (2004: 15-21), Heumer (2001), and Tucker (2010).

[33] Most notably in the present context, this is held by preeminent natural theologian Richard Swinburne. See Swinburne (2001). About Swinburne's natural theology, Alvin Plantinga has said, "Here the most prominent contemporary spokesperson would be Richard Swinburne, whose work over the last 30 years or so has resulted in the most powerful, complete and sophisticated development of natural theology the world has so far seen" (Plantinga: 2014).

"the heavens pour forth speech," to those lacking any special revelation, this is also God's call. The specificity of content in either general revelation or special revelation occurs along a spectrum, whereas Moser's distinction is black and white.

What evidence we have depends on what our conceptual repertoire is. Two men are standing in front of a tree. One is an arboreal expert the other is arboreally ignorant. The arboreal expert recognizes it as an elm. The arboreally ignorant does not. It clearly appears to be an elm to the expert, not so to the ignoramus. The evidence isn't the light-waves reflecting off the tree and forming an image on their retinas (an image we can stipulate to be qualitatively identical). The evidence consists in a conceptually-enriched post-optical experience in the mind wherein to the expert, the experience causes it to seem to be an elm, but not to the ignoramus.

What is my evidence that my wife loves me? What is my evidence that this sentence is grammatical? It's hard to identify. We can spend no more words on a general theory of evidence, but suffice it to say that whatever evidence one might *come up with* after careful reflection, the evidence that actually justifies at the time is simply the sense that it is so, an ability to *tell* or *recognize*. For example, grammaticality generally comes down to rules, rules the subject who can habitually identify grammaticality has internalized, but the subject need not be able to state or even readily recognize such rules. Nevertheless, one's acquaintance with such rules allows one to reliably discern — based simply on the feel of the sentence — whether or not a sentence is grammatical. This is reasons commonsensism at work. We are rational animals, but we are rational *animals*, and God has built us to recognize truth instinctually. There is no compelling reason to think naturalistic evolution would provide this reliability, this link-up between our epistemic instincts and reality.[34] At the very base of our rational capabilities, in a perfectly general way, is the grace of God. And as we have been at some pains to demonstrate, this is so even on a standard evidentialist epistemology[35] assumed by key natural theologians.

[34] See footnote 22 and 23.

[35] Note here that "evidence" does not mean "argument" as it often does when used by Plantinga. For more on this see Dougherty and Tweedt (2015).

4.2 Talk about Your Hidden God!

Could there be a world with no revelation whatsoever? Technically no, as we've used "revelation" above for encoded information about God. To see why there couldn't be a world in which there was literally no revelation in this sense, consider that any contingent being provides a premise in the contingency argument for a necessary being, the rest being *a priori*. Thus any world at all will encode information about God. Of course, even a world with no contingent beings, only God himself, clearly encodes information about God. But what really matters for our purposes is not what information is encoded but what we can make of it. And that's a matter of how we are constituted, which is up to God.

God could give us evidence — impulsional evidence — that he exists under any circumstances. Imagine a world in which you don't have the usual sources of evidence. You have no senses, in particular. Thus, you have no testimony — at least not any human testimony as we ordinarily conceive it, but we'll return to that shortly. You have no or very little memory — as little as needed for the scenario we are painting to be metaphysically possible. You also have next to nothing by way of rational insight or even introspection. In particular, you don't form many beliefs about abstract matters or about the contents of your own mind because you get very little information about them (again, as little as possible to make my scenario metaphysically possible). This is a bit of a bleak existence, similar to being asleep all the time or in a sort of trance.

A very contemplative individual might reflect upon their existence and its nature. They might notice that they change and that anything that changes must be contingent. They might see that universal contingency is absurd and thus infer that there must be a necessary being. So even in this extremely epistemically pared down situation, someone *with the right conceptual abilities* could engage in RPNT. But what conceptual abilities we have is up to God. He decides in deciding what to create what kinds of creatures there will be, what kinds of capacities they have. A baby has, in a way, more evidence than we do in the above thought experiment, yet they don't reason to the existence of a necessary being! If God wanted to create creatures who didn't know anything about him, it would have been easy for him to do. All he had

to do was to restrict our cognitive abilities or conceptual resources in the right way. So, as we've been arguing, all knowledge of God is not only by way of revelation, it is by way of gift, grace. Revelation is an act of the revealer to the subject of the revelation, just as in the testimony of the Holy Spirit.[36]

4.3 Personifying Evidence

Moser explains his notion of "personifying evidence" of God as having the following distinctive character:

> *…this evidence becomes salient to inquirers as they, themselves, responsively and willingly become evidence of God's reality*, in willingly receiving and reflecting God's powerful moral character — specifically divine, unselfish love for others, even one's enemies (Moser 2010: 2).

This is not exactly a clear notion of evidence. Is "evidence" in the quotation personifying evidence or propositional evidence? If the former, then it's deeply flawed, because then it appeals to the very notion it purports to explicate. If Moser means the latter, then propositional evidence is appropriate proximate evidence for God, since it is the operative evidence according to what he says.

Moser offers a definition of "the transformative gift" as:

> one's being authoritatively convicted in conscience and forgiven by *X* of sin and thereby being authoritatively called into volitional fellowship with *X* in perfect love and into rightful worship toward *X* as worthy of worship and, on that basis, transformed by *X* from default tendencies to selfishness and despair to a new volitional center with a default position of unselfish love, including forgiveness, toward all people and of hope in the triumph of good over evil by *X* (Moser 2010: 200).

What Moser seems to fail to appreciate is that being "transformed from tendencies to selfishness and despair to a new volitional center tending to unselfish love" can be a process of prevenient grace. It is something that in most cases happens by degrees and that happens, at least in part, prior to "getting saved." That is, prior to someone recognizing in any clear way God's "authoritative call" or enters into ways of "rightful worship" of God, they can, by God's grace, begin to undergo this transformation, and, indeed, sometimes undergo it to a considerable degree, even more so than some people who *do*

[36] See Dougherty (2014b: 97-123).

explicitly recognize God's authoritative call! That is, Moser seems to ignore the doctrine of *prevenient grace*. Prevenient grace, as the name implies, comes before effectual grace, and is based neither on knowledge of special revelation nor any explicit knowledge of God at all. God supports this pre-salvation transformation via a myriad of natural means. Seen this way, God's preparatory action in prevenient grace is of a piece with the idea of general revelation. In an imperfect but telling analogy, we say that natural theology is to sacred theology what prevenient grace is to saving grace (at least as the latter normally occurs). Like prevenient grace, natural theology — based on natural revelation — comes before and paves the way, for some, at least, for God's authoritative call contained preeminently in Sacred Scripture. Philosophy is, again, the handmaid of theology; a humble servant of an exalted Queen, yet in virtue of that service, in a way (extrinsically) exalted.

4.4 Epistemic Humility Once More

Some who see RPNT as opposed to epistemic humility suffer from serious misconceptions about the *aims* of natural theology. Natural theology has many uses for both believers and unbelievers alike. Here are two examples of the benefits for believers. Aquinas uses the conclusions of his natural theological arguments as the basis for teaching believers about the *nature* of God in a way that increases our appreciation of God's majesty and otherness. Christian apologists can assuage doubts believers might have due to atheological arguments, or even equip believers to be unmoved by them. But both of these have their appropriate correlates for unbelievers. Notice first that belief and unbelief form a spectrum for firm and fervent belief to "new atheist" style contempt and false certainty. In between are most people. Consider the set of people who occupy the segment of the spectrum clearly below adherence but also lacking anything like contempt or false certainty. They, too, may be interested in what Christians' conception of God is (perhaps more than some Christians!). They, too, may occupy a space between wonder and worry about atheological arguments. Therefore, they, too, deserve the care and attention of natural theologians.[37] For purposes of illustration, let us focus on a subclass

[37] See Rickabaugh and McAlister (forthcoming).

of the last case as an example: non-antagonistic agnostics who have been the subjects of attempted proselytization by atheists (whether "new" or old).

We take it that a very significant proportion of natural theology is aimed at this audience or one quite similar. Is addressing such individuals' concerns by appeal to general revelation an affront to intellectual humility? Paul Moser seems to think so.

> Here is the real danger of natural theology: it leaves us, from the standpoint of redemption, in an optional intellectual sideshow, without pointing us to (the salient evidence for) the redemptive moral character of the God worthy of worship (Moser 2013: 124).

The danger arises, says Moser, since

> Given only de dicto evidence, one will lack evidence for the God worthy of worship, even if one has evidence for the god of deism or the god of the philosophers. It's no surprise, then, that the contemporary debates over the arguments of natural theology rarely, if ever, get around to the crucial redemptive features to be expected of a God worthy of worship (Moser 2013: 124).

But this is wondrous strange. What's true is that the conception of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition is richer than the "god of the philosophers." That is, the list of properties of the being generally concluded to exist from theistic arguments or even the richer theology of Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* (especially book Lambda) and in Plato (Book X of the Laws and elsewhere) is a subset (approximately) of the set of properties enumerated by, say, Aquinas as he is elaborating on the western religious tradition. It's also true that part of the compliment set consists in a set of "redemptive features." Alas, Aristotle thought that God was too much removed from us to play any really redemptive role (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. VIII). But, allowing for some reasonable variation, the features of God discernable from nature (Rom. 1:20) are a *subset* of the features that make God clearly worthy of worship and the agent of our redemption. So let us divide the set of God's properties (bracketing the doctrine of divine simplicity) into the redemptive features and the non-redemptive features. Let R_1, R_2, R_3, etc., refer to individual "redemptive features"[38] (technically propositions asserting that God has these features)

[38] Why the scare quotes? Here's why. Moser seems to treat "redemptive feature" as a monadic predicate expressing a simple property when in reality it is surely some kind of relation and thus not part of the intrinsic nature of God at all, as Moser repeatedly seems to assume.

,and let the R_i all be conjoined to form the conjunction R. Let N_1, N_2, N_3, etc. refer to God's "non-redemptive features." Let the Ni all be conjoined to form the conjunction N. Then the proposition that the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition exists can be represented by the conjunctive proposition N & R (allowing for grammatical slippage).

Now, again, we must keep in mind the humble purpose of most natural theology: defense of N & R against atheological arguments for those troubled by such arguments. For N & R to be true, N must be true. N & R can't be true unless N is true. Thus defense of N is in service of N & R. Philosophy, that is, is the handmaid of theology. It is a humble role but one glorified by that which it is in the service of. To be even a floor sweeper at the King's castle is an exalted position, not to be distained or deprecated. Moreover, it is uncharitable to presume those who involved in such work end the conversation at N. RPNT is best practiced in a community and over an extended period of this that is aimed at bringing others into a personal encounter with God. Moser seems to assume that natural theology necessarily rejects the significance of volition in knowing God. But why think that is the case?

The sad fact is in this day and age many people, whether raised religious or not, are subjected to a widespread secular ideology that causes them to have the impression that ~R is well supported by evidence the intelligentsia are in position of. This is a barrier to accepting N & R (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Strangely, Moser seems to even find this simple function somehow untoward.

Many philosophers of religion worry that some kind of natural theological argument is needed *prior* to a person's willingness to consider receiving a direct volitional challenge from God. In this perspective, God would have to rely on some kind of natural theological argument to challenge beliefs unfriendly to endorsing and cooperating with God's existence (Moser 2013: 124).

Moser goes on to greatly disdain this idea and provide a counter example to it, as though he is revealing some fundamental flaw in RPNT. It is telling that he offers no citation of any examples after "Many philosophers." In fact, we suspect that exactly *no* philosophers think this, and we certainly challenge Moser to find a *single* one who does. The problem is with the phrases "needed" and "have to." It's blindingly obvious that there's no *logical* necessity here, and it's hard to see some weaker form of necessity that could make the claim even prima facie plausible. Consider this thesis:

Natural Theology Necessity Thesis: God *must* use natural theology to remove intellectual barriers to belief.

We assert that no natural theologian has ever asserted this in print with a strong modality. Moser is free to enlighten us. At any rate, even if someone somewhere has held this outrageous view, no major natural theologian has, and it certainly isn't a necessary component of appropriate, humble RPNT.

CONCLUSION

We have offered a number of arguments against Moser's claim that the robust practice of natural theology reeks of epistemic pride. We've argued that all knowledge of God is grounded in revelation from God and that natural theology, as it is grounded in general revelation should be conceived of quite broadly. Hence, RPNT is in itself a humble response to God's self-revelation. We've also argued that the means by which Moser rejects RPNT as arrogant, his distinction between personifying evidence and spectator evidence, suffers significant problems. His distinction isn't so radical, because all evidence ends up working the same way. Second, it threatens the very distinction as he makes it, because all evidence ultimately consists in experiences with assertoric force, which therefore put normative pressure on us to accept their claims. No evidence is mere spectator evidence. Moreover, this distinction devalues the role of prevenient grace.[39]

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ATHEISM AND INFERENTIAL BIAS

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Abstract. While the cognitive science of religion is well-trodden ground, atheism has been considerably less scrutinized. Recent psychological studies associate atheism with an intellectual virtue, inferentiality[1] (Shenhav 2011; Norenzayan, Gervais, and Trzesniewski 2012; Norenzayan and Gervais 2013; Pennycook 2012). Theism, on the other hand, is associated with an intellectual "vice", intuitive thinking. While atheism is allied with the attendant claim that atheism is the result of careful rational assessment of the relevant evidence, theism is considered the result of a lack of reflection on the relevant evidence (or careless disregard of the evidence). Atheism, then, is rational, but theism, then, is irrational.[2] In this essay, we will assess the import of these studies and the attendant claims that these differences in thinking styles entail differences in rationality.

I. ATHEISM AND INFERENTIAL THINKING

If religious belief is, as the cognitive science of religion suggests, culturally recurrent, natural, and non-inferential (Barrett 2004; McCauley 2011; Atran 2002; Boyer 2001), then we should expect unbelief to be relatively rare,

[1] These studies take "analytic thinking" as a synonym for "inferential thinking" (unlike philosophers, who typically take analytic thinking to be an intuitive or non-inferential or immediate judgment). Since the intended audience of this essay is philosophers, I will not follow the psychologists and will instead use the term "inferential." I will remind the reader throughout of how I am using the terms.

[2] While the psychologists themselves are often careful not to make such inferences in their studies, headlines (including prestigious journals such as *Scientific American*) based on these studies do. Consider: "Logic Squashes Religious Belief, A New Study Finds" http://psr.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/08/02/1088868313497266.full; "Losing Your Religion: Analytic Thinking Can Undermine Belief" http://guardianlv.com/2013/08/atheists-more-intelligent-than-religious-believers-says-new-study/.

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nonnatural and inferential.[3] Recent studies have shown a correlation between inferential thinking and unbelief. Do such studies show that atheists are rational but theists are not? Do they demonstrate the rational superiority of atheism over theism?

If one typically finds oneself, through no inferential effort on one's own part, believing in God, one might need to reason one's way to unbelief. Consider an analogy with folk physics, which like religious belief is culturally recurrent, natural, and intuitive (McCauley 2011). Folk or naive physics is our unreflective, perceptual understanding of the physical world. Folk physics might include simple and true generalizations such as "Dropped rocks fall to the ground" and "Rocks thrown hard enough at windows will break them." But it also includes common-sense statements that run contrary to contemporary physics, which postulates a host of unobservable entities such as atoms and photons (and may even hold that our natural notions of past and future are illusory). The movement from folk physics to contemporary physics required an enormous amount of inferential effort, effort sufficient to override at least some of our deep and natural intuitions.[4] Contemporary physics, requiring abstract thinking and complicated mathematics, is deeply counterintuitive and contrary to what we observe. Belief in contemporary physical theories, then, requires inferential thinking.

Likewise, the rejection of our very natural religious beliefs may involve inferential thinking.[5] Just this sort of reasoning guided Will M. Gervais and Ara Norenzayan through a series of studies to determine the effect of inferential (what they called "analytic") thinking on religious belief and unbelief (Gervais and Norenzayan 2012). Because the aforementioned head-

[3] We are speaking in terms of general tendencies, not cognitive necessities. So, for example, while we (the entire group of human beings) may be generally inclined toward intuitive religious belief, not everyone will be a religious believer, and not every religious believer will have acquired his or her beliefs non-inferentially. The claim that we are typically natural and nonreflective theists is consistent with there being non-inferential atheists and inferential theists.

[4] Given our repeated relapses into folk physics, one might think that we can never fully overcome our natural dispositions.

[5] Again, I am speaking in generalities. One might believe $e = mc^2$ because they were told it, not as a result of inferential thinking (though I doubt, under such circumstances, one would understand it well at all). Moreover, one might be an atheist because one's parents taught one at the earliest age that there was no God (and so required no inferential thinking on one's part).

lines relied on their studies, I will consider them in some detail.[6] Gervais and Norenzayan offered a series of inferential prompts to determine their effect on religious belief and unbelief. They hypothesized that inferential thinking would override one's more natural and intuitive cognitive inclinations toward religious belief.

In the first study, using the Cognitive Reflection Test developed by Frederick (2005), they offered three problems. Their study will make more sense if you stop and think through your own response to the problems before proceeding to their analysis. The problems are as follows:

1. A bat and a ball cost $1.10 in total. The bat costs $1.00 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost? ____cents

2. If it takes 5 machines 5 min to make 5 widgets, how long would it take 100 machines to make 100 widgets?_____minutes

3. In a lake, there is a patch of lily pads. Every day, the patch doubles in size. If it takes 48 days for the patch to cover the entire lake, how long would it take for the patch to cover half of the lake?_____days

In each case, the quick and easy intuitive response is incorrect, while the more deliberate inferential response is correct.[7]

Participants were then measured with respect to religious belief and unbelief, responding to questions such as the following:

* In my life I feel the presence of the Divine

* It does not matter as much what I believe as long as I lead a moral life

* I believe in God

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[6] Although Gervais and Norenzayan's studies prompted the headlines, they themselves resisted the sensational conclusions of the preceding section. They write: "Finally, we caution that the present studies are silent on long-standing debates about the intrinsic value or rationality of religious beliefs, or about the relative merits of analytic and intuitive thinking in promoting optimal decision making" (Gervais and Norenzayan 2012, 496).

[7] The quick and easy intuitive yet wrong response to (1) is .10, while the correct analytic, deliberate answer is .05, to (2) is 100 while the analytic answer is 5 and to (3) is 24 while the analytic is 47.

* I just do not understand religion
* God exists
* The devil exists
* Angels exist

Gervais and Norenzayan found that success on the Cognitive Reflection Test was negatively correlated with affirmations of religious belief; inferential thinking, they claimed, was negatively correlated with religious belief. So, in their terms, Gervais and Norenzayan concluded: "This result demonstrated that … the tendency to analytically override intuitions in reasoning was associated with religious disbelief" (Gervais and Norenzayan 2012, 494).

A second set of studies involved unconscious primes, with a series of prompts designed to elicit inferential thinking. For sake of illustration, let us consider just one, the disfluency prime.[8] Disfluency Primes involved fuzzy fonts (*prime sample font*) rather than the large clear fonts of the control group (**control sample font**). Gervais and Norenzayan's claim is that having to figure out a fuzzy font engages inferential thinking in a way not required when reading large and clear fonts. The subjects again completed a measure of belief in God/religiosity.

Again, Gervais and Norenzayan concluded that the set of studies reinforce the hypothesis that inferential processing decreases religious belief. More recent studies affirm the hypothesis that if religious belief is more intuitive and non-inferential, then unbelief should be a product of inferential reasoning.

Shenhav, Rand and Greene (2011) conducted a CRT study similar to that of Gervais and Norenzayan with over 800 participants (U.S. residents) with a median age of 33; intuitive responses were positively correlated with religious belief and inferential responses with unbelief. Their two other studies com-

[8] The other studies involved implicit primes and art primes. Implicit Primes involved arranging words into sentences with the prime group given thinking terms (reason, analyze, ponder, etc.), while the control group was given unrelated words (hammer, shoe, jump, etc.). Participants in the art control group stared at a "neutral" image such as The Discobulos, a sculpture of a man with a discus, whereas the remainder was primed by staring at The Thinker (an "artwork depicting a reflective thinking pose").

bine with this one to show a correlation between intuitive thinking and belief in God and inferential (analytic) thinking and unbelief.

Pennycook et al. (2012) sampled over 200 people across the United States with a median age of roughly 35. They measured inferential thinking style (again which they called "analytic cognitive style," ACS) in two ways, first with a variant of the Cognitive Reflector Test and second with Base-Rate Conflict (BRC) problems (problems that contain a conflict between a stereotype and probabilistic information). Since religious engagement is likely correlated with religious belief, they measured belief according to an individual's reported level of participation in, for example, church and prayer. They also measured religious beliefs through one's degree of belief in heaven, hell, miracles, afterlife, angels and demons, and an immaterial soul. Finally, they queried participants about what kind of God, if any, they believe in: answers ranged from theism to atheism. While they produced many nuanced results, overall they affirmed the intuition that inferential thinkers are more likely to be unbelievers than intuitive thinkers. Their first study, for example, offered evidence of "an analytic [inferential] tendency to ignore or override initial intuitive responses" (339). They concluded that inferential processing decreases the likelihood of supernatural belief.

II. SO FAR

Cognitive science of religion has apparently shown a correlation between intuitive thinking and religious belief, on the one hand, and between inferential thinking and unbelief, on the other. Note what it has and hasn't shown. It has shown a correlation between thinking styles and belief: an inferential thinking style is correlated with atheism and agnosticism, and an intuitive thinking style is correlated with religious belief; those who are inclined to a more inferential thinking style are more likely to be atheists or agnostics, and those who are inclined to intuitive thinking style are more likely to be religious believers. It has not shown that anyone's unbelief is a result of conscious and careful reflection on good arguments against belief in God. And it has not shown that intuitively based God beliefs are irrational. Moreover, it has not shown that individual atheists have inferential thinking styles and that individual theists have intuitive thinking styles; nor has it shown the basis,

inferential or intuitive, of any particular person's belief or unbelief in God. It has simply shown that a certain thinking style is correlated with a certain belief (or unbelief). Anyone who draws any additional conclusions — about rationality-irrationality or truth-falsity — is going way beyond what any of these studies warrant (probably in ways that reflect favorably upon what the author believes).

Both intuitive and inferential beliefs can be true; both can be rational.[9] There is more than I can argue for here, but let me make the basic point. It is simply inconducive to our nature as human beings to restrict rationality to beliefs which can be inferred from some body of evidence. If we were to restrict ourselves to inferential beliefs, we would have nothing to believe (belief must start somewhere, not every belief can be inferred). If we have rational inferential beliefs, we must also have rational non-inferential beliefs.

Inferential beliefs are often based on beliefs that are ultimately intuitive. Reason does not liberate us from intuition. Inference operates on our assumptions about the ways reality seems to us (intuition). This is true, I think, in every domain of human inquiry. Our ordinary, common sense beliefs rely on intuitions (non-inferential assumptions) about space and time, the reliability of sense perception, belief in the past, and belief in an external world. Scientific beliefs assume without argument the uniformity of nature, the inductive principle, and truths of mathematics. In this section, I will focus on philosophical beliefs, in particular, belief in God.

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[9] I am not insensitive to intuitive biases, which have been well documented (Kahneman 2011). But there are also inferential biases. For example, we tend to be sensitive to evidence or arguments which support our beliefs and to be insensitive to evidence or arguments that are contrary to our beliefs. Not all inferential beliefs are true. People have inferred such untrue beliefs as the phlogiston theory, "women should aspire to be beautiful" (since they cannot be rational), and "Nixon will make a great president." Scientists seem to have inferred themselves into a contradiction between its two most widely accepted and successful theories—quantum mechanics and general relativity. They cannot both be true. Finally, philosophers, among the most ardent defenders of argument, continue to hold a wide diversity of incompatible beliefs. Some philosophers believe enthusiastically while others deny with equal vehemence the following and more (I take just a few claims in ethics; examples could be drawn from every area of philosophy): there are moral absolutes, there are moral facts, and there is human virtue.

III. ARGUMENT AND INTUITION

Reliance on intuition is often disguised by the remarkable complexity of philosophical arguments. Beneath the symbols, modalities, and nested propositions, one finds an intuition. In every philosophical argument, there is at least one fundamental premise that cannot be argued for. Dig deep enough, and one will find the unargued place where one starts. This unargued starting point is an intuition, an immediate, non-inferential judgment. Such intuitions may be elicited by stories, motivated by cases, critiqued by counterexamples, or appealed to in theories, but they are not and cannot be argued for. One "gets them" (or not).[10]

Although we must rely on our intuitions, we are not so metaphysically astute that we can clearly and certainly perceive those involved in, for example, an argument for (or against) the existence of God, for an absolute and universal moral standard, or for metaphysical idealism. Relevant intuitions in these fields might include claims that an infinite regress of causes is absurd, that moral statements require grounding, and that sensory appearances can be adequately accounted for without reference to a material world. Discussions in political theory, social policy, ethics, the meaning of life, the nature of human persons, determinism and free will likewise rely on crucial premises that are not universally discoverable by intuition. Widespread and interminable disagreement from epistemically equal peers is evidence against the indubitablity of philosophical intuition (McGinn 1993).[11]

We all have substantive philosophical beliefs about reality, which betray our commitments to fundamental, intuitive beliefs. Most substantive philosophical beliefs for most people are immediately held, non-inferential. I take it that most ordinary folk (as well as most philosophers and scientists) hold few of their philosophical beliefs — in free will, say, or the objectivity of mo-

[10] Some philosophers contend that philosophical intuitions have evidential value, which others ardently reject (Cappelen 2012). There is increasing empirical evidence that intuitions vary according to, for example, cultural background, socioeconomic status, and affective state (Weinberg et al. 2001; Nichols et al. 2003; Machery et al. 2004; Nichols and Knobe 2007; Swain et al. 2008).

[11] Joshua Alexander and Jonathan Weinberg argue that "the problem with standard philosophical practice is that experimental evidence seems to point to the unsuitability of intuitions to serve as evidence at all" (Alexander and Weinberg 2007, 63).

rality — on the basis of an argument. For many, including some philosophers, belief in God is immediate and non-inferential. And for some others, perhaps for more philosophers, belief in God is mediate and inferential. If the studies on atheism and inference are correct, relatively more unbelievers have come to their unbelief through inference.

Everyone's belief or disbelief in God, inferential or not, is grounded, ultimately, in intuition.[12] For most religious believers, belief in God is intuitive, that is, non-reflective or non-inferential. Those whose belief in God is inferential rely on arguments that are grounded in intuitions (the principle of sufficient reason, for example, or the objectivity of morality). I suspect that most unbelievers are atheistic not due to careful assessment of theistic arguments: they are, instead, mindblind, conformity bias, incredulous, or apatheist atheists. What about those whose rejection of theism was consciously inferential? Even those atheists had to rely on intuitive (non-inferential) epistemic principles (perhaps assuming that belief in God is like a scientific hypothesis and so must be accepted or rejected according to the canons of scientific rationality). Or such atheists had to assume various metaphysical principles (perhaps rejecting the principle of sufficient reason or the objectivity of morality).

We can get some understanding of the role of intuition in the formation of philosophical beliefs by placing Plato and Aristotle side by side. Plato was deeply suspicious of sense perception, hoping to escape from this elusive and illusive shadowy world into the Real, ideal, and universal world of mathematics and the Good. Although deeply influenced by his teacher, Aristotle was constitutionally disposed to muck about, relish, and find reality in the very material world that Plato despised and to deny it to the immaterial world that Plato loved. Aristotle's philosophy affirms this world, particulars, and matter. While both argued for their particular worldviews, they relied fundamentally on different intuitions. Both could account equally well for all that humans experience. And yet, their conclusions were driven by their differing intuitions that the truth lies in this direction rather than that one (see James 1956

[12] We must also assume (take as intuitively given) various epistemic principles about the nature and normativity of belief. For example, one must assume (or reject) (a) belief in God must be based on evidence, or (b) disagreement among those who are one's intellectual equals undermines one's rationality. If one affirms (a), one must also make assumptions about the nature of argument — deductive, probabilistic, cumulative case, inference to best explanation?

and James 1981). While their intuitions found expression in arguments, intuition, not inference, ultimately drove the development of their worldviews.

In philosophy, inferential and intuitive thinking are both grounded, ultimately, in intuition. Despite different styles, philosophical thinking is deeply and irremediably grounded in intuition.

IV. INFERENCE AND BIAS

Hilary Kornblith (2012) argues that there is no reason to think reflection (inference) is better that non-reflective (non-inferential) thinking. Empirical studies have shown that, due to confirmation bias and our tendency to rationalize (after the fact), reflection is often inaccurate. When challenged, reflection yields both rationalizations and a false sense that we have good grounds. Reflecting on beliefs, then, seldom gets one closer to the truth.

We seldom acquire beliefs as the result of coolly rational, explicit and dispassionate attention to arguments (though we pride ourselves at having done so). Our beliefs and practices are more often the product of universally pervasive, unconscious (implicit) processes that are automatically activated in a wide variety of circumstances. "At the nexus of social psychology, cognitive psychology, and cognitive neuroscience has emerged a new science called 'implicit social cognition' (ISC). This field focuses on mental processes that affect social judgments but operate without conscious awareness" (Kang and Lane 2010: 467). These pervasive biases are triggered unconsciously, involuntarily, and without one's awareness or intentional control. While we may explicitly disavow, for example, racism, studies show that we are implicitly a seething cauldron of anti-black prejudices and it is those prejudices which move us to believe and act in various ways (the studies here are unequivocal and undeniable). And we are not biased only against black people. We are biased with respect to age, gender, skin color, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexual orientation, class, body image and, of course, religion.

Implicit bias studies show that people of all races manifest racial biases despite sincere declarations to the contrary. For example, we may explicitly disavow racism but our very real underground motivations engender feelings of superiority, beliefs that narrate privilege, and practices that dispossess and disadvantage black people. "In fact, the serious discrimination is implicit, subtle and nearly universal. Both blacks and whites try to get a white partner when asked to team

up to do an intellectually difficult task. In computer shooting simulations, both black and white participants were more likely to think black figures were armed. In emergency rooms, whites are pervasively given stronger painkillers than blacks or Hispanics" (Brooks 2013). Even after sustained training, thorough self-examination, and genuine desire for change, implicit biases persist (and surface in ways that harm those on the receiving end).

Every human being is equipped with unconscious mental processes that are automatically activated in a wide variety of circumstances.

One study showed that people are three times more likely to put money in an untended coffee tin, the "honesty box," if the tin is adorned with eyeballs. While everyone should pay the listed amount for their cuppa, a coffee tin decorated with flowers received 1/3 of the funds of the eyeball-adorned tin. Moreover, the payers are unaware that they are paying their fair share because they sense they are being watched. Subjects who are informed would surely concede their irrationality had they been informed that they had been unconsciously moved to act by a set of eyeballs. Cheating and littering likewise decrease when people feel they are being watched (all it takes is images of eyeballs). Moreover, people are inclined to be more generous when unconsciously prompted with religious words such as "spirit" or "church." Unconscious religious promptings dramatically increase the amount of money a subject is willing to share with a stranger.

Although most were moved to generosity unconsciously, most subjects refuse to believe that they were unconsciously moved to act. Most subjects tell themselves this story: "As a good citizen, I pay what I owe. Some other people may be unconsciously moved by the presence of silly eyeballs, but I acted out of a sense of duty." Or in the sharing case: "I'm a good and generous person. Other people may have been unconsciously moved to share after seeing religious words but not me. I shared because I'm generous." These stories are true in some cases but not in most. And yet we find ourselves telling ourselves (and sometimes others) these sorts of stories, which are little more than ex post facto rationalizations that make us look or feel better — moral rational and virtuous, more in self-conscious control of our beliefs and actions — than we really are. We are considerably more the product of unconscious mental processes than we are of conscious, deliberate, freely exercised mental processes.

These unconscious mental processes operate clandestinely, bypassing one's reasoning processes; one believes or acts unreflectively. I may think I decided

(along with thinking that I've carefully and dispassionately assessed the evidence) but "find myself believing" is what typically happens. I never (self-consciously) decided to be a proud (white) privileged American with a host of attendant biases against, say, blacks, Arabs, women, fat people, or Finns. Having grown up in middle class white America, I simply absorbed a huge number of identity-shaping beliefs and practices (beliefs and practices that now seem to me as commonsensical as believing in the past and in the external world).

When prompted, a whole host of these identity-shaping beliefs automatically create beliefs and attitudes or move me to act. I bristle when Europeans criticize American interventionism, I feel fear when approached by young black men on a street at night, and I viscerally react when a turbaned-bearded man stands up in an airplane. And I act — I argue with the European, I cross the street to avoid the young black men, and I stand up in the plane just in case. Or I vote for politicians with more isolationist policies, or don't hire people named Shaniqua, or demand that Muslims integrate into my own ways of living (that they become more like me).

When confronted with an implicitly instigated belief-action, I tell myself a story, one that makes sense of my beliefs and actions, a story that *rationalizes* my behavior (within which I am a careful rational reflector and virtuous agent). Such stories, which come after but are offered as the explicit reasons for one's beliefs or actions, are nothing more than confabulations (bullshit, to use the non-technical term). I make myself the rational hero of my own drama. I tell myself a story of US exceptionalism: how our country's unrivaled commitment to freedom was blessed by God with astounding prosperity and power (and now, responsibility). Or I tell myself a story of people in poverty making bad choices. Or I tell myself a story of the connection between Islam and violence (and my own culture's moral progress and purity). And I feel better — more rational, more virtuous — after hearing and heeding my own story. In fact, this falsifying narrative makes me more confident in my belief, more proud of my intellectual prowess, more assured of my virtue. And moves me further from the truth.

Kornblith criticizes the philosophers' insistent demand for rational reflection because of this very human tendency to offer rationalizations of our previously (intuitively) held beliefs. After providing such rationalizations, subjects are often more confident of their belief but for no good reason. While they find their alleged justifications of their initial beliefs to be completely persuasive, they are

simply bad reasons which offer no legitimately rational support for their initial beliefs. Just as humans are influenced in a wide variety of non-truth-conducive ways in their acquisition of intuitive or immediate beliefs, they are equally susceptible to non-truth-conducive ways of rationalizing their beliefs. He writes: "The idea, then, that by reflecting on the source of our beliefs, we may thereby subject them to some sort of proper screening, and thereby improve on the accuracy of the resulting beliefs, is simply misguided. When we reflect in this way, we get the impression that we are actually providing some sort of extra screening of our beliefs, and we thus have the very strong impression that we are actually doing something to insure that our beliefs are, indeed, reliably arrived at. But this is not what we are doing at all" (Kornblith, 24-25).

This act of what Kornblith calls "self-congratulation" does little more than make us feel better about ourselves and superior to those we've judged defective. As Kornblith points out, we have a strong tendency to prefer beliefs simply because they are ours. We have a strong tendency toward belief conservatism — to preserve or conserve our already held beliefs. We have a tendency to notice and favor evidence that supports our previously held beliefs and to ignore or discount evidence that opposes them. We easily remember evidence in favor of our beliefs while we just as easily forget evidence that opposes them. On those moments when we do stop and reflect, little wonder that our previously held beliefs are overconfidently held and asserted.

V. CONCLUSION

Since philosophical arguments essentially rely on intuitions, neither resting on intuition nor relying on argument is better suited at gaining the truth.[13] With respect to philosophical matters (including belief or disbelief in God), then, intuition and inference are on epistemically equal ground. If rationality involves doing the best one can to get in touch with the truth, neither intuition nor inference has an epistemic advantage.

[13] One might think both are equally bad at gaining philosophical truth. Unlike many other intuitive beliefs, with philosophical intuitions we cannot check the facts to see if they are reliable. We have no belief-independent access to the philosophical world.

News headlines, some psychologists and many philosophers valorize inferential thinking over intuitive thinking. But human beings cannot avoid reliance on intuition. The situation is all the more pressing in matters philosophical. Scratch an inferentialist and you will find an intuitionist. That is, look carefully at a philosopher's proffered argument, and you will find an essential, intuitively accepted premise. Even for the most ardent evidentialist, argumentative reasoning starts with intuitions.[14]

If one is doing the best one can with respect to gaining the truth, one's belief or disbelief in God is rational. Religious belief may be more nonreflective, but religious believers are not evidence insensitive. And atheists may be more inferential, but arguments assume intuitions. Neither has an epistemic advantage.

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[14] It is hard to imagine a plausible evolutionary story in which developing reliable philosophical intuitions is reproductively successful.

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INTUITIONS AND ARGUMENTS: COGNITIVE FOUNDATIONS OF ARGUMENTATION IN NATURAL THEOLOGY

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Abstract. This paper examines the cognitive foundations of natural theology: the intuitions that provide the raw materials for religious arguments, and the social context in which they are defended or challenged. We show that the premises on which natural theological arguments are based rely on intuitions that emerge early in development, and that underlie our expectations for everyday situations, e.g., about how causation works, or how design is recognized. In spite of the universality of these intuitions, the cogency of natural theological arguments remains a matter of continued debate. To understand why they are controversial, we draw on social theories of reasoning and argumentation.

1 INTRODUCTION

Arguments that aim to rationally establish the existence of one or more gods appear in many cultural traditions. For instance, the design argument appears in several polytheistic traditions, including Hinduism and ancient Greek and Roman philosophy (Brown, 2008; Sedley, 2007). It observes that features of the world, such as biological organisms and the structure of the universe, seem fine-tuned to sustain human life. As the 8th-century Hindu philosopher Śaṅkara put it:

> In ordinary life what we do see is that houses, palaces, couches, seats, pleasure-gardens, and the like, which are useful for obtaining pleasure and avoiding pain at appropriate times, are constructed (*racitā*) by intelligent craftsmen. In like manner, observe that this entire universe, externally consisting of the earth and other elements, is suitable for experiencing the fruits of various acts. [...] Since even the most competent craftsmen cannot comprehend (the world's construction), how could the non-intelligent Material Nature (*pradhāna*) devise (*racayet*)

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> it? In the case of such things as a lump of earth or a stone, no (power of contrivance) is seen, but the design (*racanā*) of special forms out of such things as clay is seen when they are superintended by potters and the like. In the same way, Material Nature (transforms itself) only when connected with a superintending, external intelligence (Śaṅkara, cited in Brown, 2008, 108).

From this, Śaṅkara inferred that intelligent agents (in particular, Brahman) are responsible for the design of the universe. Christian authors like Newton and Paley offered similar arguments (see McGrath, 2011, for an overview).

The enduring popularity of these and other natural theological arguments is no coincidence, but results from stable features of human cognition that operate at two levels: intuitions and argumentative reasoning. Intuitions provide the raw material for premises in natural theological arguments. They arise as a result of individual reasoning processes. Argumentative reasoning occurs in social contexts: on the basis of intuitions, reasoners formulate arguments to examine the plausibility of religious ideas. In this paper we look at intuitions and argumentative reasoning as the cognitive basis of natural theology. Section 2 introduces cognitive approaches to natural theology. Section 3 examines the intuitions that underlie natural theological arguments, focusing on their evidential value. Section 4 discusses the dialectical context in which such arguments are formulated. Section 5 concludes by tying these different stands together.

2 NATURAL THEOLOGY THROUGH THE LENS OF COGNITIVE SCIENCE OF RELIGION

Cognitive science of religion (CSR) is a multidisciplinary field that studies religious beliefs and practices by looking at the cognitive processes that underlie them. It encompasses various disciplines, such as developmental and cognitive psychology, anthropology and neuroscience. CSR authors propose that religious beliefs and practices build on everyday cognitive processes and inference mechanisms, such as perception and memory. This marks a departure from how religion has been typically studied in the humanities and social sciences, i.e., as a primarily cultural phenomenon. For example, Guthrie (1993) argued that our perceptual systems have evolved in such a

way that they are highly sensitive to cues of agency, especially anthropomorphic agency. A configuration of two aligned spots, and a third spot, situated under the two, will be easily taken for a human face. The cultural evolution of supernatural beings builds upon this tendency to overattribute agency.

An emerging consensus in CSR is that religion is natural (see e.g., Bloom, 2007; McCauley, 2011, for explicit defenses of this claim). The term "natural" as applied to religion is polysemic. Some authors (e.g., Dennett, 2006) use it in the sense of *ontological naturalness*: religion can be explained without invoking any supernatural agents or forces. Others (e.g., McCauley, 2011) focus on *maturational naturalness*: religious beliefs and practices emerge early in development, without explicit instruction, like one's first language. Under this latter view, religious beliefs are easy to acquire and process as they key in on how our minds work.

In this view of religion as a natural phenomenon, the role of reasoning and argumentation remains unclear. If belief in God (or some supernatural being more generally) is natural, then why would one argue for God's existence? Moreover, some studies (e.g., Gervais & Norenzayan, 2012) suggest that reasoning and religious belief do not go well together. Analytic reasoning decreases religious belief, whereas more intuitive styles of thinking increase it. As Sosis and Kiper (2014, 270) write, "adherents do not attain their religious commitments through analytical contemplation; rather, they derive and sustain them by expressing them through rituals, symbols, myths and other elements of the religious system." What are we to make of practices that combine religious belief and reflective reasoning, such as natural theological argumentation? CSR has been mainly concerned with folk religious beliefs and practices, with little attention for theology and philosophy of religion. Most work on CSR and theology has focused on theological incorrectness (e.g., Slone, 2004), which occurs when religious believers unwittingly distort official theological doctrines to fit their intuitive expectations. For example, when Christians have to make inferences about what God can know, they are influenced by their beliefs about what human agents can know. They explicitly affirm that God is omnipotent and omniscient, but when they have to recall a narrative where God saves a drowning boy who prays to help him, they misremember it to the effect that God first had to finish listening to another prayer before he can attend to the boy (Barrett & Keil, 1996). Theological

concepts, such as the Trinity, often present a radical departure from ordinary religious concepts. The Trinity is a puzzling concept for ordinary religious believers as it unites three persons in one substance. Subtle differences in trinitarian concepts between, say, Eastern Orthodox and Western traditions elude them. As a result, they often distort such concepts to fit their more intuitive expectations, although they try to adhere to official teachings of their denominations. For instance, a qualitative study with English parishioners found that they do not see Jesus on an ontological par with God the Father (as western Trinitarians holds), but rather as a man who had an exemplary lifestyle and moral teachings (Christie, 2013).

If reasoning and religion are incompatible, how can we explain natural theology? Norenzayan (2013, 181) argues, "apologetics is doomed to failure as a philosophical enterprise because it fails to capture how our minds accept the plausibility of religious belief." Yet, if sales of popular books, such as *The God Delusion* (Dawkins, 2006), or views on YouTube channels, such as the *Veritas Forum*, are any indication, natural theology is far from doomed. Natural theological arguments continue to generate interest. As we will see in the next sections, natural theological arguments are not completely separated from the intuitions that underlie ordinary religious beliefs. To the contrary, these arguments critically rely on intuitions and cognitive processes that also play a role in folk religious beliefs. In the next section, we will review evidence from CSR that supports this continuity. Subsections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 summarize chapters 4, 5 and 6 in De Cruz and De Smedt (2015).

3 INTUITIONS UNDERLYING NATURAL THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

Natural theological arguments aim to establish the existence of God using intuitions that are broadly shared. Such intuitions arise spontaneously, also in the minds of non-philosophers or non-theologians. For instance, the cosmological argument builds on the intuition that contingent, temporal events have a cause for their existence. Since we have the non-reflective belief that everyday events have external causes, we spontaneously wonder, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" This sense of cosmic wonder underlies the cosmological argument, including sophisticated versions based

on probability (Swinburne, 2004) or Big Bang cosmology (Craig, 1998). Even when natural theologians of the past did not explicitly use the term "intuition" and its variants, intuitions played a crucial role in natural theological arguments. In his design argument, Śaṅkara invited readers to consider objects designed for human comfort, such as palaces, couches, and pleasure-gardens, assuming that they would notice a similarity between these artifacts and the universe in its design. Once this intuition is in place, they may be more inclined to accept the argument that the universe, like artifacts, has a designer. We argue that intuitions that fuel natural theological arguments have early developmental origins (De Cruz & De Smedt, 2015). We illustrate this by looking at the intuitions that underlie three popular arguments for the existence of God: the teleological, cosmological, and moral arguments.

3.1 The teleological argument

Teleological arguments (also known as arguments from design) have been formulated in diverse cultural contexts, including in ancient Greece and Rome, medieval and modern Europe, Classical India, and the medieval Islamic world. Many forms of the teleological argument, for instance, Paley (1802 [2006]), propose an analogy between features of the natural world, such as the human eye or a bird's wing, and complex artifacts, such as a mechanical watch. They can be formalized as follows (Sober, 2004, 118): there is an observation O and two possible hypotheses (H_1, H_2) to explain it:

O: the watch/the universe has features such as goal-directedness and complexity.

H_1: the watch/the universe was created by an intelligent designer.

H_2: the watch/the universe was produced by a mindless chance process.

The teleological argument holds that the best explanation for complexity in artifacts is design, and that likewise, the best explanation for complexity in the natural world is design. This is an argument from analogy, as we will see in more detail in subsection 4.3. Given that design entails a designer, the natural world was designed by one or more powerful supernatural beings.

What explains the intuition that natural objects, like artifacts, are goal-directed? Young children have a robust preference for teleological explana-

tions for natural objects, and this remains latently present in adults as well. From about five years of age, young children show a preference for teleological over mechanistic explanations for natural objects. For instance, when offered the choice between teleological and mechanistic explanations, e.g., "the rocks were pointy so that animals could scratch on them when they got itchy" or "the rocks were pointy because bits of stuff piled up for a long time", young children consistently choose the teleological option (Kelemen, 2003, 204). Older children and adults prefer the mechanistic explanation, indicating a reduced appeal to teleological explanations. Yet, several studies show that adults are more likely to endorse wrong teleological explanations under time pressure, e.g., "The sun radiates heat to nurture life on Earth." This tendency is even present in American physical scientists at research-intensive universities (Kelemen, Rottman, & Seston, 2013). Adults — including atheists who explicitly deny any higher purpose in their lives — also appeal to teleological explanations to come to grips with significant life events, for instance, they believe they failed their exams so that they would learn that they could do something else in life (Heywood & Bering, 2014).

The tendency to see teleology in the natural world and in one's personal life is pervasive, but does this mean humans are intuitive creationists? In Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Cleanthes argues that we perceive design, just like we perceive teleology: " Consider, anatomize the eye; survey its structure and contrivance; and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation" (Hume, 1779, Dialogues III, 77–78). However, attributing design requires additional background information. Both adults and young children take the history of objects into account when they decide to attribute design. For instance, when they are shown objects and are given two divergent reports of how they came into being, either by accident (e.g., a strip of cloth was caught in a machine by accident, which resulted in holes punched in the cloth at regular intervals) or design (e.g., a person carefully cut equidistant holes with a pair of scissors), participants are more prone to call the latter object a belt if they think it was intentionally created (Gelman & Bloom, 2000). On the other hand, adults and children who heard the accidental story described it as a strip of cloth with holes in. The importance of background information also reveals itself at the neural level: participants

who listen to a piece of electronic music show a high activation in brain areas involved in the attribution of mental states, such as the anterior medial frontal cortex, superior temporal sulcus, and temporal poles. By contrast, subjects who are told this is a random computer-generated piece do not show this activation (Steinbeis & Koelsch, 2009). Experiments like these suggest that we do not perceive design automatically, even if the object exhibits some complexity and regularity. Humans are not intuitive creationists, rather, the teleological argument already assumes design (i.e., theism) when it attributes design intentions, and then argues for a creator.

3.2 The cosmological argument

Cosmological arguments infer the existence of God from the existence of the universe. Some cosmological arguments, such as Thomas Aquinas's second and third way rely on the intuition that causal chains are finite, and therefore, there is a first cause. Others, like Leibniz's, invoke the principle of sufficient reason: every contingent state of affairs has a reason or explanation. A third class of cosmological arguments assumes that the universe is only finitely old, and that objects that begin to exist have an external cause for their existence. This *kalām cosmological argument* was influential in medieval Muslim philosophy (Shihadeh, 2008), and has contemporary defenders (e.g., Craig, 1998). Cosmological arguments typically consist of two moves: first, they propose that the universe requires a cause or explanation for its existence, and second, they identify this cause or explanation as God:

(1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause of its existence.

(2) The world began to exist.

(3) Therefore, it must have an originator (from 1 and 2).

(4) This originator must be eternal; otherwise it too must have an originator (from 1).

(5) The originator is God.

Infants already have the intuition that contingent events (especially those where disorder turns into order) have external causes, and they prefer agents

as causes of such events. For instance, when a disordered pile of blocks turns into a neat stack, or when beads arrange themselves into regular patterns, infants look longer if the cause turns out to be a mechanical claw, rather than a human hand. This suggests that they expect that human agents cause these events (Newman, Keil, Kuhlmeier, & Wynn, 2010; Ma & Xu, 2013). Other looking time experiments similarly indicate that infants have a preference for agents over non-agents as causes for events. For example, 12-month-olds expect a human hand, but not a toy train, to cause a beanbag to land on a stage (Saxe, Tenenbaum, & Carey, 2005). Young children who witnessed inanimate objects moving without any apparent external cause sometimes appealed to invisible mechanical devices, such as batteries, or, more frequently, to invisible persons who made the devices move (Gelman & Gottfried, 1996).

Older children and adults spontaneously provide causal explanations. When adults have to recall a story, they spontaneously make causal inferences (not present in the original scenario) to reconstruct the event. For instance, when a character in a story finds that her wallet is missing, participants will spontaneously reconstruct the story as if her wallet was stolen by a pickpocket (Hassin, Bargh, & Uleman, 2002). In cases like these, people offer accounts in terms of invisible generative causes. As humans are able to do this even after a single instance of an event, they seem to have no problem inferring generative causes for unique events. The cosmological argument keys in on this spontaneous search for hidden causes, and the preference for agents as causes for ordered complexity.

3.3 The moral argument

Moral arguments make an inference from the (purported) existence of a moral sense or objective moral norms to the existence of God:

(1) If objective binding moral norms exist, then God exists.

(2) Objective binding moral norms exist.

(3) Therefore, God exists.

In this simple formulation, the moral argument's first premise draws an explicit connection between God and objective binding moral norms. Re-

cently, a large cross-cultural survey conducted by the Pew Research Center[1] found that people worldwide regard belief in God as a necessary condition for being a moral person. This view is especially prevalent in poorer countries with weaker systems for law enforcement.

From a CSR perspective, the connection between morality and God can be explained as the result of cultural evolution: historically, cultures used belief in watchful, punishing deities to enforce socially appropriate behavior. People who think they are being watched behave in a more prosocial way than those who do not. This has been experimentally demonstrated in several settings. For instance, a self-serve coffee and tea station had a banner with either a pair of staring eyes or a picture of flowers hanging right above the prices. These pictures were alternated each week. During the weeks when the eyes were on display, there was more money collected in the box (Bateson, Netttle, & Roberts, 2006). Belief in morally concerned, watchful deities may be an effective way to reduce the temptation to cheat. Several studies found that people indeed behave more generously towards others when they are primed with god concepts (e.g., Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). Norenzayan (2013) speculates that during the Neolithic larger, cohesive groups that stably held beliefs in watchful, punishing deities had an advantage over groups without such beliefs: they could cooperate better and had less problems with cheating and freeriding. Over time, these groups became prevalent as they successfully outcompeted other groups for limited resources. This historical situation contributes to the widespread belief in premise 1 of the moral argument.

Its second premise is fueled by our intuition that moral norms and judgments have an absolute, non-subjective character, that they transcend individual preferences and cultural values, and that they are true even if everyone believed they were false. There is empirical support for the claim that humans are intuitive moral realists, i.e., that they intuitively believe that morality is objective and that it does not change according to cultural preferences. Young children believe that a non-moral norm (e.g., not chewing gum in class) could change if teachers accepted it, but that moral transgressions (e.g., pulling another child's hair) would remain wrong, even if teach-

[1] Pew Forum's Global religious landscape, 2012, http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/03/13/worldwide-many-see-belief-in-god-as-essential-to-morality/

ers allowed it (Nichols & Folds-Bennett, 2003). Goodwin and Darley (2008) observed similar objectivist tendencies among undergraduates. Participants believed that moral statements were almost as objective as scientific facts, and more objective than social conventions or personal taste. According to the students, moral statements they agree with strongly are also the most objectively true — the more they agreed with statements, the more objectively true they were. This strong intuitive sense that moral norms are objective lies at the basis of moral arguments for the existence of God.

3.4 The evidential value of intuitions in natural theology

What is the evidential value of intuitions that underlie natural theological arguments? This question ties into a larger debate on the evidential value of intuitions in philosophy more generally. Some authors, such as Williamson (2007) and Cappelen (2012), argue that appeals to intuitions are just a form of linguistic hedging: I see it this way, but you might see it differently. Today, philosophers cannot draw on traditional psychological justifications, such as that intuitions would be memories of our prenatal life in the World of Forms, as Plato held, or that intuitions are innate ideas, instilled by God, as Descartes assumed.

Thanks to recent developments in cognitive psychology, contemporary philosophers are in an excellent position to revisit the psychological origins of intuitions. Cognitive scientists are studying the psychological bases of intuitions, e.g., in moral cognition (Haidt, 2001), dual-processing approaches to reasoning (Evans, 2008), and conceptual knowledge in infants and young children (Carey, 2009). In a broad psychological sense, intuitions are assessments that arise as a result of unconscious, inaccessible reasoning processes. Intuitions appear spontaneously, without conscious deliberation. One set of intuitions that has received attention, and that is relevant for the study of natural theological argumentation, is core knowledge[2] (see also De Cruz, 2015). According to developmental psychologists (e.g., Carey & Spelke, 1996; Spelke & Kinzler, 2007), humans have early-developed inference-mechanisms that generate intuitions about the physical, biological, and psychological world.

[2] The concept of core knowledge sometimes goes by alternative names, such as "folk theories", "intuitive knowledge" (e.g., Gelman & Legare, 2011), or "core cognition" (Carey, 2009).

Examples of domains of core knowledge include intuitive physics, which guides our expectations about physical events, intuitive biology, which provides us with beliefs about growth, development, and behavior of organisms, and intuitive psychology, which allows us to predict and explain the actions of others by appealing to internal mental states.

Can the psychological origins of intuitions say anything about the cogency of natural theological arguments? Using a reliabilist strategy, one can examine whether a particular type of cognitive process is usually reliable (Goldman, 2007). For example, a recent cross-cultural study has revealed that people tend to deny knowledge in Gettier cases (Machery et al., in press). Differently put, humans across cultures have a concept of knowledge that is more demanding than justified true belief. According to Boyd and Nagel (2014), such a demanding concept of knowledge is effective in helping us navigate our social world: it allows us a better picture of whether someone really knows that p, or is merely lucky in this belief. Since keeping track of what others know is ecologically important for social creatures like us, we are sensitive to factors like luck to judge whether someone really knows a state of affairs. In this way, the epistemic intuitions that underlie philosophical thought experiments such as Gettier scenarios are reliable.

Applying this strategy to natural theological arguments, we can examine whether the teleological, causal, and moral intuitions that underlie natural theological arguments are generally truth-conducive. It seems that, in everyday conditions, they are. When an ordinary event happens, such as an unfortunate plane crash, we are right to try to identify an external cause of this event. Natural theology stretches the bounds of our ordinary intuitions by reaching beyond our everyday experience. Whether our causal intuitions are also reliable when we consider the origin of the universe as a whole is unclear. Reliabilism encounters the generality problem. To assess whether a given token process is reliable, we need to settle the appropriate type process. In the case of the cosmological argument, it is unclear whether our ordinary causal reasoning processes are the appropriate type process. Ordinary causal intuitions are not always reliable, for example, they break down in the domain of quantum mechanics, which suggests that they may be more appropriate for events involving middle-sized objects, the context in which our causal intuitions evolved. This objection is, of course, an ancient one. Hume (1779) and

Kant (1781 [2005]) cautioned against making extrapolations from everyday causal cognition to the universe as a whole. Likewise, the Buddhist atomist Dharmakīrti (6th–7th century AD) argued that cosmological arguments go beyond what is permitted through inductive extrapolation: one cannot generalize from ordinary causes and effects in everyday circumstances to a unique being such as God (Dasti, 2011).

The case of the cosmological argument illustrates that we cannot draw straightforward conclusions about natural theological arguments from the psychological processes that underlie their premises. This does not mean that their psychological underpinnings are irrelevant. Suppose, for instance, that intuitive moral realism is a cognitive illusion. According to Ruse and Wilson (1986, 179) "Human beings function better if they are deceived by their genes into thinking that there is a disinterested objective morality binding upon them, which all should obey." Currently, this hypothesis lacks sufficient empirical support[3]. However, if it turned out that Ruse and Wilson are correct, we would have an undercutting defeater for the intuitive moral realism that supports premise 2 of the moral argument. This would not mean the premise is false, but it would mean it is not prima facie true.

4 ARGUMENTS IN NATURAL THEOLOGY

4.1 The cognitive basis of argumentation

Reasoning is the individual or social process by which we, individually or collectively, make inferences from premises in order to reach a conclusion. Descartes (1619 [1985], rule III) contrasted (deductive) reasoning with intuition as follows: "Thus we distinguish at this point between intuition and certain deduction; because the latter, unlike the former, is conceived as involving a movement or succession; and is again unlike intuition in not re-

[3] At most, there is evidence for a connection between intuitive moral realism and altruistic behavior. When participants are primed with moral anti-realism (e.g., Do you agree that our morals and values are shaped by our culture and upbringing, so it is up to each person to discover his or her own moral truths?") or receive no prime, they are less generous in donations for charitable causes than when they receive a prime that makes moral realism more salient (e.g., "Do you agree that some things are just morally right or wrong, good or bad, wherever you happen to be from in the world?") (Young & Durwin, 2013, 304).

quiring something evident at the moment, but rather, so to say, borrowing its certainty from memory." When we intuit, we spontaneously reach conclusions, whereas reasoning involves finding and evaluating reasons for why the conclusion is true.

Until recently, most philosophical and psychological studies of reasoning took as the exemplar case of reasoning the lone reasoner, the person who thinks very carefully, weighing various considerations, to reach a conclusion. This picture is challenged by recent work on the social function of reasoning. According to the argumentative theory of reasoning (Mercier & Sperber, 2011), cognitive capacities that are involved in reasoning evolved in a social context where we evaluate the arguments of others (to decide whether to change our minds), and where we try to persuade others by good arguments. This social perspective sheds light on some peculiar features of reasoning, such as the robust presence of biases. For example, reasoning is subject to confirmation bias, the tendency to interpret claims in a way that confirms one's prior beliefs, and to view claims that do not match these with suspicion, or ignore them blithely. People are better at finding weaknesses in other people's positions than in their own. Moreover, they are unable to predict how well they will do in assessments of their knowledge, even when they received extensive feedback earlier (Eva, Cunnington, Reiter, Keane, & Norman, 2004). When adults are asked to give arguments for their position on social issues, they tend to produce weak arguments, such as circular ones. This is remarkable in light of the fact that even five-year-olds have a preference for non-circular over circular arguments. By ten years of age, the ability to detect circularity in an explanation is robust (Baum, Danovitch, & Keil, 2008). By contrast, people are better at evaluating the knowledge and arguments of others: in one experiment where participants were asked to individually solve a puzzle and then present its solution to the group, participants nearly always identified the correct solutions, based on arguments made by those who solved them (Trouche, Sander, & Mercier, 2014). On the lone reasoner view, where reasoning functions to improve one's individually held beliefs, these cognitive limitations are surprising — confirmation bias and an inability to see the weaknesses in one's own line of reasoning are not conducive to good reasoning in a solitary context. However, if reasoning is a social process,

it is unsurprising that people have confirmation bias and are not that good at presenting arguments.

Natural theological argumentation exhibits biases we find in other domains of reasoning as well, with theists being more favorably disposed toward theistic arguments and atheists more in favor of arguments against God's existence (De Cruz, 2014; De Cruz & De Smedt, 2016). Tobia (2016) presented participants with a ontological argument for or against God's existence. Subjects had to evaluate whether the argument was logically valid, and how strong it was. Predictably, theists were more inclined to believe the theistic ontological argument was logically valid. In both theists and atheists, strength ratings accorded to prior belief: theists found the theistic ontological argument stronger, and atheists favored the atheistic argument. These results do not bode well for philosophy of religion, and feed worries (e.g., Draper & Nichols, 2013) that philosophy of religion is riddled with biases. However, it is in line with other findings in experimental philosophy that indicate that philosophical specialization does not attenuate biases: Schwitzgebel and Cushman (2012) demonstrated that professional philosophers, even ethicists, are just as susceptible as laypeople to order effects, the order of presentation of moral dilemmas.[4]

If the social theory of reasoning is correct, we should expect that confirmation bias plays a role in how philosophers evaluate natural theological arguments. But argumentative practices could help correct for these biases. For instance, as a result of confirmation bias, theists might be unaware of plausible objections to particular arguments. But such objections can be pointed out to them by atheists, who examine arguments for theism with extra scrutiny, as a result of their disconfirmation bias against such arguments. This could then lead to theists sharpening their arguments. Consider the fine-tuning argument. The original design argument which focused on biological properties presented two possible origins for the appearance of complexity and design in nature: chance or design. Proponents of this classical design argument (e.g., Paley, 1802 [2006]) then argued that design was a better explanation

[4] Note that discussions on bias in experimental philosophy have tended to focus on individual assessments of arguments and intuitions elicited by thought experiments. They have not yet examined to what extent argumentative practices might mitigate individual biases, or more generally, how philosophers interact with each other in an argumentative context.

than chance. However, the classic design argument did not take into account that a combination of chance and non-random selection of favorable characteristics could create complexity. The fine-tuning argument (see Collins, 2009, for review) avoids this response, since it does not focus on biological organisms but on the conditions for life in our universe. Prima facie, it seems very unlikely that all these conditions (including physical laws and cosmological constants) would be fine-tuned in such a way as to allow for carbon-based life, or any life at all. An objection to this fine-tuning argument is that fine-tuning is merely the result of an observation selection effect (Sober, 2004) — the very nature of our existence introduces a bias: we cannot observe an environment in which there are no observers, so our evidence will always be biased toward observations of environments in which observers can exist. This objection is based on the weak anthropic principle: "What we can expect to observe must be restricted by the conditions necessary for our presence as observers" (Weisberg, 2005, 810). Swinburne (1990) responds to this line of argument by appeal to intuitions elicited by the following scenario: suppose you will be executed by a firing squad composed of 12 competent marksmen who each have 12 firing rounds. If, after firing 144 bullets, you are still alive, this observation is surely subject to an observation selection effect, but it remains surprising, and the fact that you are alive requires an explanation. The most plausible explanation in this case is that your survival is the result of design (e.g., the firing squad willfully misfiring to spare your life). Some authors have argued on the basis of this that even with the observation selection effect, the observation of fine-tuning is still relevant evidence for the fine-tuning of the universe (e.g., Weisberg, 2005). Thanks to the dialectics of natural theological argumentation, the fine-tuning argument is an improvement on the classic design argument since it responds to a number of objections raised to the original argument, and presents a tougher challenge for the nontheist to answer (namely, why we live in a life-permitting universe), a challenge that is hard to respond to in an ontologically parsimonious way, e.g., without invoking multiple universes, one of which would happen to be ours.

4.2 Natural theological argumentation as a practiced skill

Arguing about religion in the context of natural theology differs in several respects from ordinary argumentative contexts. As we have seen, people tend to produce shallow, unconvincing arguments during informal discussions. In more formalized settings, the stakes are higher. For example, giving a weak argument in a court of law may incur costs: it provides the other party with ammunition (e.g., "Look, they are just contradicting themselves") and takes away valuable time for formulating more compelling arguments. Similarly, philosophers and theologians who argue poorly can expect to be penalized, for example, by rejection through peer-review.

It is helpful to think about natural theological arguments as the products of social reasoning in a highly specialized context. Humans are naturally endowed with an "intuitive metarepresentational mechanism, a mechanism for representing possible reasons to accept a conclusion — that is, for representing arguments — and for evaluating their strength" (Mercier & Sperber, 2011, 58). Everyone can argue and provide reasons for the beliefs they hold. But in some highly specialized domains of knowledge, such as natural theology or philosophy of religion in general, reasoning is a practiced skill; its practitioners are well aware of the argumentative moves they can make and that others can make against them. Just like chess players know what moves are available to them (e.g., when one's king is in check, the only moves that are allowed are those that remove the check), skilled reasoners know what moves they can and cannot make. Some of these implicit rules are broad, for instance, philosophers take care not to make logical mistakes, such as affirming the consequent or denying the antecedent. Others narrowly apply to the subject of the debate, for example, Aquinas scholars who discuss the interpretation of a contested passage have to be in line with widely accepted views about Aquinas' philosophy.

The argumentative moves in natural theology are constrained by background assumptions. For instance, when debating God's existence, authors presuppose a thin and underdetermined concept of monotheism, rather than a fully-fledged concept of God as espoused in, say, Mormonism or Anglicanism. In a deliberate attempt to change the field, one can, of course, question the rules of the game, and argue that philosophy of religion should embrace

richer concepts of God (e.g., Trakakis, 2008). But, these criticisms are not leveled against the arguments; rather they question the constraints within which these arguments are formulated. Given that arguments for and against theism are formulated in a formalized context with implicit assumptions and rules, we need to examine whether these are conducive to good reasoning.

4.3 Analogies as argumentative tools

We will now provide one illustration of a common argumentative move in natural theology (and philosophy more generally), namely argumentation through analogy. Analogies are pervasive in everyday discourse, for instance, love is like a journey, the Internet is like a highway. Structurally, analogies map properties of a source domain (e.g., journey) onto a target domain (e.g., love). The source domain is the better-known domain of knowledge that a reasoner can draw upon to elucidate issues in the target domain. Although this mapping from source to target domain is never perfect, analogies can be useful to gain insights into poorly understood domains. In good analogies, the structural properties of target and source domain are similar, so that the reasoner can increase her understanding of the target domain. Analogies play an important role in scientific reasoning and creativity. For example, Kepler drew an analogy between light and *vis motrix* (the motive power of the Sun, a precursor to gravity) to gain insights into planetary motion, in particular why planets further from the Sun revolved more slowly. Kepler's analogies played a critical role in the formulation of his three laws of planetary motion (Gentner et al., 1997). Similarly, evolutionary psychologists (e.g., Cosmides & Tooby, 1994) use artifact analogies such as Swiss army knives to elucidate their ideas about our evolved, functionally adapted minds with several specialized modules for specific cognitive functions, e.g., face recognition (De Cruz & De Smedt, 2010).

Analogies are not only used to increase our understanding of an unfamiliar situation, but also to convince an interlocutor through argumentation. For example, one could use the love-is-like-a-journey analogy to emphasize that there are ups and downs in a relationship, that is, to argue to give a difficult relationship another chance. While analogies commonly figure in argumentative reasoning, there is no agreement on what form they have, or what

criteria should be used to evaluate them. Brewer (1996, 966) proposes the following general structure for arguments from analogy:

(1) *z* has characteristics *F, G,* ...

(2) *x, y* have characteristics *F, G*, ...

(3) *x, y* have also characteristic *H.*

(4) The presence in a thing of characteristics *F, G,*[...] provides sufficient warrant for inferring that *H* is also present in that thing.

(5) Therefore, there is warrant to conclude that *H* is also present in *z*.

Natural theological arguments often take the form of an analogy. Arguments from design, for instance, emphasize that natural objects (such as eyes or trees) have complexity and teleology as characteristics, just like artifacts (watches, pleasure gardens). Artifacts have a designer, therefore, there is warrant to conclude that natural objects also have a designer.

How can we know whether there is warrant to conclude that the property is present in the target domain? This is a difficult question to settle, and one of the reasons why natural theological arguments are hard to evaluate. As Hume already noted:

> If we see a house, Cleanthes, we conclude, with the greatest certainty, that it had an architect or builder; because this is precisely the species of effect which we have experienced to proceed from that species of cause. But surely you will not affirm, that the universe bears such a resemblance to a house, that we can with the same certainty infer a similar cause, or that the analogy is here entire and perfect. The dissimilitude is so striking, that the utmost you can here pretend to is a guess, a conjecture, a presumption concerning a similar cause (Hume, 1779, 51).

Hume, speaking through the mouth of the skeptical Philo, was correct in observing that the analogy from artifacts to natural objects is not a near analogy. It is a distant analogy, where the source and target domain are far apart. However, this by itself does not render the analogy invalid. It could still work if the structural properties are similar. Hume argued that if the analogy with artifacts is maintained, it is not clear whether one can speak of

design. He observed that artifacts that show ingenuity and design are often the result of gradual change:

> If we survey a ship, what an exalted idea must we form of the ingenuity of the carpenter who framed so complicated, useful, and beautiful a machine? And what surprise must we feel, when we find him a stupid mechanic, who imitated others, and copied an art, which, through a long succession of ages, after multiplied trials, mistakes, corrections, deliberations, and controversies, had been gradually improving (Hume, 1779, 106–107)?

In this passage, Hume prefigures work on cultural evolution. As Rogers and Ehrlich (2008) have shown, the design of Polynesian canoes exhibits small, gradual modifications over time that have resulted in more seaworthy vessels over the centuries. Also, as Hume remarked, since many artifacts are the joint project of several designers, the uncomfortable conclusion would be not for monotheism but polytheism.

More recent arguments against design include the "no designer worth his salt" objection (see Sober, 2007, for review), the argument that many adaptations are imperfect and that their structure suggests a blind process of evolution rather than deliberate design, for example, the panda's thumb, the human prostate, and the awkward structure of the mammalian eye. Other authors, such as Sarkar (2011), point to the fragility of natural objects — often cited as an example of fine-tuning and hence design by contemporary proponents of the design argument (e.g., Behe, 1996) — as examples of incompetence:

> Human intelligence suggests that complex systems are better (that is, more reliable and, in that sense, more reflective of intelligence) when they have sufficient built-in redundancy to guard against easy collapse. In a well-designed house we have fire exits besides doors; in planes we try to have multiple engines, besides emergency exits. Why is the bacterial flagellum and similar irremediably fragile systems not more a sign of incompetence (Sarkar, 2011, 299–300)?

Such argumentative moves display the features of reasoning as a social process, such as confirmation bias toward one's own views, and disconfirmation bias toward the views of others. Note that in the case of the design argument, some of the hardest challenges are not those that discard the analogy, but rather those that go along with the analogy from artifact to natural object, but that, as we have just seen, point out that classical theism

does not immediately follow because the natural structures betray imperfect design.

As we have seen, in the case of the design argument, the social process of reasoning has led to more sophisticated arguments and better objections. However, it remains an open question whether the invisible hand of argumentation can always work effectively in natural theology. Philosophy of religion is dominated by theists, in particular Christian theists (Bourget & Chalmers, 2014; De Cruz & De Smedt, 2016). Due to confirmation bias, weaknesses in arguments cannot be weeded out as effectively if reasoners have the same background assumptions. Nevertheless, the minority of nontheists has significantly changed the field in the last decades, especially in the analytic tradition.

5 CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, we tentatively offer some ideas on how intuitions and the social dimensions of reasoning interrelate in natural theology. We have examined the intuitions that lie at the basis of natural theological arguments and the social contexts in which these arguments are proposed and defended. Intuitions provide the raw materials for many of the arguments. These intuitions emerge early in development and are a stable part of human cognition. However, accepting these intuitions in natural theology depends on background assumptions about theism. Natural theological arguments are a skillful form of argumentation that is nevertheless constrained by features of social reasoning. There is a large body of empirical evidence suggesting that processing fluency has an influence on evaluations. Fluent mental processes tend to require fewer cognitive resources, are quicker, and are often accompanied by a subjective feeling of processing ease. Beliefs that fit well with core knowledge tend to be processed more fluently, and, as authors such as Sperber (1996) have argued, they have a better chance of being culturally transmitted. Next to this, ideas that we can process more fluently are also evaluated more positively; this is both the case for perceptual processing fluency (e.g., clear writing versus fuzzy writing) and for conceptual processing fluency (e.g., processing a familiar idea

versus an unusual one) (see Winkielman, Schwarz, Fazendeiro, & Reber, 2008, for an overview).

Obviously, processing fluency is not the only factor that influences how ideas are evaluated. As we have seen, reasoners also use consistency with earlier beliefs (confirmation bias). Natural theological arguments frequently rely on deeply-seated intuitions that we use in a variety of situations, such as the causal intuitions of the cosmological argument, or the teleological intuitions at work in design arguments. Natural theological arguments that rely on core knowledge are easier to process and this may account for them being more persuasive, and hence more culturally successful. This is tentatively confirmed by the fact that arguments that do not rely on such intuitions tend to be less cultural widespread than arguments that do. For example, the Hindu philosopher Udayana (fl. 10th century) provided the following socioteleological argument for the existence of God: starting from the assumption that all culture and civilization was present at the beginning during a golden age, and then gradually declined, one must wonder how the earliest humans received all the arts of civilization. This knowledge must have been imparted by some superhuman teacher, God (Brown, 2012, 42–43). This argument depends on several culture-specific assumptions, such as the idea of a golden age at the beginning of time and the gradual decline of civilization, which may explain why this argument is not widespread. By contrast Śaṅkara's earlier-discussed design argument (8th century) relies on intuitions about teleology and design that emerge early in development (e.g., that things in the natural world are there for a purpose), which explains why arguments similar to this recur cross-culturally, such as with the classical Roman author Cicero (106–43 BCE) or the Christian author William Paley (1743–1805).

In sum, the recurrence of natural theological arguments, such as the design, cosmological, and moral argument, that rely on our early-developed teleological, causal, and moral intuitions, may be explained by the persuasive force of the intuitions that underlie them. We can expect such arguments to continue to be debated in philosophy of religion, theology, as well as in the broader public sphere.

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NATURAL THEOLOGY IN EVOLUTION: A REVIEW OF CRITIQUES AND CHANGES

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Abstract. The purpose of this article is to provide a broad overview and analysis of the evolution of natural theology in response to influential critiques raised against it. I identify eight main lines of critique against natural theology, and analyze how the defenders of different types of natural theology differ in their responses to these critiques, leading into several very different forms of natural theology. Based on the amount and quality of discussion that exists, I argue that simply referring to the critiques of Hume, Kant, Darwin, and Barth should no longer be regarded as sufficient to settle the debate over natural theology.

INTRODUCTION

Adam, Lord Gifford (1820-1887), who in his will sponsored the ongoing Gifford Lectures on natural theology, defined natural theology quite broadly as "The Knowledge of God, the Infinite, the All, the First and Only Cause, the One and the Sole Substance, the Sole Being, the Sole Reality, and the Sole Existence, the Knowledge of His Nature and Attributes, the Knowledge of the Relations which men and the whole universe bear to Him, the Knowledge of the Nature and Foundation of Ethics or Morals, and of all Obligations and Duties thence arising." Furthermore, Gifford wanted his lecturers to treat this natural knowledge of God and all of these matters "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." (Gifford 1885) John Hedley Brooke, one of the premier historians of the relationship of science and religion, similarly defines natural theology as "a type of theological discourse in which the exist-

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ence and attributes of the deity are discussed in terms of what can be known through natural reason, in contradistinction (though not necessarily in opposition) to knowledge derived from special revelation." (Brooke 2002, 163-164) Natural theology as thus understood has been subjected to much critique from several different directions. Can knowledge of God truly be a science comparable to astronomy and chemistry? And can (or should) knowledge of God truly be obtained without special revelation from God, purely on the basis of human reason and experience? Isn't religious faith just about faith without any basis in reason — what does faith have to do with evidence? Natural theologians have faced critique from both the natural sciences, philosophy and theology. The power of the critiques is commonly perceived to be very strong, and the existence of some contemporary defenders of natural theology is sometimes met with incredulity. Have such natural theologians not heard of Kant, Hume, Darwin and Barth?

However, contemporary natural theologians are well aware of the ideas of Hume, Kant and Barth, and have attempted to formulate natural theology to avoid these critiques (e.g. Craig & Moreland ed 2012; Sennett & Groothuis ed 2005). While some overviews of aspects of the discussion are available (e.g. Taliaferro 2012 & 2013; Moore 2013; Sudduth 2009; Holder 2012; Pannenberg 1991, 73-118), the overall broad nature of the evolution of natural theology still deserves to be discussed further. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the overall evolution of natural theology, and how multiple alternative forms of natural theology can be mapped out in response to the traditional critiques. In briefly analyzing the various ways in which natural theologies have been formulated, the article also seeks to advance the discussion over how what really is essential for a theology to be considered a natural theology. I conclude that natural theology has evolved sufficiently that theologians should no longer consider simply referring to the traditional critiques to be a sufficient rebuttal of natural theology. I will begin with some overall considerations about the definition of natural theology, then go on to discuss the traditional critiques and different lines of response to them.

UNDERSTANDING NATURAL THEOLOGY

As the article will show in more detail later, contemporary natural theologians take vastly different approaches in answering the critiques of Hume, Kant and Barth.[1] For example, a person self-identifying as a natural theologian might think that we have only weak evidence of God, and that natural theology is a unnecessity for the rationality of religious faith. However, another person adopting the term "natural theology" might think that we have strong evidence of the existence of God, that natural theology is necessary for the rationality of religious faith. The nature of the evidence and argument forms that are used can also create very different natural theologies.

Given the variety of natural theology, one might ask if these views are actually too different to all fit under the label of "natural theology". Accepting such a variety of views as species of natural theology threatens to divest the term of all meaning. One possible reply to this objection would be to argue that all the differents forms of natural theology do fit under the some highly unspecific definitions of natural theology, such as Macquarrie's (1975, 137) definition: "the function of natural theology was to provide a connection between our ordinary everyday discourse about the world and even our scientific discourse on the one side, and theological discourse on the other." This is indeed a function of all forms of natural theology, but it may be too broad.[2] Most contemporary theologies attempt to connect theology to our current

[1] If we consider Intelligent Design to be a part theology, then the variety of responses increases further. Then we could also classify natural theologies based on their response to Darwin as part of the response to the "critique of the evidences of natural theology". However, proponents of ID do not themselves consider their arguments to be natural theology, but natural science. This is why they criticize methodological naturalism as a ground rule of science (Kojonen 2016d). Critics of ID also often do not consider ID to be proper natural theology, but rather a "God of the gaps" -argument. However, drawing these borders can be difficult. On this see Kojonen 2016b.

[2] According to Wolterstorff (1986), Thomas Aquinas identified three main purposes of natural theology: 1) to seek for truth about God which can be known based on natural philosophy, 2) to clear away objections to the faith through apologetics, and 3) to help transform faith into seeing through providing supporting arguments for beliefs initially accepted only based on faith.

situation and other discourses, but calling all of these theologies "natural" would also threaten to remove the value of the term.[3]

One way of specifying this definition further is to argue that the connections provided by natural theology must provide evidential support for religious belief. As William Alston (1991, 289) puts it, natural theology is "the enterprise of providing support for religious beliefs by starting from premises that neither are nor presuppose any religious beliefs". But some natural theologians (principally Alister McGrath) argue that natural theology should actually be practiced beginning from within the Christian tradition, with the aim of clarifying how this tradition makes sense of the world. As I understand his approach, McGrath does believe that natural theology does ultimately also result in providing some evidential support for the Christian faith. However, for him this is just a byproduct of natural theology, rather than being its primary defining characteristic or starting point (McGrath 2016, 176). I will comment on these issues further while discussing responses to critiques of natural theology.

For now I am focusing on the definition of natural theology, and the possibility for classifying natural theology in a way that allows us to include a wide variety of forms under this term. Rather than defining natural theology through just a single characteristic, an alternative approach would be to take a cue from the debate over the definition of religion and adopt a more multifaceted definition based on outlining different characteristics that are typical of natural theologies.[4]

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[3] Pannenberg (1991, 101) criticizes such a broad definition of natural theology as follows: "If any relating of what is specifically Christian to general concepts, and especially to anthropology, is in the future to be called natural theology, then the term is one that can be adapted in any way one pleases to fit strategies of theological differentiation. For what theology can avoid describing what is specifically Christian in general concepts? Hence, while one might regard one's own theology as strictly a theology of revelation, one can easily detect traces of natural theology in that of all others."

[4] For example, Alston (1967) argues that we should not think of "religion" in terms of a single unifying characteristic, but rather a web of characteristics, many of which may be absent from a particular religion. Also, the existence of just a few of these characteristics may be insufficient to make something a religion. Alston's characteristic are (1) belief in supernatural beings, (2) a distinction between sacred and profane objects, (3) ritual acts focused on sacred objects, (4) a moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods, (5) characteristic religious feelings such as awe, (6) prayer, (7) a worldview, (8) a total organization of one's life based on the

In his own article in this issue, Olli-Pekka Vainio provides such a list of characteristics that usually go into a natural theology. Based on Vainio's list, I suggest that we can distinguish the following characteristics that are often present in natural theologies. The presence of merely a few characteristics in some form would not be enough to make a view a natural theology, but the absence of (or a strange formulation of) some characteristic also would not invalidate a theology from being a natural theology. I will list the characteristics here only briefly, though much more could be said about each.

(1) Realism about theological claims: talk about God is understood as at least attempting to refer to a mind-independent reality.

(2) Participatory ontology: some aspects of the natural world reflect something about its creator. It can vary greatly what aspects of nature reflect its creator, in what way, and how strong the compelling the reflection is thought to be.

(3) A positive view of human reason: it is possible for human reason to recognize these aspects of the world as a providing evidence of God. There is variance in to what extent this is possible for human reason without being first healed of the negative noetic effects of sin through further supernatural aid.

(4) A commitment to formulating the knowledge mediated through this natural revelation as arguments or proofs of the existence (or non-existence) and attributes of God.

(5) Evidentialism: evidence is thought to be important for supporting the rationality of beliefs.

(6) Spiritual worth: natural knowledge of God or evidence about God is thought to have some positive value for religious life.

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worldview, and (9) a social group that more or less follows these tenets. While "religion" refers to the conjunction of a sufficient number of such characteristics, "theology" typically refers to the doctrine and way of thought associated with this religion. Summary from Kelly James Clark (2014, chapter 2).

Again, the idea is that having a different opinion on one or more of these characteristics might not be enough to disqualify some idea from being "natural theology", just as lacking one of the usual characteristics of a "religion" might not disqualify something from being a religion. We might argue that some characteristics are particularly important for a view to qualify as a proper natural theology: for example, the commitment to formulating arguments for the existence of God might be such a characteristic. Yet as I will show later, some do attempt self-identify as natural theologians without developing such arguments, and not without justification. Among the mainstream of natural theologians, there are also different understandings of how the arguments should be developed.

McGrath (2016, 22-25) similarly argues that the different approaches to natural theology can be best understood as different and complementary aspects of natural theology, akin to thin slices of a thick sandwich. This is not to say that natural theologians will in practice necessarily agree that some other form of natural theology is plausible, spiritually valuable or even coherent. As I will argue, contemporary natural theologians have vastly different strategies for responding to the traditional critiques of natural theology.

In a way, it might be argued that the variability of the forms of natural theology in history also shows that the critiques of Hume, Kant, Darwin and Barth cannot be straightforwardly applied against all forms of natural theology. As Brooke and Cantor (2000) and Pannenberg (1991, 73-107) argue, natural theology has taken many forms through history. There is no one authoritative definition of natural theology, and even the Gifford lectures exemplify many different views of the matter. Thus it might be argued that the particular forms of natural theology that Hume and Kant criticized do not exist anymore, and it is anachronistic to apply these critiques to contemporary natural theology. Rather, contemporary natural theologies must be examined on their own merits, and we must develop new critiques against them. I think this conclusion is ultimately right, but it is too fast. While differences between forms of natural theology are in the end quite large, there are also substantial overall similarities which make it possible to at least attempt to apply the same critiques against contemporary natural theologies. For example, in the debate over contemporary design arguments, Humean critiques of the explanatory power of theism in the face of the problem of bad design con-

tinue to be developed, and his critique of the logic of design arguments is also often referenced (see Kojonen 2016a, chapter 8). The traditional critiques of natural theology have also been so influential that it would be useful for the credibility of natural theology to show how they can be avoided. I move now to present an overview of these critiques.

TRADITIONAL CRITIQUES OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

The most influential philosophical critiques of natural theology have been presented by the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) and the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* Hume analyses the arguments of natural theology and presents both critiques and defenses of it through different characters, particularly focusing on the design argument. This makes the work difficult to summarize. Nevertheless, the critiques of natural theology presented by the character Philo have usually been taken to represent Hume's own views. Philo presents several different arguments against the viability of natural theology:

(1) Our inductive experience of the world cannot provide grounds for beliefs about unique events like the origin of the cosmos.

(2) The design argument understood as an analogical argument fails, since the analogy between the cosmos and machines is very distant.

(3) The problem of natural evil is counterevidence to the claims of the natural theologians: "Look round this universe. — The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children." (*Dialogues*, part XI. Hume 2008b).

(4) The arguments of the natural theologians cannot establish the identity of the creator, or whether there are one or many gods.

(5) Natural theology leaves the mystery of the origin of God unexplained; if this is rational then it should be equally rational to leave the mystery of the origin of the cosmos unexplained.

(6) The concept of God as a necessary being may even be incoherent, since we can conceive of God's nonexistence.[5] (See further Penelhum 2005, Russell 2014)

For Kant, reading Hume's critiques both in the *Dialogues* and in his other work was like waking up from a "dogmatic dream", and his is reflected in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant did have good things to say about teleological arguments as they were understood at the time:

> "Reason, constantly upheld by this ever-increasing evidence which, though empirical, is yet so powerful, cannot be so depressed through doubts suggested by subtle and abstruse speculation, that it is not at once aroused from the indecision of all melancholy reflection, as from a dream, by one glance at the wonders of nature and the majesty of the universe — ascending from height to height up to the all-highest."[6]

However, just as Hume argued that the conclusions of natural theology are insufficient for rational religious belief in God; Kant similarly claimed that the design argument can at most prove the existence of some sort of "architect" of the universe, rather than the existence of an "all-sufficient primordial being".[7] According to Kant, using speculative reason to discern God's properties or to establish his existence is an error, because God is not spatio-temporal and cannot be the object of experience. He argues that we can only have reliable knowledge of things that can at least in principle be experienced. Although allowing that arguments can also presented in favour of beliefs about things that are beyond experience, Kant argues that in such cases an equally plausible argument can always be given for the contrary view. These he calls the "antinomies of pure reason." In his later works Kant grounds be-

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5 Kai Nielsen takes the argument that the concept of God is incoherent further. According to Nielsen, even the stars spontaneously arranged themselves to form the sentence "GOD EXISTS", this would not be evidence of the existence of God, since such a sentence would be incoherent. (Nielsen 2004, 279. For discussion see Taliaferro 2013.)

6 Kant 1957, 520 (A624/B652).

7 Kant 1957, 522 (A627/B655).

lief in God as necessity for the operation of "practical reason" rather than the arguments of natural theology (Rossi 2014). Natural theological arguments are, according to Kant, based on the humanly constructed concepts of pure reason, rather than being experientially grounded. Thus Kant calls natural theology "ontotheology". The critique of natural theology as "ontotheology" was since taken up by philosophers following Heidegger and also by many theological critics of natural theology (White 2016, chapter 1).[8]

Karl Barth, possibly the most influential theologian of the 20th century, was highly critical of natural theology. Barth´s programme was to establish theology on its own foundation of the revelation of God, against theologies where human experience had become the foundation of theology. His critique of natural theology is related partly to his historical situation: Barth was worried that natural theology would leave theology open to becoming the servant of political ideologies such as Nazism. However, Barth's critique of natural theology is based on fundamental disagreements with natural theology that go far beyond Barth's own historical situation. He also objected to Emil Brunner's very moderate attempts at rehabilitating natural theology (Barth 1946[1934]). As a Gifford lecturer Barth argues that natural theology is diametrically opposed to Christian theology. He claims that from the point of view of natural theology true theology, the "teaching of the Reformation", is actually "the greatest of errors" (Barth 2005[1938], 7).

Indeed, natural theology is prohibited by Barth's understanding of God, humanity and revelation. Building on Lutheran and Kantian critiques of natural theology, Barth argued that natural theology ignores the infinite qualitative distinction between humanity and God (McCormack 1995).[9] He criticized the scholastic understanding of the *analogia entis*, which he understood to mean that the creation is somehow analogous or similar to God, and so

[8] In this paragraph I have followed the traditional way of reading Kant's critique of natural theology. However, see Chignell 2009.

[9] Note that Barth's understanding is more radical than that of early Lutherans, including Luther and Melanchton. See the article by Ilmari Karimies in this issue, as well as Sudduth 2009, 9-13 and Woolford 2011, chapter 3. However, regardless of what the views of the early Lutherans were, after Kant Lutheran theology came to be interpreted to be opposed to natural theology. See e.g. von Loewenich 1976.

can reveal God on the basis of this similarity.[10] Barth argued instead for the *analogia fidei*, according to which God can only be known through faith in God's own self-revelation in Christ. In building its system of theology upon reason, rather than divine self-revelation, natural theology is the antithesis of true Christian theology and true religious faith. Rather than attempting to persuade the world by constructing systems of thought based on fallen human reason, the Church should testify about God's revelation in Christ (see further White ed. 2010, Moore 2013).

FURTHER CRITIQUES OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

In the contemporary discussion, arguments by Hume and Kant continue to be repeated and developed against natural theology. Further critiques of natural theology have also developed, and here I will briefly describe what I call the scientistic critique of natural theology and theological antirealism. I indeed mean the "scientistic" rather than the "scientific" critique here. Scientific critique might be made against certain premises of certain arguments of natural theology, such as the biological design argument. (See Kojonen 2016a). However, scientism goes beyond this to assert that the natural sciences are our best or only way to know or form rational beliefs about reality. (Stenmark 2001; De Ridder, Peels & van Woudenberg ed. forthcoming)

Insofar as the natural sciences are methodologically naturalistic, scientism would seem to rule out natural theology already on methodological grounds. This thinking has its roots in the logical positivism of the early 20th century, in turn a development of Humean and Kantian ideas, though their ideas of what "science" was would have been far different.[11] In the contemporary dis-

[10] The way this "somehow" is construed is of course critical for the debate: if God and created beings are understood to share a common property of "being", critics argue that this makes God into just a "being among beings", rather than the transcendent Creator. Defenders of the analogie entis have contended that this misunderstands the term, and that the capacity of created things to reflect their creator must be understood in another way. (White 2016; White 2010 ed.)

[11] Thus scientism also might be traced back to Hume. Hume's separation of empirical and a priori knowledge and his suspicion of metaphysics fits quite well with scientism: "If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can

cussion, Alexander Rosenberg, who advocates scientism, argues that scientism "is the conviction that the methods of science are the only reliable ways to secure knowledge of anything — being scientistic just means treating science as our exclusive guide to reality, to nature — both our own nature and everything else's". (Rosenberg 2011, 6-8) But scientism is rarely stated this explicitly. In the context of discussion about natural theology, it seems to me that we can also sometimes identify the influence of scientism in the standards of evidence and reasoning that are adopted, rather than scientism being an explicitly stated premise.[12]

Regarding theological realism, natural theology assumes that talk about God is meant to refer to a mind-independent reality that we can comprehend at least to some degree. Rather than being a fiction of the human mind, God is understood as the real creator of the universe. Theological nonrealism can be understood in various ways. For example, in full blown theological nonrealism it is argued that religious language is not meant to refer to metaphysical entities, but to fulfill other functions. Theology is not about making truth claims. If this were to be the true understanding of theological language, then natural theology as an attempt to discuss the evidence for theological truth claims would be truly alien to religious faith. (Keller 2014, Rauser 2009)

Theological nonrealism is sometimes presented as a neutral Wittgensteinian analysis of the grammar of religious language (Phillips 1988). However, critics have long argued that it cannot truly be merely descriptive of religious language, but rather a normative account, since the vast majority of religious believers do believe in the mind-independent existence of God. Discussion of these issues is ongoing (Phillips ed. 2008), but the nonrealist position is definitely in the minority. This means that the presupposition of realism is not the most controversial presupposition of natural theology. Yet even if the nonrealist critique of natural theology fails in its strongest form, one might still argue that the primary purpose of religious language is not in making truth claims,

contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." (*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* Section XII.) The same sentiment is echoed by contemporary scientistic thinkers who want the natural sciences to take over the discussion over the traditional questions of the humanities, philosophy and theology, or argue that the questions discussed in these disciplines are meaningless or unanswerable if they cannot be studied by the methods of natural science.

[12] For examples of this tendency in the discussion of design arguments, see Kojonen 2016a and Kojonen 2016b.

and that the primary reasons for choosing a religious way of life are also not about metaphysics, even if religions do also make metaphysical truth claims. In that case one could argue that natural theology is at most a side-issue from the point of view of religious belief.

It seems to me that all of the foregoing critiques can be classified, following Charles Taliaferro's (2013, 385) terminology, into external and internal critiques. The external critiques deny the very possibility of natural theology already in principle whereas the internal critiques deny the viability of natural theology in practice. I classify the external critiques as follows:

1) The philosophical critique of the concept of God as incoherent: if such a concept cannot even be coherently formulated, then the project of natural theology fails to get off the ground.[13]

2) The epistemological critique of the possibility of natural theology: if the question of the existence or non-existence God is already in principle unanswerable or unthinkable by humans, then natural theology cannot get off the ground. I am thinking particularly of the Kantian epistemological critiques of natural theology.

3) A full-blown nonrealist understanding of theological language as a critique of natural theology: if religious language is not meant to refer to any mind-independent reality, then the presentation of natural theological evidence for the existence of such a reality misses the point.

The internal critiques listed above are the following:

4) The critique of evidentialism as the basis for requiring any natural theology. If belief does not have to be supported by the kind of evidence presented in natural theology, then this can be argued to make natural theology unnecessary. I classify this critique as an internal critique, since it in itself does not establish that natural theology could not be possible or useful.

[13] Taliaferro (2013, 387-389) classifies this as an "internal" critique, but I think it is better classified as an external critique as it would prohibit any natural theology already a priori, rather than based on the assessment the compatibility of the evidence with various theological positions.

5) The critique of the arguments of natural theology. This can be done based on the explanatory poverty of theism or the lack of overall convincing evidence of the existence of God.

6) The critique of the relationship between natural theology and confessional theology. For example, the critique arise from theological understandings of God, human nature and salvation. Perhaps the concept of God used in natural theology is too far removed from the theological understanding of God to be of any use, and perhaps fallen human reason cannot benefit from any natural revelation of God. Furthermore, natural theology is sometimes argued to make belief in God into a human accomplishment, whereas faith should actually be understood as a gift from God or an act of God in humans.[14]

I will now turn to consider different types of responses to these critiques, with the goal of understanding the overall broad lines of the responses that are available and how this helps classify different types of natural theology.

It seems to me that contemporary defenders of natural theology are united in their answers to the listed three external critiques of natural theology (1-3). They agree that the concept of God is not incoherent, that reasoning about metaphysics is possible at least to some extent. They also want to say something about a real God, and are thus not antirealists about theological language. Natural theologians can take comfort that these affirmations are broad enough to be shared by many who are not natural theologians. The mainstream of Western theology holds that the concept of God is not incoherent, the possibility of metaphysics has many defenders in contemporary philosophy (Tahko 2016), and the broad mainstream of religious believers and theologians believe that religious language tries to say something about a real God. (Keller 2014) However, the answers of contemporary natural theologians to the three internal critiques (4-6) differ considerably.

[14] I classify this critique as ”internal” since such critics of natural theology might still maintain that the natural world reveals its Creator and that this might be discovered by humans if we were not fallen creatures.

THE CRITIQUE OF EVIDENTIALISM

Regarding the critique of foundationalism and evidentialism (4), the mainstream position during the Enlightenment was indeed that evidence is absolutely necessary for religious belief. Thinkers like John Locke (1640-1703) held that reasonable belief in the truth of some proposition should always be proportioned to the evidence for that proposition. This way of thought was summed up by W. K. Clifford in his famous essay "The Ethics of Belief" as "it is wrong always, everywhere and for anyone to believe without sufficient evidence". (Clifford 1877[1999]) This emphasis on the necessity of publicly available evidence supporting belief would make natural theology an absolute necessity for the rationality of religious belief. This assumption about the ethics of belief has come under strong critique in recent decades, and natural theologians can take different positions. (McCarthy 1986; Chignell 2016)

For example, the natural theologian may follow Alvin Plantinga in arguing that many rational beliefs are not held on the basis of evidence and arguments. Rather, beliefs like "I see a tree" or "God loves me" can be properly basic beliefs, not requiring justification based on publicly available evidence or arguments. This would make natural theology unnecessary for the rationality of religious belief. However, it might still be valuable for reasons other than ensuring the rationality of religious belief. Plantinga himself argues that properly basic beliefs might receive further support based on evidence and arguments, and so his critique of classical foundationalism seems compatible with natural theology.[15]

Alternatively, the natural theologian can admit the force of Plantinga's critique while continuing to hold that natural theology is quite important for

[15] Plantinga's relationship to natural theology is complex. At points Plantinga critiques natural theology, arguing variously that it fails in establishing its conclusions sufficiently clearly and that its defenders err in assuming that natural theology is necessary for religious faith. (Plantinga 1982; 2000, 272-80. For responses, see Sudduth 2009 and Swinburne 2004b.) However, in other writings Plantinga allows that the warrant of religious belief can be increased if it is also supported by arguments, and that the arguments of the natural theologians are good and credible arguments, comparable to the best philosophical arguments. Plantinga also allows a role for natural theology in rebutting objections to religious belief. (e.g. Plantinga 1991). For a similar perspective, see Alston 1992. On Plantinga's relationship to natural theology see further Mascord 2007, chapter 6. For a broader overview of the related idea of fideism, see Vainio 2010.

the rationality of religious belief. For example, Swinburne agrees that people can have rational belief in God without arguments, based on things like religious experience and the testimony of authorities. However, he would classify these things as evidence. According to Swinburne (2004b), while a medieval peasant would be well justified in believing in God on such grounds, nowadays with the increased religious pluralism and the many objections to religious faith, natural theology is indeed necessary for the continued credibility of religious faith. For Swinburne, it is not necessary that each individual religious believer can present a natural theology, but at least somebody needs to be doing natural theology in order to maintain belief in the Christian God as a live option.

The natural theologian's response to the challenges to foundationalism and evidentialism will depend on the natural theologian's broader view of epistemology. It seems clear that even if natural theology is unnecessary for the rationality of religious faith, it might still have other purposes, so the critique of evidentialism is not fatal to natural theology. In the history of natural theology, it has been motivated not only by the desire to satisfy the demands of rationality, or even only by the desire to find evidential support for religious belief. In addition, natural theology has also been about connecting religious beliefs with the broader world and interpreting all of reality in light of God[16], moving towards increased knowledge of God, and even prayer and meditation of the Creator through the creation (McGrath 2016, 163-168). Nevertheless, it does seem true that the need for natural theology is somewhat less pressing once the evidentialist assumption, and evidentialist objections to religious belief are given up.[17]

[16] E.g. Macquarrie 1975, 137: "We could say that the function of natural theology was to provide a connection between our ordinary everyday discourse about the world and even our scientific discourse on the one side, and theological discourse on the other."

[17] As Wolterstorff (1986, 39) points out, one of Barth's critiques of natural theology was natural theology required faith to desert "its own standpoint" and to take up the contrary "standpoint of unbelief": the believer is staking his or her faith on natural theological arguments. If the grounds of faith are actually much broader, then this helps mitigate Barth's challenge. Through analyzing the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas, Wolterstorff persuasively contends that natural theology does not have to be "evidentialist apologetics" following Enlightenment-Age models.

THE CRITIQUE OF THE EVIDENCES OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

Now on to the critique of the evidences of natural theology (5). As Plantinga (1991, 312; 2000, 32) notes, traditionally natural theological arguments have often been held to a very high standard. In this understanding, theistic arguments were supposed to begin from self-evident premises and move through clear deductive reasoning to the conclusion that God exists. Some of the critiques of Hume and Kant also seem to assume that if there is any doubt about the premises of natural theological arguments, the arguments lose their value. For example, Hume presented the argument that if the designedness of the cosmos can also be explained by positing a finite Creator, then the teleological argument is useless for religious belief. However, with Plantinga, the contemporary discussion has moved away from such high standards. Now theistic arguments can be considered to be good arguments, and to have evidential value, even if they do not establish their conclusion with absolute certainty. Consequently it has become possible for defenders of natural theology to take vastly different positions on how strong the arguments of natural theology are.[18]

On one end of the spectrum, Thomistic natural theologians like Edward Feser (2008) hold that we have extremely strong Aristotelian-Thomistic arguments for the existence of God based on metaphysical premises that are evident to all people based on their ordinary experience, though developments in philosophy have obscured this fact from us.[19] However, most natural

[18] Stephen T. Davis (1997, 189-190) presents five possible purposes for arguments of natural theology, from less to more demanding: (1) to show that theists are rational in their belief in the existence of God; (2) to show that it is more rational to believe that God exists than it is to deny that God exists; (3) to show that it is more rational to believe that God exists than to be agnostic on the existence of God; (4) to show that it is as rational to believe in God as it is to believe in many of the things that atheist philosophers often believe in (for example, the existence of "other minds" or the objectivity of moral right and wrong); or (5) to show that it is irrational not to believe that God exists (that is, it is irrational to be either an atheist or an agnostic). (Quoted in McGrew & DePoe 2013, 301.)

[19] See further also White 2016. The idea that natural knowledge of God is so ubiquitous and certain is consistent with the Catholic position expressed in the First and Second Vatican Councils. See e.g. the Vatican II document *Dei Verbum*, chapter I:6: "As a sacred synod has affirmed, God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason (see Rom. 1:20); but teaches that it is through His revela-

theologians are currently satisfied with merely probable knowledge of God, or simply evidence that makes belief in God justified. Influentially, Richard Swinburne (2004a) presents a Bayesian cumulative case argument for the conclusion that the existence of God is more probable than not based on the evidence. Ninian Smart's (1992) "soft natural theology" is even further down the scale from Thomistic natural theology. Smart holds that while we do not have convincing evidence either for or against religious belief, we do still have evidence and arguments that are relevant for religious belief. This kind of soft natural theology is still valuable for Smart, since it makes rational discussion of worldviews possible in a pluralistic world.

Sometimes it is difficult to classify natural theologians on this scale of "little evidence" to "strong evidence". This is because, as I will discuss in more depth below, natural theologians also differ on how commonly shared the premises of natural theological arguments are, and how persuasive these arguments can be from the point of view of nonbelievers. For example, Alister McGrath's position is difficult to classify at this point. On the one hand, McGrath argues that the evidence is highly consonant with belief in God, so much so that Christian belief provides the overall "best explanation" of nature. On the other hand, McGrath also argues that nature is ambiguous because of the evil and ugliness it contains, and that the status of Christianity as the best explanation can only be perceived after reason is illuminated by the light of Christ. (McGrath 2016, 73-78)

I will continue the analysis of McGrath's thought below. But I do want to note that the concept of ambiguity is also present to some extent in the other natural theologians. For example, Feser and Swinburne would also acknowledge that there are many people who think that the evidence is highly ambiguous. However, they could argue that what matters is not how people perceive the evidence, but how good the evidence and arguments of natural theology actually are, even if some people are prevented from perceiving the strength of the evidence by factors such as the influence of bad philosophy

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tion that those religious truths which are by their nature accessible to human reason can be known by all men with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error, even in this present state of the human race."

in Western culture or the bad noetic effects of human sin.[20] There may also be theological reason to except some ambiguity to the evidence. C. Stephen Evans (2010) argues that while signs of God are ubiquitous in the created world, some ambiguity to the evidence is also theologically desirable. This is because while we would expect God to leave signs of himself, we would also expect him to leave us some way of resisting belief in him. Taking this kind of position allows natural theologians to accept the ambiguity of the evidence, and yet believe that evidence is valuable for belief in God.

Natural theology is usually understood as an enterprise providing arguments supporting belief in God. However, this is not the only way that natural theology has been understood: even Lord Gifford's definition of natural theology is focused on natural "knowledge of God". The Giffordian definition does stipulate that natural theology is a like science, which would seem to imply the use of arguments and evidence in natural theology. However, suppose that it is possible to have natural knowledge of God without arguments. Might the reliability of this knowledge be defended in a natural theology without presenting any of the traditional arguments for God's existence? Hume's contemporary Thomas Reid (1710-1796) provides the groundwork for such views by arguing that belief in the designedness of the cosmos is based on a non-inferential capacity to detect design. Just as we perceive that other humans have minds, and that human artifacts are purposefully created, so too we also perceive that there is a Creator of nature. According to Reid, design arguments can act to reinforce the reliability of this initial perception, but such arguments are not necessary for natural knowledge of God.[21]

One argument along these lines is defended Mats Wahlberg (2012). To defend the possibility of reliably perceiving design in biological nature, Wahlberg presents a deep analysis of the nature of perceptual beliefs, as well as of compatibility of Darwinian evolutionary biology and this non-inferential

[20] Thus White (2016, xxv) argues that the idea that all humans have the capacity for natural knowledge of God "need not entail the belief that such a non-Christian realization of natural knowledge of God even occurs at all (although, like Aquinas, I consider this point of view to be mistaken.) Even less is it a claim that this natural dimension of the person in the fallen state must or can be awakened without the work of grace. Grace can be given, after all, even to heal "merely" natural capacities afflicted by ignorance or the disorders of the will and the emotions."

[21] *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), essay V.

belief. Wahlberg concludes that it is still reasonable to see biological nature as a natural revelation of the Creator, and as providing a powerful reason for this belief. Wahlberg's approach is not simply a restatement of intuitions about nature, but a systematization of purported natural knowledge of God and the discussion of it in relation to the natural sciences. For Wahlberg, the perception of design in biology also helps make religious belief in a Creator intelligible. So, whatever we think of the merits of this approach, it does satisfy many of the characteristics of natural theologies.[22]

THE CRITIQUE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH CONFESSIONAL THEOLOGY

Regarding the critique of natural theology's relationship with confessional theology (6), natural theologians have to take a position on two different main questions:

(1) How comprehensible is God and how do our concepts apply to him?

(2) What is proper relationship between natural and revealed theology? Different answers to these questions create large differences between natural theologies.

As the *first theological question* (1), how comprehensible is God and how do our concepts apply to him? Natural theologians will need to say that our expressions about God succeed in pointing to him at least in some way. Yet a common critique of natural theology is that it commits the "ontotheological" error by equating the being of God and the being of creatures. Some theologians are hesitant to even say that God exists, since (the argument says) this might make God into just another being among beings, a part of the world, thus compromising the infinite qualitative distinction between the Creator and his creation. (E.g. Macquarrie 1977, 118. See further McCord-Adams 2014; Marion 2016) Natural theologians can take different positions here. Denys Turner (2004) argues that to avoid the error requires simultaneously

[22] For further analysis of Wahlberg's approach and similar arguments by Plantinga and others, see Kojonen 2016c.

affirming both God's unknowability and his knowability. Claiming that God is wholly other and that human concepts cannot be applied to him would make God irrelevant to humans and dismiss the central Christian doctrines of God's revelation and incarnation. However, believing that we can wholly comprehend God would lead to creating a false image of God to fit into our philosophies. For Turner, the key is that in proving the existence of God (or at least providing evidence supporting this belief) natural theology is proving the existence of a mystery that reason cannot fully grasp. Thus natural theology seems in principle compatible also with negative theology, and does not have to overly emphasize the likeness of God and the world.[23] Turner argues that properly understood, as natural theology leads us to understand that God exists and that God has certain attributes, it also leads us to understand God's transcendence and mysteriousness. Thomistic natural theologians like Turner are careful to emphasize the difference between God and humans, keeping to Thomas' analogical understanding of theological language (See also Feser 2008, White 2016, Stump 2016).

As Alston (2005) points out, contemporary Anglo-American philosophical theologians generally trust in the capacity of the human reason to understand quite a lot of the properties and intents of God, though no-one believes that they fully comprehend God. Many natural theologians adopt a univocal understanding of theological language. It is emphasized that we must be able to understand what we mean by terms like "person" or "existence" when we apply them to God, and that the use of such terms does not need to mean that God is in all respects like a human person.[24] Swinburne's (2004a) natural theology, for example, depends on our ability to understand God's moral reasoning. This allows the Swinburnean natural theologian to say that a certain kind of world is more likely on the hypothesis that God exists than on any competing hypothesis. Without assuming that humans can understand God's

[23] A similar point is made by Augustine: "though the voices of the prophets were silent, the world itself, by its well-ordered changes and movements, and by the fair appearance of all visible things, bears a testimony of its own, both that it has been created, and also that it could not have been created save by God, whose greatness and beauty are unutterable and invisible." (De civitate dei, XI, 4).

[24] For different perspectives of how we can talk of God's "properties", see also Holmes 2007, Wainwright 2009 and Williams 2005. For whether the critique might apply to Intelligent Design as a form of natural theology, see Kojonen 2016a, chapter 6.

motivations, this kind of natural theology becomes impossible.[25] Thus differences in how we understand theological language and the mysteriousness of God can result in large differences in how we construct natural theological arguments.

The *second theological question* (2) on which natural theologians differ concerns the proper relationship between natural theology and divine revelation. The question is multifaceted, but often arises from the consideration of the noetic effects of human sin. To what extent is natural knowledge of God possible to humans even given the noetic consequences of human sin? Is natural knowledge of God possible only for believers, illuminated by the grace of God, but not for nonbelievers? Historically Christian natural theologians have admitted that natural knowledge of God is fallible and prone to error. For example, Thomas Aquinas argued that "the truth about God such as reason could discover would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors." (Summa Theologica, 1.1.) Luther's critique of the theology of glory also emphasizes how human sin distorts natural theology, so that whatever correct knowledge of God people attain to is useless for salvation.[26] Thomas Woolford (2011) argues that the extent

[25] Dawes (2009, 46-48) argues that the analogical nature of theological language harms the explanatory power of the arguments of natural theology.

[26] See the article by Ilmari Karimies in this issue. As a related point, the relationship between the natural theologians' "God of the philosophers" and the God of the Bible is also a point of contention. Is the "God of the philosophers" described by natural theology the same God as the biblical God? Do we need to begin our theological discourse from Christ and the Trinitarian understanding, or could it be possible to begin from a general philosophical theism and then accept Trinitarianism as a specification of that theism? Turner (2004, 17-20) considers the issue on the basis of Aquinas' writings. Here I want to simply note that the question of reconciling different understandings of God is not a problem that arises simply outside of biblical theology, but also arises from within the Christian tradition and the Bible. For example, the prophets of the Old Testament do not talk of the Trinity, yet the Christian tradition identifies the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the Trinitarian God. The Christian tradition includes the idea of progressive revelation, where not all truth about God was clear instantly, but was progressively revealed. The question also arises naturally from within the religious life: what guarantees that I now worship the same God as I did as a child, when my understanding of God has changed considerably? It is not just natural theologians who have to worry about reconciling different ideas of God. And if the problem can be solved in these cases inside Christian theology, why not also between natural theology and revealed theology? Of course, in addition to the doctrine of God, the possibility of reconciliation will depend on the broader content of the natural and revealed theologies, as well as how we understand the nature of religious faith.

to which natural knowledge of God was possible already based on natural revelation was one of the dividing lines between Catholics and Protestants in the Reformation period. Whereas Catholics believed that natural knowledge of God was possible already before the infusion of saving grace and before entering the Church, Protestants tended to believe that natural theology was able to attain only to limited knowledge of God, and only when the operation of reason was corrected by saving grace.[27] Nevertheless, in these historical examples, no necessary opposition between natural theology and revealed theology exists. Indeed, as Pannenberg (1991, 73-118) argues, natural theology was historically quite typically considered to build on divine self-revelation in nature.

Related to this, natural theologians can differ on the proper starting point of theology, and how natural theology is related to systematic theology. Should natural theology stand as the judge of what purported "special revelation" is the most likely to be the revelation of the true God, and perhaps even change religious beliefs based on its arguments? Should natural theology seek to begin from premises shared by both the believer and the nonbeliever, then perhaps ultimately leading to the recognition of a religious tradition as supplementing this natural theology? Or should natural theology be done beginning from openly confessional theological premises, attempting to connect some religious tradition to the broader world and culture? In the next section, I will briefly compare Richard Swinburne's and Alister McGrath's approaches related to this.

COMPARING TWO APPROACHES TO NATURAL THEOLOGY

One possibility is to begin defending the rationality of Christian belief in God by first defending the rationality of a more generic form of theism, as Swinburne (2004a) does. Building on the overall probability of the existence of God, Swinburne (2003) then constructs what he calls a "ramified" natural theology, a natural theology supplanted with additional ideas and evidence to go beyond bare theism. According to Swinburne, the historical evidence

[27] However, see Sudduth (2009) for a more positive view of the natural theology of the Reformers.

makes it highly probable that Jesus rose from the dead and was God incarnate. Based on belief in the resurrection of Jesus, it then becomes probable that the teaching of the Church which Jesus founded is reliable. This comes close to the approach of theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg (1977), who similarly argues that the historical credibility of Jesus' resurrection is essential for the credibility of Christian theology.[28]

Swinburne's natural theology ends in a fairly traditional Christian understanding of God.[29] However, it is in principle possible for this kind of approach, beginning from general natural theological considerations, to end up with a less traditional view. For example, in a defense of process theology, theologian David Ray Griffin (2013) argues that the results of the natural sciences and philosophical considerations based on the problem of evil heavily mitigate against the traditional theistic understanding of God's omnipotence. According to Griffin, the convergence of philosophical and scientific arguments points instead towards the process theologian's understanding of God. In a sense this kind of natural theology is the kind of result that Barth wanted to avoid, since here the doctrine of God is so greatly influenced by reason. The natural theologian attracted to process thought may retort by arguing that Barth was wrong and that it is better to build our doctrine of God using all of the evidence, including the deliverances of reason.

In contrast to Swinburne, McGrath's (2016) natural theology begins from within the Christian tradition. Following Barr (1994) and others, McGrath argues the Bible and the Christian tradition themselves contain good motivations for natural theology. The doctrine of humanity as the image of God capable of rationality, the idea that God has created an orderly, intelligible world and the idea of natural revelation are all Christian ideas. Beginning from robustly theological premises, natural theology is then about interpreting nature through the Christian lens and finding connections or "resonance" with the world. Christian doctrine can have an explanatory dimension even if

[28] Again, note that neither Swinburne nor Pannenberg would argue that all believers need to first do this kind of evidential work before believing in the Christian God. On the relationship of Pannenberg's and Swinburne's natural theology, see further Holder 2012, chapter 4. On ramified natural theology, see Menuge & Taliferro ed. 2013.

[29] However, note that there is debate over how traditional Swinburne's theistic personalism is when compared with classical theism. See e.g. Philipse ed 2008.

this theology is also about much more. Ultimately, McGrath argues, using the terminology provided by Lipton (2004), that Christianity provides the "best explanation" of the world. However, he also argues that we lack any neutral standpoint from which to evaluate the explanatory merits of Christianity.[30] In order to recognize the appeal of the Christian way of thought, one must already step mentally inside the Christian framework. McGrath's purpose is to present natural theology as a fundamentally Christian enterprise, rather than an alien invader to theology, as Barth conceived it. In this way, McGrath's form of natural theology is not the same type of natural theology that Barth criticized.

But is it natural theology at all? It could be argued that McGrath's approach is closer to the approach Ian G. Barbour (1997, 100) termed "a theology of nature", rather than a natural theology.[31] In Barbour's terminology, natural theologies seek to provide support for religious beliefs beginning from premises that have independent justification from any religious tradition. The direction is from universal experience towards the knowledge of God. In contrast, theologies of nature begin from within some religious tradition and then seek to form a theological interpretation of nature. Here the direction goes from pre-existing belief in God to connecting this belief with outside data, such as the natural sciences. So, natural theology is about the understanding seeking faith, whereas theologies of nature are about "faith seeking understanding" — *fides quarens intellectum*.[32]

However, I think two main considerations favor thinking of McGrath's theological engagement with nature as a natural theology. First, if we accept the view of natural theology as a collection of characteristics, we might argue that McGrath's natural theology shares enough of these characteristics to still qualify as a natural theology. He clearly holds to theological realism, believes that the creation reflects its Creator, accepts the value of evidence for religious faith, and uses many of the same evidences used by other natural theologians.

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30 Here McGrath references the work of Alasdair McIntyre (1988) and others.

31 This is argued by Padgett (2004) & Runehov (2010).

32 McGrath (2016, 176) argues that his approach has much commonality with the theology of nature developed by Robert J. Russell (1998, 196). For a more extensive development of Russell's approach, see Russell 2008.

Second, it is difficult to see how McGrath could consistently deny that there exists evidential support for Christian belief from commonly available evidence. Since McGrath believes that Christian theology provides the best explanation for all of reality, using the best standards of logic and reasoning, then it seems reasonable to think that nonbelievers might also be able to recognize that at least some evidence supports Christianity. To use a metaphor: when a good bridge over a river has been build, it is usually possible to travel on the bridge in both ways. McGrath himself does also believe that the explanatory power of Christian theology has value in apologetics, and has the habit of inviting his listeners to consider how much sense things make from a Christian standpoint. While his natural theology does not begin as an attempt to prove or justify Christian belief, but as a faith seeking understanding, McGrath acknowledges that the positive outcome of this seeking is "itself evidencing faith." (2016, 176)

An evidentialist may also agree with McGrath that Christian theologians do not have to begin by demonstrating the truth of the Christian revelation in a way that convinces all people before starting to do theology. (Visala 2016) Swinburne also does not argue that notions of rationality are wholly shared, or that the Christian must begin his or her own worldview-building from a neutral standpoint. His argument is simply that in defending the rationality of belief in God, we should appeal to publicly available evidence, and further that there is enough common ground that even a secular philosophy might support Christian truths "in some respect". (Swinburne 1993, 197) Furthermore, as noted above, a natural theologian might value evidence in the consideration of religious truths without holding that religious belief must always be based on grounds that can be shared across traditions. The merits of a "ramified natural theology" may even be discussed simply for the purposes of argument, without assuming that the believer may not have broader grounds for her religious belief.[33]

[33] Mikael Stenmark (1995, 325-327) provides an interesting metaphor for why a religious believer might consider it useful to engage in a theoretical discussion about evidence for the existence of God, even if belief in God is not primarily a hypothesis for the believer. Consider my belief that my wife loves me. This belief is grounded in my entire life experience with my wife, and my belief in them is not a hypothesis. Nevertheless, suppose that someone else does not believe that my wife loves me, or has doubts about her virtuous character. I could in principle

Critics might argue that the credibility of Swinburne's natural theology is also dependent on prior Christian belief in a sense. Consider his argument for the resurrection of Jesus. Swinburne argues that there is at least a modest probability that a good God would want to become incarnate, and to die a vicarious atoning death to save humanity from its sins. Swinburne presents moral grounds for thinking that such action from God is at least possible, and argues that this possibility is corroborated by the historical evidence.[34] Swinburne provides arguments for the plausibility of his premises which attempt to make them credible also for nonbelievers. However, it might be argued that these intuitions about morality have been formed in a Christian culture, and that Swinburne's natural theology thus does not completely evade the tradition-dependent nature of rationality. Arguably the Ancient Pre-Christian world had very different ideas about morality. Despite any common ground between Christian doctrine and pagan philosophy, the idea of a crucified God (which Swinburne believes dates back to the very earliest Christianity) was revolutionary, and appeared preposterous to many of early Christianity's critics on philosophical grounds. (Hart 2009) It might thus be argued that the plausibility of Swinburne's presuppositions is also in a sense dependent on our historical situation.[35] My point here is not to take a strong stance on this issue, but simply to highlight that the tradition-dependence of natural theology is another issue which natural theologians need to have a stance on. McGrath embraces the tradition-dependence of rationality, though as a critical realist he also believes in the possibility of the tradition of natural theology to get ever closer to truth. It may be fair to say, as Rodney Holder (2012, chapter 6) argues that typically natural theologians emphasize the idea that there is also something about rationality that transcends

discuss some evidences of this love, even though it will be difficult to convey the full grounds of my own beliefs. Similarly, Stenmark argues that a religious believer may discuss God's existence as a hypothesis and attempt to present evidence for it, though the grounds for that religious belief may be broader and not entirely communicable.

[34] In contrast to Swinburne, Timothy McGrew (2012) argues that the historical evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that it is able to overcome even an extremely low prior probability to the resurrection. This argument requires much more of the historical evidence, but is less susceptible to the criticism that the credibility of the priors is too dependent on pre-existent Christian belief.

[35] For some critical reviews of Swinburne's argument, see Wiebe 2009 and Otte 2003.

particular traditions more than McGrath does.[36] McGrath (2016) himself emphasizes that he is simply presenting a nuanced approach to natural theology that attempts to do justice to the actual complex situation we find ourselves in.[37]

CONCLUSION: ON THE EVOLUTION OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

My purpose in this paper has been to analyze the overall broad contours of the responses that are natural theologians have made to the traditional critiques raised against their enterprise. I have argued that natural theology has evolved in response to the critique. I have outlined how contemporary natural theologians differ in their responses to the eight main issues: (1) the importance of evidential support for religious faith, (2) the force of the evidences of natural theology (3) which evidences of natural theology are the most convincing, and what form natural theological arguments should take, (4) the nature of theological language, (5) the understanding of God that natural theology sup-

[36] The fact that the ideas used in natural theological arguments can often be traced back to a religious tradition need not be a negative thing for the credibility of the arguments. For example, Robin Collins (2012) emphasizes that explanations of the fine-tuning of the laws of nature must not be *ad hoc*. According to Collins, the fact that belief in a Creator God who values the existence of life predated the discovery of cosmic fine-tuning helps show that theism is not such an *ad hoc* explanation.

[37] Natural theologians can differ on how much common ground there is between humans based on our common experience. Even if human experience is always conditioned by contingent factors, there may still be much common ground between different traditions. Despite the vast differences between Christian theology and Ancient Greek philosophy in Antiquity, there was also some common ground, and the Christian Fathers were able to utilize and transform some philosophical concepts in developing theology. (For one overview, see Pelikan 1997.) However, Jenson (2001, 6-11) argues that Greek philosophy was simply Greek theology, and that there is also today no reason to think that philosophers have any more rational authority to talk about God than theologians do. Thus for Jenson natural theology is not really natural, but always the theology of some particular group in a particular contingent historical situation. Jenson's purpose is to safeguard the epistemic primacy of biblical revelation in doing theology. As he writes: "Barth did not declare independence from 'the philosophers' because philosophy is something so different from theology that it must be kept at arm's lenght. His reason was exactly the opposite: he refused to depend on the official philosophers because what they offered to do for him he thought he should do for himself, in conversation with them when that seemed likely to help." (Jenson 2001, 21). But if one accepts the idea that some experiences and ideas of rationality might be common to all of humanity, then Jenson's critique of natural theology is no longer convincing.

ports, (6) the relationship between natural and revealed theology, (7) the proper starting point of natural theology, and (8) how much common basis for dialogue exists between believers and nonbelievers.

Differences in opinion on each of these eight points can be very large, and natural theologians often argue against each other. Nevertheless, from the amount and quality of the discussion that exists, it seems clear that natural theologians have at least attempted to adapt to (and develop responses to) the critiques presented by Hume, Kant, Darwin, Barth and others. Thus critics of natural theology should not think that quickly referring to these critiques is sufficient to refute all contemporary natural theology.

Natural theologians should of course seek to reconcile their differences on these issues and find the best approach on each question. However, while we wait for the emergence of such a consensus, I believe the variety of forms taken by natural theology also helps explain how it has been able to survive despite all of the critique it has faced. Barth (1946, 76) famously likened natural theology to a snake: "you hit it and kill it as soon as you see it." My point in bringing up this quote is not to comment on Barth's critique of natural theology further than I have already done. Rather, I want to consider the metaphor of natural theology as a biological species further. In the wild, a species able to adapt to environmental changes is less likely to go extinct. The malleability of natural theology similarly makes this species able to spread to many different theological and cultural environments and hard to kill. Some form of natural theology may thus be able to survive even in an environment that is somewhat hostile to other forms of natural theology.

For example, suppose that in a given environment, it is generally accepted that natural theological arguments fail to prove God´s existence. A natural theologian with a great deal of confidence in the available evidence may try to challenge this presupposition. However, the natural theologian can also adapt to the environment and agree that no proof of God is forthcoming. This in itself still leaves room for natural theology to raise the intellectual credibility of belief in God in some way (the precise nature of which will be determined by the epistemological view accepted in that environment), thus maintaining belief in God as a "live option", to use William James´ term (1896, 329). Of course, some objections to natural theology are too fundamental to be adapted to in this way. For

example, the critic of natural theology may not concede the relevance of evidence for religious faith at.

The malleability of natural theology is not the only reason for its survival, of course. Other reasons have also been proposed in the literature. For example, it may be that natural theology is "natural" to our kinds of intellects in the sense that (as many cognitive scientists of religion argue) our minds find it easy to interpret the world as one created by a supernatural being. (De Cruz and De Smedt 2015). Furthermore, whatever the reason, the evidences appealed to in natural theology continue to be convincing for many people. Those who experience the evidences as forceful are unlikely to want to eliminate natural theology, since they have the experience that natural theology is giving them something good. Furthermore, there is at least the perception that many of the goals of natural theology, such as apologetics to those outside the faith and intellectual confirmation to those inside the faith, cannot be fulfilled without a natural theology. As long as it is not shown that these goals are not valuable or that they can be fulfilled in other ways, the possibility of a natural theology will continue to have appeal.[38]

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[38] Indeed, another way to criticize natural theology would be to argue that there are other goals which are in contradiction with the goals of natural theology, and are also more important to pursue than the goals of natural theology. For example, Barth clearly understands the need to engage the surrounding culture, but for him the need to preserve the purity of Christian doctrine trumps any need for a natural theology. Vainio (2010, chapter 3) presents an excellent analysis of how different focusing on different goals has lead to great differences in theological method within contemporary theology.

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LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE ON NATURAL THEOLOGY

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Abstract. This article examines Martin Luther's view of Natural theology and natural knowledge of God. Luther research has often taken a negative stance towards a possibility of Natural theology in Luther's thought. I argue, that one actually finds from Luther's texts a limited area of the natural knowledge of God. This knowledge pertains to the existence of God as necessary and as Creator, but not to what God is concretely. Luther appears to think that the natural knowledge of God is limited because of the relation between God and the Universe only one side is known by natural capacities. Scholastic Theology built on Aristotelianism errs, according to Luther, when it uses created reality as the paradigm for thinking about God. Direct experiential knowledge of the divinity, given by faith, is required to comprehend the divine being. Luther's criticism of Natural theology, however, does not appear to rise from a general rejection of metaphysics, but from that Luther follows certain ideas of Medieval Augustinian Platonism, such as a stark ontological differentiation between finite and infinite things, as well as the idea of divine uniting contradictions. Thus the conflict between faith and reason on Luther seems to be explicable at least in part as a conflict between two different ontological systems, which follow different paradigms of rationality.

1. INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION OF THE ISSUE

Lutheran theology and natural theology sometimes seem to be related to each other as water is to fire. Luther's criticism of metaphysical speculation and the limits of natural reason concerning God, as well as the idea that God is only accessible under the contraries of his metaphysical being in the human Jesus Christ, may seem to render all natural theology not only an impossible endeavour, but one that should be avoided too.[1] But is this view

[1] This suspicion is connected to a tradition of criticism towards Metaphysics in modern interpretations of Luther. It is supported by approaches at Luther's thought that can be character-

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entirely correct? In this article my aim is first to attempt to construct what I would consider a proper interpretation of Luther's view of natural theology, its possibility and limits, and then to evaluate it and ask whether one can reach different conclusions on the possibility of natural theology when one places Luther's view in a wider philosophical and theological context. In analysis of the nature of Luther's thought I am building upon the so-called Platonism thesis of Luther's thought, discussed for the most part of the last Century, though rejected by the existentialist and personalist interpreters of Luther's ontology.[2]

As a starting point of my examination I will use a definition of natural theology offered on the Gifford Lectures website. According to it, "Traditionally natural theology is the term used for the attempt to prove the existence of God and divine purpose through observation of nature and the use of human reason. Seen in a more positive light natural theology is the part of theology that does not depend on revelation."[3] The definition implies that there are two methods of natural theology: the observation of nature, and the use of human reason. Though they may be in some cases considered as interrelated parts of the same process, in the face of Lutheran theological epistemology one needs to make a distinction between these two, i.e. a theoretical or *a priori* approach, and en empirical or *a posteriori* approach.

ized as Ritschlian, Existentialist and Barthian, which all agree in their rejection of metaphysics, though from different grounds. See Martikainen (1992: 5-21); Juntunen (1998: 129-131). A noticeably more positive attitude has been exemplified by the so-called Confessional Lutherans, who have made attemps at building or at least defending the place of natural theology within Lutheran thought. As examples of this see Montgomery (1998) and Loikkanen (2015). One can also mention an extremely polemical article of the confessionalist Swedish Luther Scholar Tom G.A. Hardt (1980), which nevertheless includes a useful overview on some of Luther's textual passages concerning the natural knowledge of God.

2 On the Platonism thesis in the history of Luther research, see the licentiate thesis of Karimies (2013).

3 The Gifford Lectures (2016).

2. LUTHER'S REMARKS THAT CONCERN NATURAL THEOLOGY, AND HOW TO UNDERSTAND THEM

2.1 The Inevitability of Natural Theology

A classical text to open the discussion on natural theology in the Lutheran tradition is the Heidelberg Disputation from 1518. In the theses 19-22, which are traditionally considered the central definition of the Lutheran Theology of the Cross, Luther states that

> "19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who watches (conspicit) the invisible things of God understood through God's works.
>
> 20. He deserves to be called a theologian, who understands the backside (posteriora) and visible things of God as watched (*conspecta*) through suffering and the cross.
>
> 21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross says what the thing actually is.
>
> 22. That wisdom which sees (*conspicit*) the invisible things of God as understood from his works swells, blinds and hardens everyone."[4]

The text is often interpreted as a rejection and condemnation of speculative, rational and metaphysical theology: Knowledge of God is not gained by speculating the wonders of the created world by human reason. Rather, the knowledge of God is found in Christ, under his humanity and suffering on the cross, which are the opposite and backside (*posteriora*) of the invisible glorious properties of God.[5] But is it actually at all correct to read Luther's condemnation of the theology of glory as a rejection of metaphysical

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[4] WA 1, 354, 17-24: "19. Non ille digne Theologus dicitur, qui invisibilia Dei per ea, quea facta sunt, intellecta conspicit, 20. Sed qui visibilia et posteriora Dei per passiones et crucem conspecta intelligit. 21. Theologus gloriae dicit malum bonum et bonum malum, Theologus crucis dicit id quod res est. 22. Sapientia illa, quae invisibilia Dei ex operibus intellecta conspicit, omnino inflat, excaecat et indurat." I have used my own translation here to emphasize Luther's use of the words conspicere [...] per, i.e. to look at something through something and not merely in something.

[5] See e.g. Mannermaa (2010: 27-66). In general, the theology of the Cross is usually seen to represent revelation (either historical Christ, proclaimed word, or subjective experience, as in the existential sufferings of the Christian) and taken as an epistemological principle of theol-

speculation as a method of theology, i.e. as a method which yields knowledge concerning God? Does not Luther actually in thesis 19 imply, that there indeed are invisible properties of God (*invisibilia Dei*), which can be "watched", or speculated (*conspicere*), as understood (*intellecta*) through the works of God, the created universe?[6] The probation of thesis 19 seems to consider this knowledge not as something that cannot be attained, but as something which is of little worth.[7] Thesis 24 likewise states, that the wisdom which comes from the speculation of the invisible things is not in itself evil, but is misused.[8] I therefore argue that Luther's point in the disputation is not to deny that the speculation of the creation would per se yield knowledge concerning God. The problem rather lies in the quality of that knowledge.

Luther namely states in the *Lectures on Romans* (1515-1516) that all human beings possess a concept of God or have a certain recognition of him (*notio divinitatis*).[9] By this concept of *notio divinitatis* Luther appears to mean a concept which can be described as abstract in a very specific way.

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ogy (*Erkenntnisprinzip*) which excludes and contradicts natural theology and metaphysics. See Blaumeiser (1995: 26-90); Kopperi (1997, 25-82; 2010).

6 Luther's term for works of God, "*facta*", and the allusion to Romans 1:20 point to the created things, i.e. the knowledge of God accessible through creation. This is also manifest in how these works are presented as opposite to the knowledge that comes through Christ, i.e. revelation.

7 WA 361, 34-36: "Patet per eos, qui tales fuerunt Et tamen ab Apostolo Roma. 1. stulti vocantur. Porro invisibilia Dei sunt virtus, divinitas, sapientia, iusticia, bonitas &c. haec onmia cognita non faciunt dignum nec sapientem."

8 WA 1, 354, 27: "Non tamen sapientia illa mala nec lex fugienda, Sed homo sine Theologia crucis optimis pessime abutitur."

9 See WA 56, 11-12 and WA 56, 176, 14-177, 17: "*Deus enim illis manifestauit*. Ex hoc itaque dat intelligere, Quod etiam naturalia bona ipsi Deo sunt tanquam largitori ascribenda. Nam Quod hic de naturali cognitione loquatur, patet ex eo, quod subdit, quomodo illis manifestauit, scil. per hoc, Quod *Inuisibilia eius a conditione mundi operibus intellecta conspiciuntur* (i. e. naturaliter ex effectibus cognoscuntur) i. e. ab initio mundi semper ita fuit, Quod 'Inuisibilia eius' etc., q. d. ne quis Cauilletur, Quod nostro tempore solo potuerit Deus cognosci. A conditione mundi vsque semper potuit et potest. Sed vt clarius Apostolus in istis probationibus intelligatur, Volo meo sensu aliis spectantibus modicum ludere et vel auxilium vel Iudicium expectare. Quod omnibus, idolatris tamen precipue, manifesta fuerit notitia Dei, sicut hic dicit, ita vt inexcusabiliter possint conuinci se cognouisse Inuisibilia Dei, ipsam diuinitatem, item sempiternitatem et potestatem eius, ex hoc aperte probatur, Quia omnes, qui idola constituerunt et coluerunt et deos vel Deum appellauerunt, item immortalem esse Deum i. e. sempiternum, item potentem et adiuuare valentem, certe ostenderunt se notionem diuinitatis in corde habuisse. Nam Quo pacto possent Simulachrum vel aliam creaturam Deum appel-

Luther seems to think there are two sources for this concept. On one hand he states that it is in human hearts and it is impossible to be obscured, that is, it exists as an *a priori* category. Luther refers to this concept also as the major (term) of the practical syllogism, and a theological *syntheresis,* which refers to an innate ability of moral discrimination.[10] The moral laws at least in some sense are derived from the innate knowledge of God. The reason that Luther connects the knowledge of God to the major term of the practical syllogism is probably because Luther appears to follow the idea that God is the highest good and as such the principle of goodness.[11] According to Luther human beings necessarily know both that God exists as well as that he has certain divine attributes, e.g. that he is eternal, all-powerful, immortal, capable to help, invisible, wise, righteous and merciful to those invoking him. This knowledge exists in the natural reason as a self-evident first principle, which in itself cannot therefore be falsified, though it might be in some cases denied. This knowledge also has an epistemological justification, as Luther seems to think that the principles of natural reason are known by some kind of divine illumination, which has God as its source. However, in the Fall the light of the reason has become dimmed, so that compared to the light of faith it is weak and feeble and not suited to deal with the spiritual, incomprehensible

lare vel ei similem credere, Si nihil, quid esset Deus et quid ad eum pertineret facere, nossent? Quomodo hec attribuerent lapidi vel ei, cui lapidem similem estimabant, si ea non crederent ei conuenire? Nunc Cum teneant, Quod Inuisibilis quidem sit diuinitas (quam in multos tamen deos distribuerunt), Quod qui eam habeat, sit Inuisibilis, sit immortalis, sit potens, sit Sapiens, sit Iustus, Sit clemens inuocantibus, Cum ergo hec adeo certe teneant, Quod etiam operibus profiteantur, sc. Inuocando, colendo, adorando eos, in quibus diuinitatem esse putabant, certissime sequitur, Quod notitiam seu notionem diuinitatis habuerunt, Que sine dubio ex Deo in illis est, sicut hic dicit. In hoc ergo errauerunt, Quod hanc diuinitatem non nudam reliquerunt et coluerunt, Sed eam mutauerunt et applicuerunt pro votis et desyderiis suis. Et vnusquisque diuinitatem in eo esse voluit, qui sibi placeret, Et sic Dei veritatem mutauerunt in mendacium. Cognouerunt ergo, Quod diuinitatis siue eius, qui est Deus, sit esse potentem, Inuisibilem, Iustum, immortalem, bonum; ergo cognouerunt Inuisibilia Dei sempiternamque virtutem eius et diuinitatem. Hec Maior syllogismi practici, hec Syntheresis theologica est inobscurabilis in omnibus. Sed in minore errabant dicendo et statuendo: Hic autem i. e. Iupiter Vel alius huic simulacro similis est huiusmodi etc." The words of the Bible verse Luther is commenting are printed in italic.

10 See also WA 42, 374, 6-16.

11 See Karimies (2015).

and divine things, only corporeal and earthly things.[12] The loss of the higher spiritual light of faith in the Fall has therefore lead to the consequence that though the human being knows the abstract properties of God by the light of reason, he does not attribute them to the concrete, invisible and incomprehensible divinity, i.e. the actual God, as reason lacks the intuitive knowledge of him, though it knows he exists. Instead of the actual God the human being rather attributes these properties either to concrete created objects (idols), or to deities which are abstract conceptualizations of some specific created goods, such as power or wealth, or to other false conceptions. This idea is behind Luther's saying that faith and trust create one's God, i.e. the human being divinizes that which he puts his utmost trust in.[13] The *apriori* notion of God necessarily leads, according to Luther, to the human being constructing some kind of deity.

Luther, however, appears to think that one can also arrive at the concept of God by inferring backwards from the effects to the source. With reference to Romans 1:20 Luther states that the invisible attributes of God have been possible to see since the beginning of the world, which means, that God is and has been naturally knowable from his effects, i.e. as their cause. This kind of reasoning, to which Luther referred in the thesis 19 of the Heidelberg disputation, also can induce some attributes of God by observing the created good things, as the good apparent in the natural things is to be ascribed to God who is its giver and creator.[14] The knowledge of God attained this way therefore relies on reasoning *a posteriori*: it is based on the empirical reality

[12] See e.g. WA 7, 550, 28-551, 11; WA 39, I, 175, 4; WA 42, 292, 4-5; 374, 11-16; WA 57, b197, 6-13. The exact relationship of the light of the natural reason to the light of faith in the terms of the theory of divine illumination is somewhat unclear, as Luther at some places speaks of the natural light, which the reason has, in contradiction to the divine light of faith, but at other places refers also to the light of reason as "something divine" (*divinum quiddam*), and as inscribed to the heart by God.

[13] WA 56, 176, 14-178, 17. See also WA 30, I, 132, 32-133, 8; WA 40, I, 360, 2-361, 11.

[14] WA 56, 176, 14-22: "*Deus enim illis manifestauit*. Ex hoc itaque dat intelligere, Quod etiam naturalia bona ipsi Deo sunt tanquam largitori ascribenda. Nam Quod hic de naturali cognitione loquatur, patet ex eo, quod subdit, quomodo illis manifestauit, scil. per hoc, *Quod Inuisibilia eius a conditione mundi operibus intellecta conspiciuntur* (i. e. naturaliter ex effectibus cognoscuntur) i. e. ab initio mundi semper ita fuit, Quod 'Inuisibilia eius' etc., q. d. ne quis Cauilletur, Quod nostro tempore solo potuerit Deus cognosci. A conditione mundi vsque semper potuit et potest."

as its source. Luther does not, however, seem to be greatly interested in making a distinction between these two sources of knowledge, or on differences between the methods of reasoning related to them, as he examines them in the same texts somewhat interminglingly. Nor does Luther appear interested in formulating or discussing exact arguments for the existence of God. He simply seems to suppose the idea of the Augustinian tradition, that the concept of God is known by natural reason, as well as to accept the Aristotelian Cosmological argument without further deliberation. In this sense Luther can even refer positively to the limited natural knowledge of God possessed by the Philosophers.[15]

2.2 The Problems of Natural Theology

Based on the examination of Luther's texts presented above one can conclude, that not only is natural theology possible according to Luther, but it is natural and inevitable for all human beings. Both pure reason and experience function according to him as sources of knowledge of God. Why therefore the criticism? Why does not one involved in this kind of speculation deserve to be called a theologian?

From Luther's texts the answer would seem to be, that because he or she is a metaphysician. According to Luther, namely, the speculation of the Godhead by the means of natural reason seems to necessarily lead to a qualitatively distorted conception of God, though abstractly or formally the conception might seem somewhat correct. My claim is, that this difference is based on a difference between two alternative metaphysical paradigms, or what Luther himself would call a difference between metaphysics and theology.[16] According to Luther the natural reason is always tied to visible things, and consequently the concepts it forms are based on those things.[17] Therefore when

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See also WA 56, 11-12: "*Inuisibilia enim* sc. bonitas, sapientia, Iustitia etc. *ipsius a creatura mundi* i. e. a creatione mundi *per ea quae facta sunt* / i. e. ex operibus, hoc est, cum Videant, quod sint opera, ergo et factorem necesse est esse *intellecta conspiciuntur*: non quidem per sensum, Sed per intellectum cognita *sempiterna quoque eius virtus* potestas hoc enim arguunt opera *et diuinitas* / i. e. quod sit vere Deus *ita ut sint inexcusabiles*."

15 See WA 42, 290, 15-22; Martikainen (1992: 39-40).

16 See e.g. WA 55, II, 535, 33-536, 41; 822, 637-642; WA 56, 371, 1-372, 25. See also Martikainen (1992: 29-44).

17 See footnote 12. See also Karimies (2013: 102-104; 130-132).

the natural reason forms a concept of God, it creates that concept using the abstractions of the created goods it knows. There is, however, for Luther a key qualitative difference between the created things (i.e. created goods), and the divine things (i.e. spiritual goods). This is that the created things are finite, perishable and lacking permanent existence (i.e. "empty"), whereas the spiritual things are infinite and eternal (i.e. "solid"). Luther seems to understand the nature of the divine infinity in a specific, Platonic manner: Divine goodness is unlike any limited or static object that could be possessed. Following the Platonic principle of the Good, it is something dynamic and self-diffusive, not static being, but overflowing and sharing of itself.[18] Luther also subscribes to the Augustinian idea, that one becomes through love like the object of one's love. If the object of love is empty and transitory, one becomes empty and transitory. If the object of love is God, one becomes in a certain way like God.[19] When one by faith possesses God as the highest good and begins to love God, one's soul is consequently filled with the divine ampleness.[20]

Out of this is born the distinction between the two kinds of love and two kinds of wisdom, carnal and spiritual. A person without faith is according to Luther internally 'empty' as he participates only in the created goods. This emptiness leads to the insatisfiable greedy love, as the created goods fail to satisfy the soul.[21] The basic affect of faith, on the other hand, possesses God as the self-diffusing goodness and leads person to freely and cheerfully serve God and other people, giving of himself.[22] The concept of wisdom, also often used by Luther, means some kind of general paradigm which is determined by experientially knowing or not knowing God. Whether one concretely knows the divine goodness or not gives its character to the theoretical

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18 WA 55, I, 302, 7-8; 676-678; 716-718; 753 gloss 13; WA 55, II, 81, 14-15; 119, 20-23; 154, 7-12; 247, 53-57; 284, 111-120; 367, 336-368, 337; 631, 60-64; 637, 225-227; 715, 484-488; WA 56, 75, 13-15; 253, 10-11. In the Heidelberg disputation Luther takes a positive stance towards Platonism in general, see Kopperi (1997: 173-239; 2010: 169-171); Dieter (2001: 619-631). Luther's ideas concerning the nature of the Good, however, seem to be related especially to the though of Bonaventure, see Karimies (2015).

19 WA 55, II, 879, 161-171; WA 56, 240, 31-241, 5; AWA 2, 43, 25-44, 3.

20 WA 55, I, 718; 718 gloss 6.

21 WA 55, II, 66, 15-67, 14; 338, 13-18.

22 WA 55, II, 638, 249-640, 285; WA 56, 8 gloss 4; WA 2, 500, 17-35; AWA 2, 40, 3-41, 10; 44, 7-16; 48, 1-49, 19. See also Karimies (2013: 113-118).

thought concerning God (as can be seen in Luther's use of the term in thesis 22 of the Heidelberg disputation), so that the same abstract concept (e.g. "goodness") is understood in a different concrete manners in visible things and in God.[23] The two kinds of love and wisdom, carnal and spiritual, thus form for Luther two different opposite 'paradigms' through which one understands divine things in general. When a person forms by natural reason a concept of God, and attributes to him divine properties, without the spiritual wisdom that comes from experiential knowledge of God in faith, the person uses in understanding the quality of those properties the abstractions of the natural finite good things as his model. God's goodness is therefore understood in the terms of an ultimate end (as Thomas Aquinas does), as an object to be possessed, towards which one strives by doing good works, instead of being the first cause of good works, freely given in faith, which would alter the quality of the person itself. Most of Luther's criticism of Scholastic Theology follows this model. The Scholastic thought is criticised of that it follows the model of carnal love and wisdom of the flesh, and the reason of this is its appropriation of Aristotelian metaphysics. Luther's own theology on the other hand appears to utilize ideas from medieval Augustinian Platonism i.a. concerning the nature of the goodness of God.[24] Luther's view of the capabilities of the natural reason seems to be close to the theory of abstraction, as the concepts of reason are derived from sensible forms. The spiritual intellect, on the contrary, receives its concepts by direct internal illumination, not by extracting them from sense experience.[25] Thus the object of one is for Luther the sensible world and its abstractions as well as the sensible good, the object of the other the spiritual and intellectual world and the spiritual good in itself.

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23 See e.g. WA 56, 76 gloss 1; 237, 20-28; 329, 27-330, 5; 361, 19-363, 7; 406, 16-407, 2.

24 On Luther's criticism of Scholastic Theology regarding its application of teleological view of human moral action to theology, which Luther sees as an opposite of the concept of grace, see Luther's *Disputation against Scholastic Theology*, theses 36-44; 55-56; 75-80 (WA 1, 226-228); *Heidelberg disputation* theses 25-28 (WA 1, 354, 29-34). Luther's view of divine action rather follows the Platonic model of overflowing goodness, see Karimies (2015). The view of Thomas is seen as an opposite of the Platonic model by Kretzmann (1990) as well as te Velde (1995: 30-35). In Kretzmann's opinion the idea of the Father as *fontalis plenitudo* as represented i.a. by Bonaventure is "directly repudiated by Aquinas". On Luther's critique of the Aristotelian model of acquired virtue see also Dieter (2001: 149-256).

25 See e.g. WA 55, I, 520 gloss 17.

Without access to the spiritual world, granted by faith, a human being cannot according to Luther properly understand the nature of the spiritual things.

Luther's view of the qualitative difference between the nature of God and the nature of the created things also sheds light on how he understands the function of the Creation as a sign of God. For Luther the created world is objectively, i.e. in its essence, a sign of God:

There is more philosophy and wisdom in this verse 'I will open my mouth in parables' than if Aristotle had written a thousand Metaphysics. This is because through it it is learned, that every visible creature is a parable and full of mystical instruction, according to how the Wisdom of God arranges all things beautifully and all things are made in wisdom. Every creature of God is a word of God 'For he spoke, and they were made'. Therefore creatures are to be beheld as utterances of God. Therefore to fix the heart in created things is to fix it in the sign instead of the reality, which is God alone. 'The invisible things of God are understood from these works', Romans 1.[26]

However, due to the qualitative difference between God and the created reality one cannot by inductive reasoning arrive from the sign to the signified (without creating a qualitatively erratic conception). Rather, according to Luther, to understand the signification of the created word properly, one needs to be acquainted with the divine reality which it signifies. The sign is properly understood only when the reality it signifies is seen.[27] For Luther this happens

[26] WA 55, II, 535, 33-536, 41: "Plus philosophie et sapientie est in isto versu: 'Aperiam in parabolis os meum', quam si mille metaphysicas Scripsisset Aristoteles. Quia hinc discitur, quod omnis creatura visibilis est parabola et plena mystica eruditione, secundum quod sapientia Dei disponit omnia suauiter et omnia in | sapientia facta sunt, Omnisque creatura Dei verbum Dei est: 'Quia ipse dixit, et facta sunt.' Ergo Creaturas inspicere oportet tanquam locutiones Dei. Atque ideo ponere cor in res creatas Est in signum et non rem ponere, que est Deus solus. 'Ex operibus enim istis Inuisibilia Dei intellecta conspiciuntur', Ro. 1."

[27] WA 55, II, 342, 126-140: "Quia omnia opera Creationis et veteris legis signa sunt operum Dei, que in Christo et suis sanctis facit et faciet, et ideo in Christo illa preterita tanquam signa omnia implentur. Nam omnia illa sunt transitoria, significantia ea, que sunt eterna et permanentia. Et hec sunt opera veritatis, illa autem omnia vmbra et opera figurationis. Ideo Christus finis omnium et centrum, in quem omnia respiciunt et monstrant, ac si dicerent: Ecce iste est, qui est, nos autem non sumus, Sed significamus tantum. Vnde Iudei arguuntur Psal. 27. quod non intellexerunt opera et in opera, i. e. opera in veteri lege non intellectualiter aspiciebant, Sed tantum carnaliter, non vt signa et argumenta rerum, Sed res ipsas. Quia quod intelligitur, Inuisibile est ab eo, quod videtur, aliud longe. Vnde Apostoli Annunciauerunt opera Dei (scil. in Christo facta) et exinde Intellexerunt facta eius, i. e. res preteritas in gestis et creationis,

through the light of faith, not the light of natural reason. The natural reason can only comprehend the material causes or quiddities, not the efficient and the final cause. Its knowledge of the first cause is also very limited, as explained.[28] The first problem of the natural theology, following Luther, therefore lies in that the natural reason conceives the relationship between God and the created world incorrectly, using the finite created world as its paradigm. The created things, however, differ qualitatively from God in a way which the natural reason cannot arrive to by observing the created things alone. Due to the epistemological limitations of the human reason after the Fall the reason cannot comprehend the divine being in a correct way, if it does not first have an intuitive or experiential cognition of the divinity, which is grated only by faith. The abstractive reasoning which uses the exemplars of the divine properties as they exist in the finite created world arrives at qualitatively incorrect conclusions regarding the nature of the divine attributes as they exist in God. It can correctly induce, for an example, that God is good, but it does not know, what the divine goodness actually is like.[29]

There is, however, also a second obstacle which impairs the capacity of the human reason to think about God. Luther appears to think that the human reason is discursive and analytic in approaching its objects. The divine wisdom, i.e. what God is and how he works, on the other hand, reconciles and unites contradictions.[30] In the created world the good, powerful, lofty etc. things are distinct from the evil, weak, and lowly. Therefore when human wisdom attempts to seek God, it uses the naturally good, powerful, magnificent etc. things as the foundation of its abstractive reasoning. This is theology of glory. God, however, becomes in a special manner present and accessible in the created world under

scil. intelligentes, quoniam ista opera Christi in illis olim sint figurata et significata. Quia tunc perfecte intelligitur signum, quando res ipsa signi videtur."

28 WA 39, I, 175, 7-176, 3; WA 56, 371, 1-372, 25. See also Ebeling (1982: 333-431) and Lohse (1958: 63-65; 75-76).

29 One can therefore ask whether Luther accepts or rejects the principle of analogy. To me it appears that Luther would accept the analogy of being in principle, but would reject that one can make use of it to arrive at a correct conception of God. The world is indeed for Luther a creation of God, which has a causal relation to its Creator, and by this it can be known that there is a Creator, but the specific nature of this relation cannot be known by observing the created world alone, and thus the specific nature of the Creator remains unknown.

30 See e.g. WA 55, I, 860 gloss 13; WA 55, II, 379, 669-380, 682; AWA 2, 309, 2-7.

the opposites of what are the apparent equivalents of his divine properties, i.e. under visible evil, weakness, suffering etc. This pertains especially to the Incarnation, but also to the action of God in general. Luther writes:

Therefore note, that as blessed divinity, i.e. wisdom, light, virtue, glory, truth, goodness, salvation, life and every good thing was hidden under the flesh, when instead in the flesh all evil appeared, such as confusion, death, cross, infirmity, weakness, darkness and worthlessness, (for thus different and most dissimilar thing appeared to outward eyes, ears, touch and to all powers of the whole man than what was hidden inside), so it is in the same way always up to the present day.[31]

Behind Luther's way of thought is a specific ontological idea according to which it is "greater" and more proper for God to be present under contraries and unite them, than to be present under simply one kind of things. A fitting description of the divinity, according to Luther, is that it is "all in everything" (*omnia in omnibus*), present and effective in all things.[32] For God to be truly great and miraculous his highness needs to be present in most low things and his essence needs to surpass the differences of the created order. Luther links the incarnation to this idea. The incarnation of Christ is the most proper work of God as an expression of this character of the divine nature, because in Christ the mutual opposites come together and are united by divine wisdom.[33] The ontological motive is, however, connected to a soteriological motive: As it is impossible for the human reason to seek God under the contraries (of his apparent properties as manifest in the nature, i.e. in the lowliness), the hiddenness of the salvific (i.e. incarnatorial and sacramental) presence of God guarantees Luther's central theological tenet of *sola gratia, sola fide, solo Christo*. Through

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31 WA 55, II, 720, 69-75: "Vnde Nota, Quod sicut sub carne abscondita fuit benedicta diuinitas, i. e. sapientia, lux, virtus, gloria, veritas, bonitas, salus, vita et omne bonum, cum tamen in carne apparuerit omne malum vt confusio, mors, crux, infirmitas, languor, tenebre et vilitas (Sic enim aliud et dissimillimum apparuit foris oculis, auribus, tactui, immo omnibus viribus totius hominis ei quod intus latuit), Ita vsque modo semper."

32 AWA 2, 309, 2-7: "est iam deus vere omnia in omnibus, aequus et idem, simul tamen inaequalissimus et diversissimus. Ipse est enim, qui in multitudine simplex, in simplicitate multiplex, in inaequalitate aequalis, in aequalitate inaequalis, in sublimitate infimus, in excelsis profundus, in intimis extremus et e diverso. Sic in infirmis potens, in potentibus infirmus, in stultis sapiens, in sapientibus stultus, breviter, omnia in omnibus."

33 WA 55, II, 73, 11-18; WA 57, b189, 7-19; b201, 10-b202, 8.

grace given in Christ, i.e. under the *visibilia* of the passions and the Cross, the human being may receive faith, which also grants the proper understanding of the *spiritualia* and *invisibilia*. Thus the humanity of Christ is "the door", the entrance point and the ladder of ascent to the spiritual world too.[34] This forms the central idea of the theology of the Cross. It is not theology concerned just with the humanity of Christ, but the humanity, suffering and the cross rather form the starting point through which God depreciates the natural wisdom (which has an incorrect conception of him) and grants the human being a new theological intellect, an intellect which properly comprehends both the created world as well as the invisible attributes of God as seen through the cross, and along with it, not separated from it.[35] Thus the theologian of the cross can "say what the thing actually is", seeing all things as understood (*intellecta*) through the cross and passions.[36]

One is entitled to pose here the question, whether the idea that Christ stands at the center of everything as the reconciling principle, is ontological and philosophical, or a Christological and religious one. In my opinion the two cannot be separated. As we saw, Luther appeared to be related in his view of God as the highest good to Medieval Platonist Augustinianism. The idea of self-giving goodness as the central character of the divinity has its specific background in the Augustinianism of Richard St. Victor and Bonaventure, who applied the ideas of Pseudo-Dionysios to Western Trinitarian theology.[37] Same Platonist Augustinian tradition would appear to be also behind Luther's conception of Christ as the center in which mutual opposites come together and

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[34] See e.g. WA 55, II, 668, 29-32; WA 57, b99, 1-10; b222, 10-23; WA 1, 362, 15-19.

[35] See e.g. AWA 2, 106, 17-108, 5, where Luther discusses the birth of the intellect of faith and experiential cognition of God in the passions, and how they are related to the Cross of Christ. For a closer examination of this process see Karimies (2013: 118-124).

[36] WA 1, 354, 17-22. Luther often emphasizes, that the natural reason sees only the *species* (i.e. visible forms) of things, whereas the intellect of faith sees the *res*, the things as they actually are. See WA 55, I, 520, 4-18; 520 gloss 20; WA 55, II, 56, 19-58, 1; 75, 25-76, 1; 179, 79-180, 107; 213, 124-140; 366, 291-304; 481, 481-488; 628, 430-445; 734, 109-735, 131; 758, 50-759, 55; 903, 342-364; 921, 872-897; WA 56, 70, 15-17; 445, 13-447, 27; WA 57, a93, 21-a94, 12; WA 57, b159, 5-15; WA 2, 578, 40-579, 7; AWA 2, 45, 17-18; 70, 16-23; 106, 19-108, 13; 132, 1-16; 139, 7-141, 18; 178, 24-29; 179, 17-182, 18; 199, 25-204, 5; 318, 5-19; 547, 16 - 548, 1-4 ;559, 17-560, 2; 617, 7-18; WA 5, 410, 36-38; 418, 9-419, 21; 474, 13-21; 506, 9-34; 555, 28-40; 570, 8-17; 623, 17-40.

[37] On this background see Delio (2001: 39-53); Schumacher (2001: 117-121).

must be observed together. Luther's idea namely resembles the place of Christ as the reconciling principle in the theology of Bonaventure, where Christ as the *medium* (center) of everything is the farthest extension of the Trinity in the Platonic scheme of emanation and remanation, the exact point in which the created being is taken to participate in the divine life and begins to be drawn back to God, its source. Also Bonaventure describes Christ as the door and ladder in whom the human being can enter the spiritual world. The ideas seem to be related to each other through a number of figures employed by both. Luther and Bonaventure both emphasize that one should not contemplate just the essential properties of God, but admire their union with their opposites in Christ. In my opinion it might be fruitful to study the relation of Luther's Theology of the Cross to the Christology of Bonaventure further, as there seem to be structural similarities, which is most feasibly explained by them operating in the same Platonist Augustinian tradition.[38]

3. EVALUATION OF THE LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE

What should one then think of the limits or possibilities of natural theology from the Lutheran perspective? If one should wish to uncritically follow Luther's thought, it would seem that the area, where it is possible to practise natural theology without being lead into false conclusions, is quite limited. Nevertheless, there is a narrow strip in which it exists: First of all, there is the concept of God, i.e. the *a priori* knowledge of his existence, which can be known by natural reason. Second, it is possible to reason backwards from the effect to the cause to the extent that it can be said, that because the Universe exists, God exists. Moreover, of God's attributes it can be said, that he is the cause of this known Universe. However, Luther's theology cautions that a concrete concept of God cannot be created by extrapolating from the properties of the Universe, as they exist in the Universe differently than they exist in God, and to know the

[38] On Bonaventure's Christology see Delio (2001: 84-95). Luther seems to be related to the tradition represented by Bonaventure through the use of a number of images, such as the picture of the two Cherubim facing each other, which is used to illustrate the unity of the mutually exclusive divine and human properties in Incarnate and Crucified Christ. Christ represents the mercy seat between them, who unites the opposites in his person and is the entrance to the spiritual word. See e.g. WA 57, b201, 17-b202, 8; *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* VI, 4-5; VII, 1-2.

exact nature of this difference both parts of the relation must be known. Luther therefore instructs, that without concrete knowledge (i.e. intuitive cognition, or spiritual experience) of the divinity as it is in itself, the divinity must be left "naked" and venerated as such.[39] This means that the limits of the human reason concerning its ability to comprehend God must be recognized, and one should abstain from attributing to the divinity any properties whatsoever in a concrete form, i.e. from giving any rendition of their concrete meaning. The attributes can be recognized only formally. In this sense God must remain incogitable, innominable and incomprehensible. The concrete content may only come from God's own self-revelation.[40]

However, one can also attempt to examine Luther's position from a wider perspective. Luther's dichotomy between faith and reason takes place within the context of a system where the scope of reason and the scope of faith are established by a definition. But is it actually valid? One way to approach the issue is to ask that even if one accepts as a hypothesis that the created and spiritual good are related to each other as Luther portrays, is it indeed necessary to have a personal experience, i.e. intuitive cognition, of the spiritual good in order to engage in critical and analytical thought concerning them, without falling into error of constructing conceptions which follow the false logic of the wisdom of the flesh? What if one is beforehand informed of these differences, taking Luther's notions as the starting point? Is that not what is done in this article? Is it absolutely necessary to have experiential knowledge of some thing, or even a category of reality, in order to be able to pursue analysis and argumentation within that field? Or would it be possible, even theoretically, to assume the

[39] WA 56, 177, 8-10: "In hoc ergo errauerunt, Quod hanc diuinitatem non nudam reliquerunt et coluerunt, Sed eam mutauerunt et applicuerunt pro votis et desyderiis suis." The caution is related to the concept of *nudus deus*, naked God, a concept of Luther's theology which is usually connected to a warning concerning metaphysical speculation of God outside of his revelation.

[40] See e.g. AWA 2, 139, 7 - 140, 32; WA 56, 375, 1-378, 12. In the first text Luther uses the figure of the mountain of Exodus to represent the divine nature, which must be left untouched by human reason. The principle of the limit of reason is a central theme also in Luther's treatment of the so-called spiritual tribulations: In them one must not by reason attempt to deduce how to solve the apparent conflict between God's goodness and experienced suffering, but wait for help that comes from God and exceeds the options which are apparent to reason. Thus, for an example, the death of Christ on the Cross, which appeared as an ultimate defeat for the disciples, becomes the central salvific event, in which divine wisdom unites the contraries.

principles which govern that field of knowledge, and argue within them? For an example, is it possible for a blind person to learn optics or colour theory, so that he would be capable or arguing without error within that field? A similar question was posed by Henry of Ghent, who asked whether divine illumination was necessary for theological argumentation, or whether it would possible to pursue theological argumentation with the help of natural reason alone, like a blind man could discuss things which fall under the field of vision on the basis of what he has learned from others, without an experience of his own.[41]

But even if one would agree, that experience is not necessary for adequate theological argumentation, if one subscribes to correct principles, this does not mean that such undertaking could be called natural theology, as one would nevertheless have to accept those principles, which Luther seems to think are contrary to natural reason. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate, the conflict Luther sees as taking place between theology of the glory and theology of the cross can be construed also as a conflict between two theological systems, one of which can be broadly characterized as Aristotelian and the other as Platonic. Many principles, which according to Luther are peculiar to theology and the spiritual world, such as the idea of the divine plenitude, or that it is proper for the divinity to unite contraries, can also be found in Platonic philosophy. Even Luther himself seems to agree at in certain texts that the philosophies of Plato, Pythagoras and Parmenides are at least more suitable for dealing with theological questions than Aristotelianism.[42] The choice between different paradigmatic models which are used to conceptualize the divine may thus ultimately not be a choice between proper theology and fallen natural reason, but a choice between different historical and contextual views of reason and rational principles. Thus one could claim, that one can by "natural reason" (or at least by some of its instances) arrive at many questions to conclusions which are not far from Luther's view of God, as the historic Platonic tradition at instances promoted even by Luther illustrates. Of course there are also points which cannot be derived from rational speculation alone, for example the particular historical Christian narrative. One could theoretically, for an example, agree that it is

41 See Työrinoja (2000).

42 See the philosophical theses of the Heidelberg disputation, WA 59, 424, 4-425, 18; Kopperi (1997: 225-235; 2010: 169-172); Dieter (2001: 619-631).

fitting for God to be incarnated, but it would seem that it is impossible to arrive by pure human reason or observation of the nature at the conclusion, that it is Jesus of Nazareth who is the God Incarnate. In this sense an extension of the field of natural theology would not threaten the centrality of Christ, which is of primary importance to Luther.[43] However, at this point one could also criticise the concept of natural theology as being ambiguous, insofar it is defined with the help of the concept of "natural reason" or "human reason". What is this reason, actually? Is it possible at all by reason alone to choose between different paradigmatic models examined in this article, between Platonism and Aristotelism, or in a more general sense, between empirism and idealism, or different types of philosophical idealism? When Luther warns that the human reason should not overstep it limits, there may be some wisdom in it.

CONCLUSIONS

The present examination shows that a limited place for natural theology can be found within Lutheranism. Furthermore, I have attempted to demonstrate that it is incorrect to claim that Luther's criticism of natural theology would rise from a general rejection of a metaphysical way of thought. Rather, it seems that Luther's criticism should be understood from the perspective of a conflict between two different ontological systems, which can be broadly described as Aristotelian and Platonic. Luther's argument seems to be that though we can known the world is created and can possess an innate general concept of God, the created world cannot function as a paradigm for constructing a concrete concept of God, because only one side of the relation is known by natural reason. The relation between God and the Universe can only be comprehended correctly by the light of faith, because faith possesses intuitive and experiential knowledge of God as he is in his divine being. Without faith, a human being will create a qualitatively false concept of God, as the divine reality differs es-

[43] Luther also emphasizes, that God is hidden under contraries in the concrete historical works he does, not only in the person of Christ. This means, that the purpose of the things he does is only understood afterwards, not when they are taking place. Examples of this are even the personal sufferings of the believer, see e.g. WA 56, 375, 1-378, 2; AWA 2, 61, 6-16; 179, 15-182, 8. The hiddenness of God is therefore not only ontological, but also pertains to historical processes and personal experiences of the Christians.

sentially from the empirically known finite reality. However, beside Luther's emphasis on spiritual experience as a source of theological knowledge, his view of God nevertheless seems to be greatly indebted to the Platonic tradition. One can therefore question whether the natural reason necessarily leads to such an Aristotelian and, in Luther's view, distorted concept of God as Luther thought it does. Maybe part of the conflict is actually explained by different paradigms of rationality and not by an insolvable contradiction between faith and reason.

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WA Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesammtausgabe*. (Weimar, 1883-)

Luther, Martin

AWA 2	D. Martin Luther Operationes in Psalmos 1519-1521
WA 1, 221-228	Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam. 1517.
WA 1, 350-374	Disputatio Heidelbergae habita. 1518.
WA 2, 433-618	In epistolam Pauli ad Galatas M. Lutheri commentarius. 1519.
WA 5	2. Psalmenvorlesung 1519/21 (Ps. 1 –22)
WA 7, 538-604	Das Magnificat verdeutschet und ausgelegt 1521.
WA 30, I, 125-665	Der große und kleine Katechismus Luthers
WA 39, I, 174-180	Die Disputation de homine. 1536.
WA 40, I	2. Galatervorlesung (cap. 1 –4) 1531
WA 42	Genesisvorlesung (cap. 1 –17) 1535/38
WA 55, I	1. Psalmenvorlesung 1513/15, Glossen
WA 55, II	1. Psalmenvorlesung 1513/15, Scholien
WA 56	Römervorlesung (Hs.) 1515/16
WA 57 a1-a108	Die erste Vorlesung über den Galaterbrief 1516/17.

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"SIGNS FOR A PEOPLE WHO REASON": RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND NATURAL THEOLOGY

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Abstract. In this paper, I examine various philosophical approaches to religious experience and natural theology and look at some ways in which the former might be relevant for the latter. I argue that by thinking more about oft-overlooked or -underemphasized understandings of a) what might constitute religious experience and b) what functions natural theology might serve, we can begin to develop a more nuanced approach to natural theological appeals to religious experience — one that makes use of materially mediated religious experience to develop a natural theology more sensitive to the varieties of experience of lived religion "on the ground".

I. INTRODUCTION

In some respects, the relationship of religious experience and natural theology is somewhat well-trodden territory. Much philosophical ink has been spilled on both *relata*, and the scholarly treatments of each individual *relatum* have also often either explicitly or implicitly touched on questions relevant to the other. Still, little has been written recently on the genuine points of connection between these two subjects of inquiry, in part due to the immense diversity of ways in which each term has been used in the literature.[1] Indeed, the way we choose to approach these concepts will have significant effects on the way we understand the relationship between them. In this essay, I hope to move the discussion forward by initially taking a few steps back. I thus begin by discussing a few issues regarding how 'religious experience' is to be understood, and I suggest a few new avenues for philosophical and theological

[1] Notable exceptions include Wynn (2013), Sudduth (2009b), and, to some extent, McGrath (2008).

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exploration. I then look at a few ways in which the term 'natural theology' can be employed and explore the question of how we might characterize the aim of natural theology. This discussion is followed by an examination of three ways in which religious experience may be relevant for natural theology. Ultimately I argue that it would be fruitful for analytic philosophy of religion to further expand its focus to include the somewhat underemphasized category of materially mediated religious experience and to explore its relevance for the natural theological enterprise.

II. WHAT IS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE?

There are many scholarly debates relevant to delineating the assortment of phenomena characterized in various contexts as 'religious experience', only a few of which can be discussed in detail here.[2] Most of these debates hinge on questions of what makes a religious experience *religious*, as opposed to some other kind of experience. Less commonly, questions arise regarding how best to understand the term 'experience' and what kinds of religious phenomena may fall under the experiential umbrella. In this section, I intend to briefly examine both questions, if only to point to the complexity of understanding what might be meant by the term 'religious experience'.

What Makes an Experience Religious?

One common and long-standing debate in the literature on religious experience is whether or not there is some common feature or set of fea-

[2] For example, I will not be discussing whether or not 'religious experience' is a success term (i.e., whether an experience will only count as a religious experience if it is actually caused by God or some other "religious" entity). Although this idea is motivated by the common analogy between religious experience and perception (and by a common grammatical use of the term 'experience'), there are also worries about viewing religious experience as a factive notion (cf. Griffioen 2017). The reader who wishes to use 'religious experience' in a veridical sense may substitute 'purported religious experience' for 'religious experience' throughout. Further, I do not have space here to consider the relationships between religious, mystical, and spiritual experience. Since the debates surrounding mystical experience tend to mirror those regarding religious experience, and since many mystical experiences occur in religious contexts, I will use the terms more or less synonymously in this paper, and I will largely drop all discussion of spiritual experience. This is not to say there are not relevant distinctions to be drawn here, only to note that doing so might take us too far afield.

tures shared by all religious experiences. *Perennialists* maintain that there is something common to the nature or phenomenology of religious experience — something unites all genuine cases of religious experience over space, time, and culture.[3] *Non-perennialists* — often proponents of some form of constructivism or other — deny this. So, for example, in §4 of *The Christian Faith* Friedrich Schleiermacher characterizes the essence of religion as containing a "feeling of absolute dependence" (Schleiermacher 1999: 12ff.). Similarly, Rudolf Otto insists that religious experience is, at its core, a non-conceptual, non-rational, ineffable experience of mysterium tremendum (cf. Otto 1958: 12). It is "a peculiar difference of quality in the mental attitude and emotional content of the religious life itself" (3), a "special way" of being "reflected in the mind in terms of feeling" that represents "the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion" (12). William Stace, on the other hand, distinguishes between "extrovertive" and "introvertive" mystical experiences of the unity of all things, both of which are taken to be universal (cf. Stace 1961: 79-86). Later scholars have spoken of so-called "pure conscious events" (cf., e.g., Forman 1997), in which the subject-object distinction is largely eliminated, and which they claim can be found across theistic and non-theistic traditions. The perennialist idea is thus that the "raw" mystical or religious experience is distinguishable from its interpretation (cf. Smart 1965), such that although figures in various traditions understand or relate their experiences under different descriptions, the underlying nature or quality of the experience is the same — and it is distinct from other kinds of experience.

However, the intuition that experiences are distinct from and prior to their interpretations might not be as plausible as one might think at first glance. Non-perennialists, especially those endorsing a so-called "constructivist" or "attributionalist" approach (e.g., Proudfoot 1985; Taves 2009), maintain that we cannot separate our experiences from the social, historical, linguistic, and conceptual frameworks that inform their interpretations. Instead, they claim, the cultures in which we are embedded and the concepts we inherit fundamentally underlie and shape the nature of our experience. In other words,

[3] Many perennialists also hold that the purported commonality is what makes the designation of an experience as *religious* appropriate.

experience and interpretation are inextricably intertwined. Thus, the non-perennialist denies the claim that individuals having religious experiences in different religious contexts are necessarily having the same sort of experience, allowing that, e.g., the religious experience of a 21st-century Christian in Western Europe might differ *essentially* from that of a 21st-century European Muslim or Buddhist, a 16th-century European Christian, or even a 21st-century Christian in West Africa. Likewise, two individuals who have visions of Jesus might have qualitatively different types of religious experience, depending, for instance, on whether one takes Jesus to be the Son of God or a non-divine prophet. Thus, whereas perennialists emphasize the *similarity* and *generality* of transcultural, transhistorical religious experiences, non-perennialists worry about the essentializing nature of such generalizing, focusing instead on the *diversity* and *particularity* of religious experiences as situationally embedded in place and time.

The view one adopts with respect to this debate regarding experience and interpretation has direct consequences for questions regarding religious experience's relationship to natural theology. Schleiermacher, for example, claims that the "feeling of absolute dependence […] is therefore not an accidental element, or a thing which varies from person to person, but is a universal element of life; and the recognition of this fact entirely takes the place, for the system of doctrine, of all so-called proofs of the existence of God" (Schleiermacher 1999: 133-4). In this sense, a theory of religious experience could actually supplant traditional natural theological arguments — either as a new form of natural theological argument, or as the end of natural theology altogether.[4] A slightly less radical claim is that the truth of perennialism could provide natural theologians with better justification for certain general theological claims, especially those concerning the existence of a higher reality. As Stephen Bush notes: "If perennialists are right that mystical experiences have a common core, then they can appeal to a wide variety of experiences from various traditions as rational justification for belief in the existence of what-

[4] The latter might also be compatible with Plantinga's (1980) "Reformed objection" to natural theology, assuming that some proper basic beliefs could be (non-inferentially) grounded in or even prominently expressed through religious experience. However, as we shall see below, Plantinga's rejection (or sidelining) of natural theology rests on a particular understanding of the term 'natural theology', which we may not be forced to accept.

ever reality they think the mystical experiences indicate" (Bush 2012: 102). This is not to say that a natural theologian who appeals to religious experience must embrace perennialism, as John Hick's work might show (cf., e.g., Hick 2006; 1984). Still, the perennialist may have an easier time of it when it comes to providing evidence for natural theological arguments from experience. Indeed, many such arguments appear to assume a kind of perennialism from the outset. Yet a focus on the radical plurality of religious experience may also have its benefits, as we shall see below.

What Kinds of Experiences Count?

Whatever position one ultimately endorses in the perennialist/non-perennialist debate, discussions of religious experience have — especially since the publication in 1902 of William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* — typically focused on the experiences of *particular individuals* that stand out in their lives or that they themselves identify (or would identify, if prompted) as somehow *special* or *unusual* (cf. Taves 2009: 5). These experiences are usually temporally *discrete* and *episodic*, taking place at a particular time and having a clearly-defined beginning and end. Of course, James himself is careful to note that his investigation looks specifically at what he calls "religious geniuses" to bring the phenomena he is examining into clearer focus. He is not interested in the "ordinary religious believer, who follows the conventional observances of his country." Such religious experience James calls "second-hand" and a matter of "dull habit", due to its being "suggested", "communicated […] by tradition", and "determined to fixed forms". Instead, he is interested in the kinds of "original experiences which were the pattern-setters" for such "second-hand" religion (James 2004: 19).

Further, although James may have played a large role in shaping the way scholars have approached religious experience, the emphasis on religious experience as largely individualistic, episodic, and life-changing goes at least as far back as 18th-century Lutheran pietism and was cemented in Western culture through such movements as English and European Romanticism, the Great Awakenings, and American Transcendentalism. Indeed, "Conversion" and "rebirth" narratives dominate much Western (especially Protestant) religious discourse. Moreover, many mystical and mystagogical traditions (which James also discusses) imply that the end of the "mystical path"

involves some sort of experiential union with God, thus also appearing to privilege the special nature of certain kinds of individual experiences. So, for many of us, this kind of "setting apart" of religious from ordinary experience might seem quite natural. Yet many — even most — people have never undergone drastic experiences of the kind described by James and likely never will. Still, it is not as though God is completely absent from their lives, nor is religious experience.

Even in Evangelical Christian traditions, with all their emphasis on dramatic and sudden religious experience, experience of God is often also sought in the everyday, as Tanya Luhrmann's close anthropological study of California "Vineyard Christian" communities attests. These believers, Luhrmann writes, have "an intense desire to experience personally a God who is as present now as when Christ walked among his followers in Galilee" (Luhrmann 2012: 13), and they pursue practices by which they can come to hear God's voice speaking to them as they go about their ordinary lives. Through engaging in playful-yet-sincere exercises — including activities like "chatting with God", "singing with God in the shower", or even planning a regular "date night" with God (80) — the Vineyard Christians strive to make hearing God's voice or feeling God's presence a regular and natural feature of their everyday experience. That such a skill must be developed also highlights the limitations of viewing religious experience as fundamentally discrete or episodic. In the case of the Vineyard Christians, even where adherents might point to specific events in which "the supernatural breaks through into the everyday" (56) and delivers a specific message, learning to recognize certain patterns (57) and coming to progressively re-orient one's inner affective dispositions (109) are crucial for being able to hear that message and ultimately form constituent parts of one's religious experience. "Hearing God's voice is a complex process," Luhrmann writes (60), one that itself arises *through experience*. Here, the relevant understanding of 'experience' is the same as that involved in becoming an "experienced wine-taster" or a "learned piano player". There is a diachronic, progressive aspect to religious experience understood in this way, and to focus solely on the particular, episodic "happenings" that arise out of such experience is to limit our investigation into the ways that religious experience may be relevant for natural theology, as I will discuss in more detail below.

In a similar vein, the various forms of religious *practice* communicated through tradition and cemented in culture — James' habitual, "second-hand" religion — both ground and shape the structure of the general experience of the ordinary religious faithful. Indeed, the mundane, habitual, embodied practices of religious adherents and the feelings and sensations that accompany them might be central to understanding religious experience. Moreover, such experience is not solely individualistic. Much of it represents a kind of experience that is intersubjective, communal, and otherwise *shared*.[5] Certainly, it relies on religious experience's being "communicated" and "determined to fixed forms", as James put it, but such social-historical communication and cultural determination of form is what allows communities to mutually experience and identify the objects set apart in the religious tradition to which they belong. Such forms are also dynamic and shift as communities imaginatively (re-)negotiate the boundaries of the religious concepts and objects that frame the nature of their shared experience.

There are more categories here worth of further discussion. For example, much of the focus on religious experience in the literature takes it to be largely a mental occurrence (e.g., Swinburne 2004: 293). Yet the body also plays a significant role in both discrete and diachronic religious experience of both special and mundane kinds (cf. Coakley 2009). Not only do bodily practices sometimes effect or even constitute religious experiences, mental religious experiences elicit strong bodily responses in the experiencer. Indeed, for some cases of religious experience we might think the body plays a more significant role than any particular mental attitude. Further, there is a question of whether only "positive" experiences should be under discussion in our treatments of religious experience. First, not all religious expe-

[5] One might admit that just as there is a sense in which certain groups may be said to "share" a culture or history, groups may also be characterized by a collectively-shared *experience*. Similarly, just as it seems plausible to make reference to collective beliefs, intentions, and actions, it does not seem out of place to talk about discrete collective *experience*s. We might even think that, in some cases, collective religious experience might display properties not reducible to the aggregate of those of its individual experiential "parts". In any case, little philosophical ink has, so far as I know, been spilled on either notion of "shared experience". Still, notable mentions of the former may be found in various discussions of identity politics (cf., e.g., Alcoff 2005: 278), and a brief examination of compassion moving in the direction of the latter can be found in Cates (1997: 140ff).

riences and emotions are positively valenced. Experiences of the demonic or those experiences of the Divine that elicit extreme fear, sadness, or even anger might plausibly count as religious experiences. Second, on a slightly different understanding of the positive-negative distinction, one might wonder whether religious experience must always involve the *presence* of some object, or whether experiences of transcendence, absence, or divine hiddenness might also be relevant subjects for discussions of religious experience.[6]

Given the above considerations, it is clear that the relevance of religious experience for natural theology has much to do with how 'religious experience' is understood. However, there is also substantial ambiguity in the term 'natural theology', and an examination of the various ways it has been used in the literature will likewise assist in our examination of how it is that religious experience might be significant for natural theology and vice versa.

III. WHAT IS NATURAL THEOLOGY?

Understandings of Natural Theology

There are many competing accounts of 'natural theology', both implicit and explicit, in the literature. In the Abrahamic traditions, the realm of natural theology has historically been delineated by contrasting it with "revealed" theology. Of course, the term 'revelation' itself is rather vague. Not only does it refer to the *content* of what is communicated; it is also used to denote the *act* of God's communicating that information, as well as the *medium* by which it is communicated (cf. Griffioen 2017). Thus, the distinction between natural theology and revealed theology depends largely on what sense of revelation is under discussion. A broad understanding of revealed theology claims that it contains those truths revealed to human beings via any sort of divine activity or theophany, including God's general creative and sustaining activity. A narrower and more common understanding reserves for revealed theology only those propositions purportedly conveyed via a special divine act of

[6] For a discussion of experiences of absence, see Farennikova (2013). See also Coakley (2009) for a discussion of the religious significance of so-called "apophatic" experiences and Turner (2005) for a treatment of religious experience as absence and its relevance for natural theology.

communication to particular persons at particular times — truths generally passed down in the holy texts or oral tradition of a particular religious tradition. On the latter understanding, then, natural theology contains those propositions accessible to human beings without recourse to Scripture or the testimony of the persons and traditions to and via which the propositions of revealed theology were purportedly communicated. Of course, on both the broad and narrow understandings, revealed theology may contain propositions that also fall under the purview of natural theology, though presumably the former additionally includes propositions not found in the latter.[7]

Yet even if we accept this rough characterization of natural theology, it is merely a way of getting at what natural theology is by talking about what it is *not*. When it comes to positively characterizing natural theology, there are at least two different general routes philosophers and theologians have adopted. The first places emphasis on *method*: Natural theology, they say, avails itself of *discursive rational argumentation* to arrive at theological conclusions. Yet even here, there are questions regarding what kinds of argumentation are acceptable: First, one might claim that what makes natural theology "natural" is its appeal to *empirical* facts about the natural world. Such approaches are likely to exclude or downplay *a priori* arguments like the Ontological Argument — an argument which some might take as a paradigm case of natural theological argumentation. Indeed, depending on how empirically-oriented such approaches become, they might even exclude certain forms of the *kalam* cosmological argument, whose premise that the universe has a beginning might not be "empirically robust" enough to pass muster. One might further ask whether appeals to pragmatic as well as theoretical reasoning could (or should) fall under the conceptual umbrella of natural theology.

A second approach to natural theology views it as involving theological knowledge or understanding arrived at via the use of one's *natural cognitive*

[7] It is less commonly discussed whether natural theology could contain propositions not found in revealed theology, yet this, too, seems conceivable, especially on the narrow understanding of the latter, since there could be truths about God knowable through reason that have, for providential reasons, not (yet) been revealed through any special divine act of communication. Further, many propositions of Classical Theism (e.g., 'God is impassible' or 'God is omnibenevolent') might not be explicitly (or even implicitly) stated in Scripture, such that natural theology might be said to go beyond revealed theology by filling in important hermeneutical "gaps" in the latter.

faculties. Thus, the "natural" aspect of natural theology comes not primarily through a focus on natural features of the universe but from the implementation of certain "natural" human capacities. Of course, this approach often overlaps with the methodological view, since engagement in rational argumentation requires the exercise of human reason.[8] Yet the faculty-centered approach to natural theology could also be broadened to include other capacities and ways of coming to know things, depending on what kinds of faculties one takes to constitute the "natural" ones. For example, if we think that emotional attitudes can reliably yield cognitive information, then theological truths arrived at via one's affective capacities might also be candidates for inclusion in natural theology. Further, the restriction of the "natural" to physical capacities might also be called into question. If it turns out God has universally endowed all human creatures with a *sensus divinitatis* or other "spiritual senses", where such senses may be said to belong properly to human beings, it might not seem so far-fetched to call such faculties "natural", even if they are not physically observable.

The approaches to natural theology laid out thus far tend to be intertwined (and thus sometimes run together in the literature). As with the term 'revelation', it is not always clear whether 'natural theology' refers primarily to a particular propositional content, a particular method or set of methods, or the medium or faculty employed. Usually it is some combination of these three. Thus, a very restricted understanding of natural theology might claim that natural theology is the set of true propositions about God which may be arrived at through the implementation of sound theoretical reasoning in the form of demonstrative argumentation, whereas a very wide understanding of natural theology might claim that it includes any and all cognizings of Ultimate Reality arrived at via the exercise of one's natural faculties without

[8] The website of the prestigious Gifford Lectures, for example, merges all of the above understandings of natural theology: "Traditionally natural theology is the term used for the *attempt to prove the existence of God and divine purpose* through *observation of nature* and the *use of human reason*. […] Natural theology is the part of theology that *does not depend on revelation*" (http://www.giffordlectures.org/overview/natural-theology, my emphasis). Sudduth (2009b) likewise defines natural theology as "rational arguments for the existence and attributes of God" but relates it essentially to "truths about God that may be known by the light of natural reason" and "natural knowledge of God" (214-15).

recourse to Scripture or testimony. And each of these options may be modified to include/exclude various considerations of the kind discussed above.

A final way we might understand natural theology departs in some ways from the above approaches. This is the approach that takes natural theology to represent something like a *theology of nature* (cf., e.g., Pannenberg 1993; Hendry 1980). Ian G. Barbour (2009) describes such a view as "proposing ways in which a God who is accepted on other [non-scientific] grounds […] might be reconceived as acting in nature" (34), whereas Azizan Baharuddin (2000) characterizes it as "a set of beliefs about God's relationship to the natural world" (614). Thus, theology-of-nature approaches do not reason from nature or natural faculties to the Divine but rather move from a theory of the Divine to conclusions about nature and the Divine's relation to it. Although both Barbour and Baharuddin distinguish theologies of nature from natural theology, it is worth keeping in mind that the two concepts are closely related and might have significant overlap — especially on certain understandings of the function or aim of natural theology.

What is the Aim of Natural Theology?

Ultimately, however, one might maintain that natural theology is as natural theology does. But what exactly does it do? What is it supposed to do? Here, there are various possibilities. One obvious answer is that natural theology aims at arriving at particular truths about God and the Divine — or, from the perspective of human inquiry, at *knowledge*. But this by itself might not be particularly helpful. For example, on the assumption that the most important theological truths are, in fact, reliably revealed in some particular religion, it might seem unnecessary to resort to natural theology to come to know these truths. Moreover, those engaged in natural theology seldom arrive at new or previously "undiscovered" theological truths. It is thus perhaps more productive to look at the *dialectical* function of natural theology.[9] Natural theology has been used as an *apologetic* tool to defend certain theological doctrines

[9] De Cruz & De Smedt (2015) provide an overview of the dialectical function of natural theology in the first chapter of their *Natural History of Natural Theology*. See also Sudduth (2009b) for a comprehensive discussion of the various functions of natural theology in the history of Protestant thought.

against criticism, as a *polemical* device to attack competing theological positions, and as a *persuasive* device to convince skeptics and doubters.

In the life of an individual believer or a particular religious faith, natural theology can also play a *clarificatory* role aimed at more carefully elucidating certain Scriptural concepts, or it may serve a *reconciliatory* function where there appear to be conflicts between revelation and reason. In such cases, natural theology may serve to provide one with greater *understanding* of what one already believes. It can be a way in which, to channel Anselm, *fides* can pursue *intellectum*.[10] Yet the function of natural theology need not be purely epistemological or even cognitive: It may be a means by which one could engender *love* or other relevant affective attitudes, since one might wonder whether or not one could truly love something one cannot — at least to some relevant extent — understand. In this vein, Alister McGrath (2008), claims that natural theology is about "resonance, not proof" (15): "[N]atural theology does more than attempt to make intellectual sense of our experience of nature, as if it were limited to the enhancement of a rationalist account of reality. It enables a deepened appreciation of nature at the imaginative and aesthetic level, and also raises questions about how the 'good life' can be undertaken within its bounds" (18). So perhaps natural theology can serve an affective, *aesthetic*, or *moral* function as well. It might even be used as a form of *prayer* or *worship* in certain contexts, one which itself might elicit or constitute certain kinds of religious experiences. However, in what follows I will look more closely at the ways in which religious experience might provide material for natural theology. It is to a discussion of this that I now turn.

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE TO NATURAL THEOLOGY

As we have seen in Parts II and III, the various understandings of both religious experience and natural theology make the task of showing the significance of the former for the latter a rather daunting one. In Part IV I wish to discuss three ways in which religious experience might be argued to be

[10] For a detailed discussion of the various intended functions of Anselm's *Proslogion*, from reflection to persuasion, see Part I of Visser and Williams (2009).

relevant to the enterprise of natural theology that rest on differing (though not always incompatible) approaches to these terms.

Religious Experience & Natural Theology I: Experience as Non-Inferential Grounds for Knowledge

I begin with a kind of appeal to religious experience that is often claimed to be independent of — and perhaps even at odds with — the natural theological enterprise. This is the claim that certain kinds of religious experience can provide immediate, non-inferential grounds for religious belief — belief which, if true, and if produced by a reliable mechanism, could count as knowledge. This kind of view has been endorsed most prominently by proponents of Reformed epistemology and often draws an analogy between religious experience and sense perception. William Alston (1993), for example, uses the term mystical perception to refer to cases in which subjects report "an experiential awareness of God," where "the awareness is direct" and "the awareness is reported to be of God" (14). Such experiences, Alston claims, may immediately and non-inferentially give rise to what he calls "M-beliefs", or "beliefs to the effect that God is doing something currently vis-a-vis the subject — comforting, strengthening, guiding, communicating a message, sustaining the subject in being — or to the effect that God has some (allegedly) perceivable property — goodness, power, lovingness" (1). A similar view is that put forward by Alvin Plantinga in his discussion of *properly basic beliefs*, which, he claims, may also arise immediately and non-inferentially from various forms of religious experience (cf. Plantinga 2000). Although Alston and Plantinga allow that there may be various forms of religious experience that occasion religious belief, both scholars focus most closely on the kinds of experience that look analogous to sense perception — at least insofar as, like perception, the relevant religious beliefs to which they give rise do not appear to be inferences drawn from evidence or the conclusions of some rational argument.

For this reason, both Alston and Plantinga contrast their views with what they take to be the natural theological enterprise. Yet their understanding of natural theology is centered on the methodological approach discussed above, on which natural theology proceeds discursively and inferentially by means of discursive argument or theoretical proof (cf. Plantinga 2000: 175;

Alston 1993: 289). At the same time, although Alston notes that the kinds of experiences he is considering are "non-sensory" in the sense of not being mediated by sensory perception (cf. Alston 1993: 5), and although Plantinga is willing to accept experiences of both a mediated and non-mediated kind as grounds for basic religious beliefs (cf. Plantinga 2000: 182ff.), in both cases it seems to be that there is some faculty, capacity, or set of "skills" by which the relevant forms of belief-grounding religious experiences are possible in human beings. Plantinga's recourse to the *sensus divinitatis* makes this claim explicit.[11] Indeed, he thinks that experientially grounded beliefs about God represent a kind of "natural knowledge". Thus he writes: "[T]his natural knowledge of God is not arrived at by inference or argument (for example, the famous theistic proofs of natural theology) but in a much more immediate way. The deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis* are not quick and *sotto voce* inferences from the circumstances that trigger its operation. […] They are occasioned by the circumstances […] not conclusions from them" (175). This "natural knowledge" is contrasted with the "non-natural" belief-producing process instigated by the Holy Spirit. The latter, he claims, is "not part of our original noetic equipment", whereas the former is "part of our original epistemic endowment" (Plantinga 2000: 180). In this sense, then, although Plantinga is keen to distinguish his project from that of natural theology, it is not incompatible with natural theology understood as a way of arriving at theological truths via the exercise of one's natural capacities (even if this might require the assistance of grace). Moreover, even though Plantinga himself raises some (historical, Reformed) objections to the methodological account of natural theology — namely that belief based solely on argument leads to a faith that is "unstable and wavering" (Plantinga 1980: 53) — his own view, as Michael Sudduth points out, "is properly speaking a denial of certain strong forms of theistic evidentialism, not natural theology" (Sudduth 2009a: 44). The proper basicality thesis ultimately says that "some theistic beliefs can

[11] Alston does speak of "perceptual skills" (91) and "spiritual discernment" (253), though these abilities have more to do with identifying or recognizing the object of awareness (as well as discerning forms of "true spirituality") than with creating the conditions for the awareness itself. Still, if the analogy between sense perception and mystical perception is to be a strong one, it would stand to reason that some faculty or capacity might need to be postulated to make sense of how non-sensory awarenesses of God can arise in the first place.

have some (perhaps highly exalted) positive epistemic status for some people under certain conditions in the absence of [methodological] natural theology" (44). Yet this leaves room for the possibility that natural theology could take other forms or perform alternative functions like those we mentioned above and that religious experience might have some role to play in natural theology understood in this way.

Of course, even if we admit that natural theology understood on the faculty-approach might be open to epistemologists of the Reformed persuasion who insist upon the *reasonableness* of non-inferentially grounded religious beliefs on the basis of certain kinds of religious experience, it is unlikely that either said Reformed epistemologists or dogmatically-entrenched methodological natural theologians (especially of the evidentialist persuasion) will be particularly happy with this characterization. Indeed, allowing natural theology to include religious beliefs formed on the basis of any natural faculty whatsoever might threaten to blur the distinction between revealed and natural theology, at least insofar as one takes much of revealed theology to stem from religious experiences of just the kind Alston and Plantinga are purporting to describe.[12] And this may be an unwelcome result to those for whom the distinction has theological significance.

Religious Experience & Natural Theology II: Experience as Evidence

A more common way in which religious experience has been employed for natural theological ends takes the form of various arguments from experience, in which *the fact that people have religious experiences* is taken to be evidence for the existence of God. Here, the focus is less on the faculty by which such experiences arise and more on the evidential force of people's having had certain kinds of experiences for arguments concerning God's existence and attributes. One of the most prominent arguments adopting such an approach is Swinburne's "argument from religious experience" in *The Existence of God*. Swinburne here understands 'religious experience' as "an experience that seems (epistemically) to the subject to be an experience of God (either of [God's] just being there, or of [God] saying or bringing about something) or of some other supernatural thing" (Swinburne 2004: 295). While aware

[12] It is, of course, unclear that special revelation has, in fact, usually taken this form.

that his definition rules out many other kind of purported religious experiences, including some of those we have discussed above, Swinburne notes that "only religious experiences of the kind that my definition picks out have apparent evidential value in pointing towards the existence of God, and that is why I am concerned with them alone" (295-6, Fn. 2). He delineates five relevant kinds of religious experience, two of which involve taking a public object "religiously" (a kind of "seeing-as") and three involving private subjective experiences of objects unavailable to other subjects at the time (298-301). Pointing to the "millions of human beings down the centuries" who have had religious experiences of these kinds, and noting that "for many people life is one vast religious experience," Swinburne appeals to the since widely-discussed Principles of Credulity (303ff.) and Testimony (322ff.) to argue that the fact of widespread religious experience can provide us with (defeasible) evidence for the existence of God.

Arguments of this kind look much more recognizable as natural theology because they involve inferential, argumentative reasoning from premises centered on the fact that people have religious experiences of certain kinds to theological claims about the existence of God. Similar appeals to religious experience could also serve to bolster further natural theological arguments about the attributes and nature of God, as well as various other theological doctrines (cf. Sudduth 2009b: 224-5). Of course, appeals to religious experience in natural theological argumentation have certain limitations. First, natural theological arguments from religious experience might only be able to serve particular (epistemological) functions. Certainly such arguments may be used in apologetic and polemical contexts, and they may serve clarificatory or confirmatory purposes, on the assumption that appeals to religious experience claiming that God is such-and-such can extend or solidify our beliefs about what God is really like (or how God prefers to reveal Godself to human beings). Yet it is unlikely that they can contribute to understanding in the sense of *fides quarens intellectum* as discussed above. While an individual's *own* religious experience may do this, arguments from religious experience are unlikely to do so. It is still possible that the argument may make someone more receptive to viewing their experiences of nature or other objects as divinely inspired, so perhaps it could "open one up imaginatively" to particular conceptions of God, but it could also have the opposite effect:

For someone who has yet to experience God, the fact that others appear to interact personally with God while God remains hidden from oneself could lead to resentment or even skepticism.

This leads to another question regarding what kinds of experiences are under discussion in these arguments. On the one hand, an argument based on somewhat more perennialist understandings of religious experience might claim that the fact that people have religious experiences of a certain *qualitative* kind — experiences with particular phenomenal features — makes the hypothesis that, e.g., God exists more probable than competing hypotheses, or raises the probability that there is an afterlife, and so on. On the other hand, the claim might be that it is the *content* of the experiences that is most relevant to natural theology, such that the fact that people have experiences as *of God* (be they mediated or not, perceptual or not, episodic or not) is what lends evidential support to such hypotheses.[13] Of course, in lived experience the two are not usually neatly separable. Still, being sensitive to this conceptual distinction may be important for the natural theological enterprise. Further, the fact that reports of religious experience vary widely and (at least appear to be) radically diverse may lend itself just as well to natural theological arguments *against* the existence of any particular God, especially if one has doubts about phenomenal perennialism. And given the fact that those who have religious experiences understood in terms of content "typically have a prior belief in God or extensive exposure to a theistic religion," one might even think that this "is just what one would expect on naturalism, while it is surprising on theism" (Draper 2002: 205).

[13] Cp. Alston (1993) on this point: "Nevertheless, we can group phenomenally diverse experiences together […] in terms of the *content of beliefs* to which they give rise: beliefs about perceivable features and activities of God. This puts us in a position to form the concept of a *single doxastic practice*, the inputs of which are experiential, and the outputs of which are M-beliefs" (186, my emphasis). However, in contrast to constructivists like Proudfoot, Alston wants to adopt a theory of perception "that gives us a *chance* to find common phenomenal features of mystical perception across cultures" (187). "To be sure," he notes, "to discern a commonality in phenomenal content, we must be able to distinguish this from the conceptualization to which it is subjected. But […] on my view, the fact of X's appearing to S as φ is, in principle, independent of any conceptualization or judgment, independent of S's *taking* X to be φ or believing or judging X to be φ, or even thinking of X as φ" (186).

It is also worth mentioning that the focus in analytic religious epistemology in general is yet again on religious experience understood as a kind of direct, discrete, "special" kind of experience. And while this certainly doesn't speak against including such experiences as relevant to natural theology, one might think that the rather myopic focus on religious *epistemology* has in part driven philosophical discussions of the *metaphysics* of religious experience. That is, in their desire to locate types of religious experience that lend themselves well to natural theological argument, analytic philosophers of religion have shaped the arena of discourse concerning the nature of religious experience, focusing almost exclusively on a very restricted set of experiences.[14] Certainly, Alston, Plantinga, and Swinburne all make room for experience understood in a broader sense, but the role that mundane, diachronic, and collective religious experience plays in the religious life is minimized in favor of dramatic, episodic, quasi-perceptual religious experiences. Yet these latter kinds of religious experience are, in the grand scheme of things, relatively rare. Indeed, many versions of the so-called "argument from divine hiddenness" take as their starting point the relative *absence* of such religious experience, even amongst those who would welcome such experiences. As Michael Rea (2009) puts it: "[M]any people — believers and unbelievers alike — have never had an experience that seems to them to be a direct experience or awareness of the love or presence of God; and those who do have such experiences have them rarely" (76).

In any case, a natural theology that focuses solely on religious experiences of the special, perceptual kind fails to do justice to many significant experiential aspects of lived religion and might thereby unnecessarily restrict the force of its arguments. Thus, in the interest of natural theology, I suggest philosophers shift their focus to another much-overlooked aspect of many religious experiences that may be conducive to the expansion and exercise of the positive natural theological enterprise. In the next section, I turn to an examination of an oft-ignored aspect of many religious experiences, attention to which might give natural theologians a further direction in which to take their arguments from experience. This is the category of *materially mediated religious experience*.

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[14] See also Coakley's (2009) discussion of the limits of Swinburne's view (289ff.).

Religious Experience & Natural Theology III: Toward a More Natural Experience of the Natural World

The idea that religious experience is often — perhaps even usually — *mediated* was brought most prominently to attention by George Mavrodes (1970) and has been taken up again more recently by C. Stephan Evans (2011; 2010; 1985), Mark Wynn (2013; 2012; 2009), and David Brown (2004), among others. Now, to be sure, there is an obvious (though not entirely insignificant) sense in which most or all religious experience might be mediated: First, we are embodied creatures, and we might think that all of our experience is thus in some way necessarily mediated by the body. Second, theistic experience, or the experience of God, is often implicitly taken to constitute a form of divine expression, self-revealing, or other means of *communication*. Yet communication necessarily requires a *medium* by which the relevant information is communicated. (Certainly, it is at least conceivable that God could directly "infuse" someone's mind with particular information, such that the causal process circumvents the bodily senses, but even this kind of "direct" awareness of God would be produced by the medium of infusion.[15]) Indeed, although the philosophers we have discussed thus far will often speak of religious experience as "direct" and "immediate", they do not appear to mean to be speaking of wholly unmediated experience.[16] The "directness" feature of religious experience appears to have more to do with the fact that the object of experience is not perceived through the perception of any other object (cf. Alston 1993: 21). The "immediacy" aspect, on the other hand, seems to have more to do with the fact that one's beliefs about the object of the experience are claimed to arise non-inferentially. "Immediacy" thus appears to refer to the (psycho-)logical proximity of experience and belief, not to a lack of mediation. In any case, it appears possible to have direct, immediate experiences of a mediated kind (cf. Evans 1985: 87). Still, a more interesting kind of mediated experience for our purposes here is that of *materially* mediated

15 Cp. medieval discussions of angelic knowledge as infused (e.g., Goris 2012).

16 Alston himself says as much, when he notes that in "direct perception" (including direct perception of God), one "is aware of X through a state of consciousness that is distinguishable from X, and can be made an object of absolutely immediate awareness, but is not perceived". This "mediated immediacy" is distinguished from "absolute immediacy" and "mediate perception" (Alston 1993: 21-22).

religious experience. This kind of experience is certainly not foreign to religious contexts. In fact, given the wide variety of forms such experience may take, it likely represents the most common kind of religious experience. It is this kind of experience I wish to explore more thoroughly in the remainder of this paper.

The notion of nature as providing "signs" of God and God's activity is prominent in the Abrahamic traditions. "The heavens are telling the glory of God", Psalm 19:1 (NRSV) declares, "and the firmament proclaims [God's] handiwork". Likewise, Surah 45 of Quran states:

> "Indeed, within the heavens and earth are *signs for the believers*. […] And [in] the alternation of night and day and [in] what Allah sends down from the sky of provision and gives life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and [in Allah's] directing of the winds are *signs for a people who reason*. […] And [Allah] has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth — all from [Allah]. Indeed in that are *signs for a people who give thought*" (Sahih International Translation, my emphasis).

Similarly, an extra-Qur'anic *hadith qudsi* quoted in many Sufi mystical texts has God proclaiming: "I was a hidden treasure, I desired to be known, I created creation that I might be known".[17] Seyyed Hossein Nasr further elaborates on this idea of creation as containing "signs" of the Divine:

> [I]n the Quran both the phenomena of nature and the verses of the Quran are called *āyāt*, or symbols and signs, each conveying a meaning beyond itself. Every *āyah*, besides its outward meaning, has a symbolic and inward significance. Every cosmic phenomenon is both a fact and a symbol of a noumenon […] The universe is constituted of theophanies; the cosmos is a set of symbols to be contemplated and a means to reach the Symbolized, a book to be read and understood in both its outward and inward meanings. (Nasr 2007: 46-47)

In the idea of God as both "hidden" and "manifest" in the phenomena of nature, we see a few ways in which a materially mediated religious experience of nature and the enterprise of natural theology may be related. First, the experience of nature may provide one with "natural signs" of God's existence, attributes, and creative activity, which are immediately recognizable to those who "use reason" or "give thought". Or the features of nature we

17 Quoted in Baharuddin (2000), 616.

experience may enter into inferential arguments of a natural theological kind. Evans (2011; 2010), too, has pointed out the ways in which our experiences of nature could — both inferentially and non-inferentially — serve as grounds for religious beliefs. He cites the case of one's experiencing the intricacy of a flower:

> Some people might well infer God's reality from [certain properties the flower has], by way of […] cosmological or teleological arguments for God's existence. […] However, […] spiritually seasoned observers of the world might experience God through the flower without any kind of inference. Such persons, we might say, are able to see the world as God's handiwork; they are able to 'read' what some theologians have called the 'book of nature,' a manifestation or revelation from God distinct from those particular events and experiences that are inscribed in inspired, revealed writings […]. (Evans 2011: 44).

Thus one may take the "signs" of nature given in experience as a starting point for discursive, rational argumentation, or one may simply come to "see" the truth of certain religious propositions by employing one's natural faculties.

Of course, although such appeals to religious experience may serve dialectical purposes, the experiences themselves may further function to express, strengthen, or renew one's faith through the implementation of our (most natural) capacities. They may provide one with a theology of nature that, as al-Ghazālī proposed, contributes both speculatively to the elucidation or understanding of certain religious doctrines and affectively to the all-encompassing love of God through God's "findableness" in nature (cf. Baharuddin 2000: 617, 631). And although experiences of nature are often individual and episodic in nature, for the seasoned religious believer — one who sees through a religious "lens", as it were — such religious experience may not be sudden, dramatic, or otherwise "special" but may be experienced in nearly everything one encounters. That is, such experiences may also be commonplace and mundane, but this does not speak against their usefulness in natural theological contexts. Finally, these and similar experiences may be positively or negatively valenced and could even include certain "apophatic" experiences, in which one becomes aware through the experience that the Divine wholly transcends the objects of one's experience (cp. Yadav 2016).

Other forms of materially mediated experience are relevant here, too. Experiences of, e.g., sacred space or music may take a somewhat different form than religious experiences of natural signs. As Mark Wynn writes:

> [Such experience can be] a way of cognizing the meaning which attaches to a localized material context, and of cognizing thereby the meaning which attaches to a more broadly defined cosmological or metaphysical context. It is, we could say, a matter of learning how to assign an appropriate significance to individual things in their material context, rather than a matter of coming to apprehend a further and rather special individual thing. (Wynn 2013: 333)

Wynn further notes that such forms of experience may be especially relevant for natural theology insofar as they invite "a certain conception of God, namely, as an overarching meaning, rather than as a supernatural 'object', and also a correlative epistemology, one which gives due acknowledgement to the sense-making capacities of the human body and of affective responses in particular" (Wynn 2013: 334). Moreover, these kinds of experience, as well as the bodily experiences of religious narrative expressed through ritual and liturgy, may move the discourse on religious experience to forms of collective and temporally extended experience — to the socio-historical, intersubjectively-informed experience of the faithful as a whole — as opposed to merely focusing on the discrete and largely esoteric experiences of relatively few individuals. Such experiences are more widespread (more "perennial", in one sense), and they reflect more fully the lived, interpreted experience of religion "on the ground". This is a promising direction for a natural theology making appeal to religious experience — one which has the potential to move the discourse in productive directions. First, it makes room for the role of the body in religious experience. Second, it may provide new and exciting ways to counter arguments from divine hiddenness.[18] Finally, it creates space for natural theology to engage with a wide range of religious cultures and experiential traditions, opening up space for renewed and engaged interreligious discourse — especially, perhaps, on matters of special global and

[18] See, for example, Michael Rea's (2009) answer to the aforementioned problem of the absence of religious experience in hiddenness arguments by pointing to "the possibility of mediated experiences of the presence of God through media that are themselves widely and readily accessible" (88).

environmental concern. By widening (and deepening) our understanding of religious experience, then, we may perhaps employ the tools of methodological natural theology to arrive at an evidentially-sensitive, experientially-based theology of nature that can inform concerted, cooperative action on issues that have far too long been ignored or combatively resisted by certain religious factions.[19]

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A COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST PHYSICALISM

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Abstract. In this article, I present a Leibnizian cosmological argument to the conclusion that *either* the totality of physical beings has a non-physical cause, *or* a necessary being exists. The crucial premise of the argument is a restricted version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, namely the claim that *every contingent physical phenomenon has a sufficient cause* (PSR-P). I defend this principle by comparing it with a causal principle that is fundamental for physicalism, namely the Causal Closure of Physics, which says that *every physical effect has a sufficient physical cause* (CC). I find that the evidence for Causal Closure is weaker than the evidence for PSR-P, which means that physicalists who take CC to be justified must concede that PSR-P is also justified, and to a higher degree. Since my Leibnizian cosmological argument succeeds if PSR-P is granted, I conclude that physicalists must either give up CC and thereby physicalism, or accept that a necessary being exists.

1. INTRODUCTION

Leibnizian cosmological arguments have two parts. The first part aims to establish the existence of a necessary being, and the second part argues that the necessary being is God.[1] Most of the debates concerning Leibnizian arguments have focused on the first part, and especially on what many take to be its crucial premise: the so-called Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). This principle comes in several different versions, for example the claim that *every contingent being has a cause of its existence*, or that *every contingent fact has an explanation*. The impor-

[1] William L. Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), pp. 5-6. See also Alexander Pruss, "The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley- Blackwell, 2012), pp. 25-26.

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tance of the PSR for the success of the cosmological argument is widely acknowledged. "Indeed, despite some notable dissent", writes Alexander Pruss, "it now appears generally established that once one grants an appropriate version of the PSR, it follows that there is a necessary first cause of the cosmos".[2] The problem for cosmological arguers, however, is that PSR is not a very popular principle today. Many philosophers reject even weak modal versions of it, such as the claim that every contingent fact *possibly* has an explanation.[3]

The step-motherly treatment of the PSR in contemporary philosophy can be contrasted with the great popularity that another causal principle enjoys, namely the Principle of the Causal Closure of the Physical (CC). Roughly, this principle states that every physical effect has a physical cause — a claim that many philosophers view as very plausible. While the CC by itself is compatible with the existence of non-physical entities and even non-physical causes of physical effects (due to the possibility of causal overdetermination), the principle is often viewed as a crucial premise in arguments for physicalism.[4]

The difference in popularity between PSR and CC makes it interesting to compare the two principles with respect to evidential support. What is the evidence for them, respectively? The CC, according to David Papineau, is a "highly empirical claim". "There is nothing conceptually contradictory in the idea that physical phenomena may be effected by non-physical causes, as Descartes supposed, for example. So the causal closure of physics, if true, must somehow follow from the findings of science".[5] The PSR, on the other hand, is often defended by reference to a priori considerations, and it is even regarded as self-evident by some philosophers.[6]

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[2] Alexander R Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 4.

[3] Graham Oppy, "On 'a New Cosmological Argument'," *Religious Studies* 36, no. 03 (2000): 345-353.

[4] Daniel Stoljar, "Physicalism," http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/physicalism/, Section 17; David Papineau, *Thinking About Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 232-233.

[5] David Papineau, "The Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Brian McLaughlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 60, 55.

[6] For example, Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason*, chap. 11.

In this article, I am going to compare the two principles with respect to the degree of support they each receive from empirical and other evidence. More specifically, I am going to argue that a version of the PSR, which I will call PSR-P, receives at least an equal amount of empirical confirmation from the success of science as does the CC, so that the two principles are roughly equivalent considered as empirical hypotheses. The PSR-P, however, is also supported by two transcendental arguments that significantly increase its prior probability.

I will then show that this epistemic situation should cause deep concern for physicalists. The price they have to pay for their claim that CC is empirically justified, is that they have to concede that PSR-P is also justified, and to a higher degree than CC. And, as I will go on to show, the PSR-P can underpin a cosmological argument that establishes *either* the existence of a non-physical cause of the totality of physical beings, *or* the existence of a necessary being. Both sides of this disjunction are more or less unattractive for physicalists. The first side, because it contradicts CC and physicalism. The second side, because the idea of a necessary being is much less at home in a physicalist than in a non-physicalist (e.g. theistic) worldview. Unless this were true, it would be hard to understand why the first part of the traditional cosmological argument has received so much critical attention.

2. THE PRINCIPLE OF CAUSAL CLOSURE REFINED

David Papineau suggests the following refined version of the CC: "Every physical effect has an immediate sufficient physical cause, in so far as it has a sufficient immediate cause at all".[7] Papineau's main concern, which he shares with many defenders of the CC, is to formulate a principle that excludes irreducibly mental causes of bodily behavior. This is why his formulation includes the qualifications "immediate" and "sufficient". Just to say that every physical effect has a sufficient physical cause would be compatible with the existence of physical causes that produce their effects only via non-physical intermediaries. In order to rule this out, the CC must require that the physical cause of any physical effect be *immediate*. Furthermore, unless the physical cause is *sufficient*, it cannot be ruled out that

[7] Papineau, "The Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism", p. 59. There seems to be a mistake in Papineau's first formulation of this principle on p. 59. When he quotes his own formulation further down at the same page, the wording is different in a crucial respect, and the second version seems to express what Papineau intends.

some physical causes need to be complemented by irreducibly mental causes if certain physical effects are to come about.

A "sufficient cause", however, cannot be understood (in all cases) as a cause that fully determines its effect. Modern quantum mechanics tells us that certain effects are random. Still, quantum theory "specifies that random physical effects have their *probabilities* fixed by sufficient immediate causes", according to Papineau.[8] So we might understand a "sufficient cause" to mean "a cause that either fully determines its effect or fully determines the chances of its possible effects".[9] According to Papineau, this means that "the appearance that quantum indeterminacy creates room for sui generis non-physical causes … to exert a 'downward influence' on the physical realm" is illusory.[10] Such sui-generis mental causes would have to affect the probabilities of their physical effects, but these probabilities are already fixed by sufficient physical causes.

While Papineau formulates the CC-thesis in terms of "physical effects", Barbara Montero speaks instead of "physical phenomena": "Every physical phenomenon that has a sufficient cause has a sufficient physical cause".[11] By a physical cause, Montero means a cause that is "physical through and through", which excludes non-physical intermediaries. Montero also shares Papinueau's understanding of what it means for a cause to be "sufficient", namely, that it fixes the probabilities of its effects. Montero's and Papineau's formulations of the CC, therefore, seem to be equivalent, provided that we (quite naturally) take the terms "physical effect" and "physical phenomenon that has a cause" to be equivalent.

Papineau's/Montero's version of the CC-thesis seems to be the weakest version that can underpin an argument for physicalism. If this version is granted, the only way for non-physicalists to block an argument to the causal impotence of non-physical phenomena is by claiming that certain physical phenomena (e.g. human actions) are causally overdetermined by distinct causes in a systematic way, which can seem to be a far-fetched position.[12] Given the causal impotence of

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8 Papineau, "The Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism", p. 59.

9 Barbara Montero, "Varieties of Causal Closure," in *Physicalism and Mental Causation: The Metaphysics of Mind and Action*, ed. Sven Walter and Heinz-Dieter Heckmann (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2003), p. 174.

10 Papineau, "The Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism", p. 59.

11 Montero, "Varieties of Causal Closure", p. 174.

12 E.J. Lowe, however, has a different view, see his "Physical Causal Closure and the Invisibility of Mental Causation," in *Physicalism and Mental Causation: The Metaphysics of Mind*

non-physical phenomena, it follows that at least a part of the mind — the part that causes behavior, if there is such a part — must be physical. This leaves open, at best, the rather moot possibility that a causally non-efficacious part of the mind could be non-physical. Stronger versions of the CC exist, but those are more difficult to defend.[13] I will therefore work with Papineau's/Montero's version. For clarity, I will use the following formulation:

(CC): Every physical phenomenon that has a sufficient cause has a sufficient physical cause.

For the purpose of this paper, it will not be necessary to address the question of how to define "physical". Physicalists are committed to the meaningfulness of the predicate "is physical", and — if physicalism is to be a metaphysically interesting claim that conflicts with (e.g.) substance dualism — physicalists are also committed to defining "physical" in a way that excludes irreducibly mental phenomena from being counted as physical.[14]

3. THE PRINCIPLE OF SUFFICIENT REASON RESTRICTED TO PHYSICAL PHENOMENA (PSR-P)

A principle of sufficient reason can be formulated in terms of explanation or in terms of causation. Since cosmological arguments (where the PSR originally belongs) are concerned with explaining the existence of *concrete* beings (or facts that involve concrete beings), the kind of explanation that is relevant is causal explanation. To provide a causal explanation is to point to a cause. In this article, I will use "causes" and "causally explains" interchangeably. The version of PSR I will defend, and compare with CC, is this:

PSR-P: Every (contingent) physical phenomenon has a sufficient cause.[15]

By "sufficient cause" I mean, like Papineau, a cause that only needs to fix the *probability* of its effect in order to count as "sufficient". This means that a common

and Action (Exeter, UK: Imrpint Academic, 2003), pp. 145-154.

13 See Montero, "Varieties of Causal Closure", pp. 174-175.

14 See Montero, "Varieties of Causal Closure", pp. 178-180.

15 I have inserted "contingent" to leave open the possibility that a necessary physical phenomenon exists. The qualification "contingent" will hereafter sometimes be left out.

objection to Leibnizian cosmological arguments — namely, that the existence of a sufficient reason or cause for every "contingent" phenomenon would actually do away with all contingency — is bypassed.[16] Moreover, since the PSR-P is restricted to *physical* phenomena, the mentioned "modal fatalism" objection misses its mark also for this reason. Even if every *physical* phenomenon would have a deterministic sufficient cause, this would not entail that *every* phenomenon has such a cause, so modal fatalism does not follow. Furthermore, the possibility of libertarian free choices is not threatened by PSR-P, even if humans are wholly physical beings, so long as sufficient causes can be probabilistic. Neither is quantum indeterminacy contradicted by PSR-P, any more than it is contradicted by CC.[17]

It could be argued that the restriction of PSR-P to the physical domain is arbitrary. But this objection cannot be delivered by defenders of CC, since the CC itself is restricted in the same way. The PSR-P can, however, rightly be accused of involving a nebulous term, "physical phenomena". Since this term also figures in CC, I will keep it for now in the interest of comparability, and replace it with a more precise notion later, when need for this arises.

4. EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR CC

David Papineau has summarized the empirical case for CC in terms of two interdependent arguments. Before I present those arguments, it is necessary to mention a third argument which was once popular, but which does not hold water, namely *The Argument from Conservation Laws*. It contends that the existence of physical conservation laws is incompatible with the existence of non-physical causes of physical events. However, as Papineau points out, the conservation of kinetic and potential energy is clearly consistent with the existence of non-physical forces, provided that those forces are governed by deterministic laws that guarantee that any kinetic energy that they "borrow" will always be "paid back".[18]

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[16] For this objection, see for example Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 202-204; Jordan Howard Sober, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against Beliefs in God* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 217-227.

[17] For more elaborate responses to these last two objections, see Pruss, "The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument", pp. 54-56, 58.

[18] Papineau, *Thinking About Consciousness*, pp. 248-249. See also Lowe, "Physical Causal Closure and the Invisibility of Mental Causation", pp. 137-140. It can also be questioned

Here are the two arguments endorsed by Papineau and (if not whole-heartedly) by Montero:

(1) *The Argument from the Explanatory Success of Science*. Papineau writes:

> "This is the argument that all apparently special forces characteristically *reduce* to a small stock of basic physical forces which conserve energy. Causes of macroscopic accelerations standardly turn out to be composed of a few fundamental physical forces which operate throughout nature. So, while we ordinarily attribute certain physical effects to 'muscular forces', say, or indeed to 'mental causes', we should recognize that these causes, like all causes of physical effects, are ultimately composed of the few basic physical forces".[19]

In more general terms, we may put the argument like this: The success of science has shown that a wide variety of physical phenomena are explainable in terms of physical causes (fundamental forces). Therefore, all physical phenomena are explainable in terms of physical causes, in so far as those phenomena are explainable at all (CC).[20]

(2) *The Argument from Lack of Anomalies*. Papineau writes:

> "The earlier argument suggested that most natural phenomena, if not all, can be explained by a few fundamental physical forces. This focused the issue of what kind of evidence would demonstrate the existence of extra mental or vital forces. For once we know which other forces exist, then we will know which anomalous accelerations would indicate the presence of special mental or vital forces. Against this background, the argument … is then simply that detailed modern research has failed to uncover any such anomalous physical processes".[21]

This argument supports CC by arguing for the non-existence of non-physical causes. If we have reason to believe that no non-physical causes exist,

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whether non-physical causal agency necessarily requires the existence of non-physical fundamental forces.

[19] Papineau calls this argument "the argument from fundamental forces", Papineau, *Thinking About Consciousness*, p. 250.

[20] A different version of this argument has been formulated by Montero in terms of the completeness of physics. Premise 1): If CC were false, then physics would be necessarily incomplete. Premise 2): Physics is not necessarily incomplete. Hence, CC is true. If Premise 2 is plausible, it is so because of the success of physics, and Montero calls this argument an argument "from the success of science" (Montero, "Varieties of Causal Closure", 177-180).

[21] Papineau calls this an "argument from direct physiological evidence", Papineau, *Thinking About Consciousness*, p. 253.

then we have reason to believe that all physical phenomena that have a cause have a physical cause (CC). Papineau claims that we have reason to believe that no non-physical causes exist, not simply because we lack evidence for the existence of such causes, but because if such causes existed, they could be expected to manifest themselves by producing events that are anomalous in relation to our knowledge of physical forces. It is hence the lack of (frequent) anomalous occurrences, in this sense, that gives us reason to believe that no non-physical causes exist, and hence that CC holds.[22]

I am now going to argue that the circumstances that these two arguments appeal to in support of CC (the success of science and the lack of anomalies) provide evidential support for PSR-P to roughly the same extent as they do for CC. Since the degree of confirmation that a particular piece of evidence provides for a claim depends both on the claim's prior probability and on the claim's explanatory power in relation to the evidence,[23] I will discuss these two factors in turn, starting with prior probabilities.

5. THE (RELATIVE) PRIOR PROBABILITIES OF CC AND PSR-P

The prior probability of a claim or hypothesis — that is, the claim's "probability before we consider the detailed evidence of observation cited in its support" — depends on how well the claim fits with background knowledge, how simple it is, and how large or narrow scope it has.[24]

Fit with background knowledge can seem to be an irrelevant factor in the present case. Recall that Papineau's arguments appeal to "the success of science" as evidence for CC. This means that the totality of scientific knowledge cannot be counted as background knowledge when we try to assess the prior probabilities of CC and PSR-P, because this knowledge is what Papineau

[22] In fact, a stronger version of CC is entailed by the absence of non-physical forces, namely a thesis that says that physical effects have *only* physical causes. Lowe has a counter argument to the Argument from Lack of Anomalies, see Lowe, "Physical Causal Closure and the Invisibility of Mental Causation", especially pp. 150-151.

[23] The "explanatory power" of a hypothesis can be understood in Bayesian terms as the probability of the evidence given the hypothesis, divided by the prior probability of the evidence. See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chap. 6.

[24] Swinburne, *Existence of God*, p. 53.

proposes as "the detailed evidence of observation". If there is any background knowledge that is relevant for the prior probabilities of CC and PSR-P in this context, it must be something else. Below I will argue that there is indeed very relevant background knowledge of a general kind to take into account, background knowledge that significantly increases the prior probability of PSR-P. But let us ignore "fit with background knowledge" for now, and focus on the other two determinants of prior probability, namely simplicity and scope.

Taken together, simplicity and scope determine the "intrinsic probability" of a hypothesis, the probability that it can be said to have *a priori*. Both CC and PSR-P are clearly very simple claims, and only two things distinguish them in this regard. First, CC makes a more specific claim than PSR-P in so far as CC ascribes a sufficient *physical* cause to physical phenomena, while PSR-P just says that physical phenomena have of cause *of some kind*. Second, the CC is a more qualified statement in so far as it only ascribes a sufficient physical cause to a certain sub-set of physical phenomena, namely those phenomena that have a sufficient cause. This leaves open the possibility that some physical phenomena might not have a sufficient cause. This qualification makes CC, arguably, somewhat less simple than PSR-P, which speaks unqualifiedly about "every (contingent) physical phenomenon".

The *scope* of a claim or a hypothesis has to do with "how much [it] purports to tell us about the contingent features of the world".[25] This obviously affects *a priori* probability. "In so far as [a claim] purports to apply to more and more objects and to tell you more and more about them, it is less probable. Clearly the more you assert, the more likely you are to make a mistake."[26]

It is difficult to compare the scopes of CC and PSR-P. The scope of CC is larger in so far as CC purports to tell us more about the nature of the causes that physical phenomena have. It is clearly more risky to claim that physical phenomena have a physical cause than to simply claim that they have a cause of some kind. In this respect, CC has larger scope than PSR-P (the former purports to tell us more about contingent features of the world). On the other hand, the scope of PSR-P is larger in so far as it purports to say something

[25] Paul Draper, "Natural Selection and the Problem of Evil", Section 2, http://infidels.org/library/modern/paul_draper/evil.html (accessed Feb 17, 2016).

[26] Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, p. 55.

about *all* (contingent) physical phenomena, while the CC only purports to say something about those physical phenomena that have a sufficient cause.

However, defenders of CC have reason to believe that the set of physical phenomena that have a sufficient cause is not *much* smaller than the set of *all* physical phenomena. Unless the great majority of physical phenomena have a sufficient cause, the success of science would be very unlikely. Normal scientific induction therefore seems to lead us to the conclusion that the great majority of physical phenomena have a sufficient cause. It is possible, of course, that causeless physical phenomena are very unevenly distributed throughout the universe, so that they are very common in parts of the universe that are presently beyond our reach. But if it is admitted that this possibility undermines the conclusion that the great majority of physical phenomena have a sufficient cause, then it must also be admitted that the same possibility undermines CC. Perhaps physical phenomena that have only *non*-physical causes are very unevenly distributed throughout the universe, so that they are much more common in parts of the universe that are presently beyond our reach? Since defenders of CC do not want to admit that the latter possibility undermines their inductive argument for CC, they cannot claim that the possibility of uneven distribution undermines the inductive argument for the conclusion that the great majority of physical phenomena have a sufficient cause. And if the great majority of physical phenomena have a sufficient cause, then it follows that the set of physical phenomena that have a sufficient cause is not much smaller than the set of *all* physical phenomena.

This means that defenders of CC must admit that the number of phenomena that CC makes a claim about is not much smaller than the number of phenomena that PSR-P makes a claim about. This, in turn, means that the scope of CC is not much smaller than the scope of PSR-P with respect to the number of phenomena that the two principles make a claim about.

It could be argued, then, that the total scope of CC is larger than that of PSR-P. A principle that claims that all physical phenomena that have a sufficient cause have a sufficient physical cause seems to make a riskier claim, ceteris paribus, than a principle that says that all physical phenomena have *some kind* of sufficient cause — given the commonly agreed understanding that the great majority of physical phenomena actually have a sufficient cause.

I will not make this argument, however. It is unclear how the two respects in which the scope of CC and PSR-P differ should be weighed against each other. What I take myself to have established so far is that CC and PSR-P are roughly equivalent in terms of simplicity and scope. Their intrinsic probability, in other words, is roughly the same. I take this conclusion to be generous.

6. THE (RELATIVE) EXPLANATORY POWER OF CC AND PSR-P

CC and PSR-P are different kinds of hypotheses. The former makes a claim about the nature of the causes that (the great majority of) physical phenomena have, the latter is the claim that all physical phenomena have a cause. This means that the two principles are not competing hypotheses. They are (at least prima facie) compatible.

In this section, I am going to argue that the empirical evidence that Papineau appeals to in support of CC is equally good evidence in favor of PSR-P. Both CC and PSR-P are compatible with the totality of empirical evidence, and they explain different aspects of it. In order to argue this point, I will adapt Papineau's two arguments for CC, and apply them in support of PSR-P.

The Argument from the Success of Science. Obviously, every case in which science has discovered a sufficient physical cause of some phenomenon is also a case in which science has discovered a sufficient cause *simpliciter*, which means that every success of science when it comes to finding a physical cause provides inductive support for PSR-P as well as for CC.

On the other hand, the cases in which science has *failed* to discover a sufficient cause of some phenomenon cannot be counted as evidence against PSR-P. Experience teaches us that causes are often difficult to find, and science proceeds on the assumption that it is always more likely that our failure to find the cause of some phenomenon is due to our present shortcomings rather than to the non-existence of a cause. If that assumption is justified (which most people believe it is), then we are *not* justified to count any particular failure to find a cause of some phenomenon as evidence against the very existence of a cause of that phenomenon. This is also true when science fails to find a cause after searching for a very long time. Nobody believes that the fact that science has not managed to satisfactorily explain the origin of

life is evidence that life originated without a sufficient cause, even though the search for an explanation has gone on for centuries.[27]

The Argument from Lack of Anomalies. An anomalous event (an event that is unexpected in relation to our knowledge of physical laws) might not only be due to the intervention of a non-physical force. If PSR-P is false, then physical events can happen for no reason at all, and events that happen for no reason at all (i.e. causeless events) would also be unexpected given our knowledge of physical laws. This means that the lack of anomalous occurrences is evidence not only for the non-existence of non-physical causes, but also for the non-existence of causeless physical phenomena.

It could be argued that there is still a difference between CC and PSR-P with respect to the Argument from Lack of Anomalies. If science were to discover just *one* non-physical cause, then CC would be falsified. But how could PSR-P ever be falsified? It is impossible to conclusively establish that some phenomenon lacks a cause. Hence, since PSR-P is empirically unfalsifiable while CC could be falsified by the discovery of a non-physical cause, it seems that empirical considerations have more significance for the plausibility of CC than for the plausibility of PSR-P.

This argument is misconceived, however. The claim that CC is empirically falsifiable is, strictly speaking, false. Even if science would discover a non-physical cause of some physical phenomenon, it would still be possible that there is an (unknown) physical cause of that same phenomenon — in other words, that the phenomenon is causally overdetermined — and this possibility can never be conclusively ruled out. If it cannot be ruled out, then CC can never be conclusively falsified.[28] Of course, if science were to discover that a great number of physical events have non-physical causes, then the possibility of systematic causal overdetermination might seem far-fetched, and a good case for the falsity of CC could, perhaps, be made. However, there are also scenarios in which a good empirical case for the falsity of PSR-P could be made — for example, if our expectations concerning causal regularity were disappointed often enough. In a very irregular world, empirical con-

[27] Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient* Reason, p. 278.

[28] There is another reason why CC could not be falsified: If we found what appeared to be a non-physical cause, it would still be possible that this cause is identical to some as-yet-unidentified physical phenomenon. (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.)

siderations might lead us to question PSR-P, even if that principle is strictly speaking unfalsifiable.[29]

It might still be argued that the inductive case in favor of CC is stronger than that in favor of PSR-P, because there is a very tight correlation between cases in which science has discovered a sufficient cause, and cases in which science has discovered a sufficient *physical* cause. There is no comparable, tight correlation that supports PSR-P. It is not the case, for example, that every physical phenomenon that science has investigated has been found to have a sufficient cause. However, the fact that science has sometimes failed to find the causes of some phenomena is best explained by the fact that it is often difficult to determine what causes something, as I argued above. So the absence of a tight correlation in this case should not be seen as a problem. On the other hand, the tight correlation between cases in which science has found a cause and cases in which science has found a physical cause, is not as strong evidence in favor of CC as one might think, because it rests on a biased sample. The tight correlation does not hold because there is a shortage of putative causal explanations — good causal explanations — that refer to non-physical causes. The correlation holds, instead, because those putative explanations are not counted as *scientific*. For example, we explain many of our actions in terms of reasons, and a reason is not — at least not *prima facie* — a physical entity. We might believe that every reason will eventually turn out to be, or supervene on, some physical entity, so that causal explanations involving reasons should not be counted as counter-examples to the tight correlation between discovered causes and discovered physical causes. However — and this is the crucial point — this is a prediction of what the future holds, similar to the prediction that every phenomenon which science has studied so far but failed to explain will *eventually* be explained in terms of a sufficient cause. It seems to me that the second prediction is no less well-grounded than the first.

We can put this in terms of explanatory power. A hypothesis H has explanatory power in relation to evidence E if and only if the probability of E given the truth of H is higher than the probability of E given the falsity of H.

[29] Of course, many philosophers of science would say that any scientific theory is, strictly speaking, unfalsifiable (the so-called Quine-Duhem thesis).

The bigger the "gap" between these two probabilities, the greater the explanatory power of the hypothesis.[30]

CC and PSR-P are both compatible with all the evidence that Papineau adduces, but they explain different aspects of it. The fact that "whenever science has found a sufficient cause, it has found a sufficient physical cause" is more probable given the truth of CC than given the falsity of CC. In this respect, therefore, CC has explanatory power, while PSR-P has none, because PSR-P does not say anything at all about the nature of the causes of physical phenomena (that is, whether those causes are physical or non-physical). On the other hand, the fact that science is highly successful — that science has managed to explain a lot of phenomena in terms of sufficient causes — is *not* more probable given the truth of CC than given the falsity of CC. If no physical phenomenon had a sufficient cause, CC would be trivially true. This means that CC has no explanatory power in relation to the fact that science is successful when it comes to finding sufficient causes. In this respect, however, PSR-P has explanatory power. It is more probable that science would be very successful if PSR-P is true than if PSR-P is false. Of course, an alternative principle that says that *almost* all physical phenomena have a sufficient cause would explain the success of science almost equally well as PSR-P does. But an alternative version of CC that says that *almost* all physical effects have a physical cause would explain why science has only found physical causes almost equally well as CC does, especially if we take into account the fact that there is a clear reluctance within the scientific community to accept as *scientific* any proposed explanation that refers to a non-physical cause.[31]

7. OTHER ARGUMENTS FOR PSR-P

So far, I have argued that the empirical evidence does not give us reason to view either CC or PSR-P as less probable than the other. Their intrinsic probabilities are roughly equivalent, their explanatory power is complementary, and it is difficult to argue that one of the two has some distinctive em-

[30] See Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, p. 110.

[31] This reluctance is certainly justifiable at the present time. My point is merely that *if* some physical phenomena actually have non-physical causes, it would require a paradigm-shift in science in order for those causes to be accepted as legitimate parts of scientific explanations.

pirical advantage. Papineau's two arguments for CC, as we have seen, can be adapted in defense of PSR-P as well. However, while the empirical case (the arguments from science) is the *only* ground for belief in CC (as Papineau acknowledges), there are additional reasons to believe PSR-P. These reasons can be characterized as transcendental arguments[32] that significantly raise the prior probability of PSR-P. One way to think about these arguments is to see them as highlighting PSR-P's deep fit with very general background knowledge.

The two transcendental arguments I will present are adapted from Alexander Pruss[33] (and Robert Koons[34]). The first argument contends that PSR-P (or some broader version of PSR) must be assumed if inference-to-the-best-explanation is to work. Since this inference model is fundamental for the practice of science, it can be argued that PSR-P is entailed by our background belief that science produces knowledge. The second argument (2) says that PSR-P must be assumed if global skepticism is to be avoided. If this is correct, it can be argued that PSR-P is entailed by our background belief that we have knowledge of the objective world.

Here are the two arguments:

(1) Science presupposes that for any physical phenomenon x, the best explanation of x is likely to be true. But this can only be presupposed if it is assumed that x *has* an explanation (that is, if it assumed that PSR-P is true). Without assuming PSR-P (or some more general PSR), the hypothesis that x lacks an explanation can never be ruled out. First, it cannot be ruled out as more improbable than other hypotheses, because phenomena that occur without a cause and hence *for no reason at all* cannot be assigned an objective probability. This is because the likelihood that a certain causeless phenomenon will occur cannot be grounded in any law of nature or any natural tendency (since such phenomena are not governed by any law or caused by any natural

[32] By a "transcendental argument", I simply mean an argument that establishes the logical presuppositions of something.

[33] Pruss, "The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument", pp. 30-32, 28.

[34] Robert C. Koons, "A New Look at the Cosmological Argument," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1997): 193-211.

tendency). Second, the no-explanation hypothesis cannot be ruled out on the ground that it lacks explanatory power, because this would be to presume that explanations are more likely to be true than non-explanations, and this can only be presumed given PSR-P. Third, it would be pointless to argue that causeless events — such as the coming to be of a brick in midair for no reason at all — would contradict the laws of nature. If the laws of nature really are incompatible with the occurrence of causeless physical phenomena, then, *ipso facto*, PSR-P holds. If it is argued that the laws of nature make causeless physical phenomena improbable, then the problem of ascribing an objective probability to such phenomena reappears. Furthermore, appealing to the laws of nature in this context is dialectically inappropriate. Our beliefs in the laws of nature are justified by inference-to-the best-explanation, and if the present argument is correct, we cannot rely on this kind of inference-pattern as truth-conducive unless PSR-P is true.

(2) If physical phenomena can occur without a cause, then it is possible that our perceptual states occur without a cause. This skeptical possibility cannot be dismissed as improbable, because — as argued above — causeless phenomena have no objective probability.

We can hence argue as follows:

(1) If PSR-P is not true, we do not have perceptual knowledge of the physical world.

(2) We have perceptual knowledge of the physical world.

(3) Hence, PSR-P is true.

Arguments of this kind contribute to raising the prior probability of PSR-P.[35] Furthermore, there seem to be no decisive *a priori* or transcendental ar-

[35] Pruss also has a number of other arguments (for a more general PSR), see Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason*, Part III. It might be seen as a problem that I argue *both* that PSR-P could be (quasi-)falsified if the world started to behave irregularly enough (section 6), *and* that PSR-P can be transcendentally motivated by reference to the conditions for the

guments against PSR-P, or in favor of CC. The latter rests on empirical evidence only, according to its proponents. As I argued in section 2, the standard arguments against more general versions of PSR are not applicable to PSR-P, partly because its scope is limited to physical phenomena.

8. A COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST PHYSICALISM

My conclusion so far is that CC and PSR-P, considered as empirical hypotheses, receive equal support from the scientific evidence. Unlike CC, however, PSR-P can also be defended on the basis of transcendental arguments that raise its prior probability significantly. Whether or not those arguments hold water, it must be granted by anyone that our pre-scientific intuitions and common experience favor PSR-P to a higher degree than CC. Prior to the eighteenth century, very few people would have found CC even remotely plausible, and it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the principle became popular among philosophers. On the other hand, PSR-P — or more general versions of the PSR — has been taken for granted or even seen as self-evident by many throughout history. Today many people might be reluctant to accept, for example, that a certain plane crash was caused directly by God or by a ghost, or by some other non-physical entity, but given sufficiently compelling evidence, they would eventually accept it. It is more difficult to see what could convince people to accept that a plane crash happened *for no reason at all*.

In light of these sociological observations, and against the background of Alexander Pruss' transcendental arguments, it seems hard to deny that the prior probability of PSR-P is higher than that of CC. This means that *if* CC is plausible given the totality of evidence, then so *a fortiori* is PSR-P.

I will now present a cosmological argument that uses PSR-P as its crucial premise. In presenting this argument I will presume, following Papineau and others, that *facts* can be causal *relata*. This is a somewhat controversial posi-

possibility of objective knowledge. However, PSR-P can be seen both as an empirical hypothesis, and as a transcendentally motivated principle. Empirical evidence might possibly defeat PSR-P considered as an empirical hypothesis, but once we realize that abandoning the principle will have serious philosophical repercussions, we might want to uphold it anyway on transcendental grounds.

tion. However, an argument equivalent to the one I am going to present could be formulated in terms of *obtaining states of affairs* as causal relata, or *situations*, or maybe even in terms of *events*, if the latter are simply understood as property-exemplifications.

As a preparation, I will formulate the PSR-P in a more precise way than I have done hitherto, by replacing the notion of "physical phenomena" with the notion "contingent facts concerning physical particulars".[36] I assume that these two notions are either equivalent, or that the notion "contingent facts concerning physical particulars" has a smaller scope than "physical phenomena".[37] By using the expression "physical particulars", I assume a rather uncontroversial distinction between particulars (or concrete individuals) and properties, and I will assume that facts are composed of — or ontologically dependent on — particulars and properties. Given these preliminaries, the PSR-P can be formulated like this:

PSR-P_2: Every contingent fact concerning physical particulars has a sufficient cause.

From PSR-P_2 we can deduce the following, more restricted, principle:

PSR-P_3: Every contingent fact concerning the existence of physical particulars has a sufficient cause.[38]

It is this latter principle that I am going to use in the cosmological argument.[39] The PSR-P_3 simply says that for all xs, if those xs are physical particulars, then the fact that those xs exist has a sufficient cause.[40] So this version of the principle is

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[36] A "contingent fact concerning physical particulars" is a contingent fact that *merely* concerns physical particulars.

[37] However, if anybody questions this, it should be noted that nothing in my argument depends on the equivalence between these notions. See below, and footnote 39.

[38] The category of "facts concerning the existence of physical particulars" does not include negative existential facts. So the PSR-P_3 does not entail that the non-existence of unicorns must have a cause.

[39] This means that if somebody would argue that PSR-P_2 actually has a larger scope than the original PSR-P, this would not matter for my argument, which depends only on PSR-P_3. The latter clearly has a smaller scope than the original PSR-P.

[40] I have borrowed and adapted this formulation from Joshua Rasmussen, "Cosmological Arguments from Contingency," *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 9 (2010): footnote 8.

restricted to existential facts — facts about the existence of physical particulars — and it claims that there is a causal explanation of why the set of physical particulars has the members that it has. This means that PSR-P_3 has a much smaller scope than the original PSR-P, since the latter makes a claim about *all* kinds of facts concerning physical particulars. The PSR-P_3's restriction to existential facts can be seen as an epistemic virtue that increases the intrinsic probability of the principle by reducing its scope. But the restriction could also be seen as arbitrary, and it could be suspected that the principle is gerrymandered for a certain purpose. This is why I have defended the more general PSR-P, which entails PSR-P_3.

Here is the argument:[41]

(1) Every contingent fact concerning the existence of physical particulars has a cause (PSR-P_3).

(2) The Big P — the fact that there are (or ever were) the very physical particulars that there are (or ever were) — is itself a contingent fact concerning the existence of physical particulars.

(3) Therefore, the Big P has a cause.

(4) No contingent fact concerning the existence of physical particulars can be caused solely by one or more of those very particulars that the fact contains, unless the fact contains a physical particular that exists by necessity.

(5) Every physical particular is contained in the Big P.

(6) Therefore, the Big P is *either* caused at least in part by something non-physical, *or* there exists a necessary physical particular.[42]

Premise 1 — PSR-P_3 — must be granted by anyone who thinks that science makes CC belief-worthy, as I have argued above.

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[41] This argument is adapted from Rasmussen, "Cosmological Arguments from Contingency", 811-813.

[42] A tacit (but I believe uncontroversial) premise needed to arrive at this conclusion is that causation must involve concrete things (that is, particulars). Abstract entities, or facts involving merely abstract entities, cannot causally explain anything.

Premise 2 says that the Big P is contingent. This follows from the fact that if only *one* of the physical particulars that actually exist would not have existed, then the Big P would not have obtained. For example, if my computer had not existed, then the fact that there are the very physical particulars that there are (the Big P) would not have obtained. Since it is hard to deny that at least one physical particular that actually exists could have failed to exist, it must be admitted that the Big P is a contingent fact concerning the existence of physical particulars.[43]

So there is no "fallacy of composition" being committed here — the fallacy of assuming that because all the parts of a whole are contingent, then so is the whole. Premise 2 does not claim that all the physical particulars that exist constitute a concrete whole. The premise only presupposes that there are *facts* about concrete particulars.

Premise 3 — that the Big P has a cause — follows deductively from 1 and 2.

Premise 4 says that a contingent fact concerning the existence of physical particulars cannot be caused to obtain merely by those very particulars it contains, unless one of those particulars exists by necessity. For example, the fact that the three things A, B, and C exist cannot be causally explained by reference merely to the particulars that compose the fact (A, B and C themselves). It is of course possible that C is caused by B, and B is caused by A, but then why does A exist? In order to answer this question without vicious circularity, either an external cause must be found, or A must be a necessary being, whose existence is not in need of a causal explanation.

When it comes to normal facts, such as the existence of three things, most people would agree with this. However, the Big P is a very special contingent fact, and it could be argued that the principle stated by premise 4 is not true if it is applied to a global fact such as the Big P. What if the Big P — the fact that there are the very physical particulars that there are — contains an *infinite* number of contingent particulars? In other words, what if there is an infinite regress of physical particulars, each of which was caused to exist by another particular? Then it might seem that we would not need to go outside of the set of physical particulars in order to explain the existence of each particular, even though none of those particulars exists by necessity. And the existence

43 Rasmussen, "Cosmological Arguments from Contingency", 813.

of each particular is all that we need to explain. So it might seem that premise 4 is false, if an infinite regress of causes is possible.

However, an infinite regress does not solve the circularity problem. In order to see this, suppose that somebody wanted to know the cause of the fact that there are humans, and it was suggested, in response, that the existence of each human is caused by another human, and so on in an infinite regress. This purported explanation would be circular, because whenever one human causes another human to exist, the fact that humans exist (at least one of them) *already obtains*. And it was *this* fact that we were asked to explain.[44] "Why do humans exist?" is not answered by saying that humans who cause each other have always existed.

The same goes for physical particulars in general. The fact that (contingent) physical particulars exist cannot be explained by saying that each physical particular is caused by another physical particular. A cause that is wholly "outside" of the fact to be explained (why there are the physical particulars there are) is needed, even if the number of physical particulars is infinite (unless there is a necessary physical particular).[45] This means that premise 4 cannot be rejected on the ground that an infinite regress of physical particulars is possible. Premise 4 is fully compatible with this possibility.

Premise 5 says that every physical particular is contained in the Big P. This is true in virtue of the definition of the Big P.

The conclusion — that the Big P is *either* caused at least in part by something non-physical (a claim that contradicts CC), *or* there exists a necessary physical particular — follows deductively from the premises, provided that

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[44] William Rowe states why the purported explanation is circular: "If you are going to explain why there are *any* facts of a certain kind (where it is a contingent matter that there are facts of that kind), you cannot do so by citing a fact that is itself a fact of that very kind. For to do so is circular" (William Rowe, "Circular Explanations, Cosmological Arguments, and Sufficient Reasons," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (1997): 197). I have substituted "fact(s)" for "truth(s)" in the quote from Rowe. See also Alexander Pruss, "The Hume-Edwards Principle and the Cosmological Argument," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43, no. 3 (1998): 149-165; Rasmussen, "Cosmological Arguments from Contingency," 812.

[45] See Michael Rota, "Infinite Causal Chains and Explanation", *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 81 (2007): 109-122. In this paper, Rota argues that "necessarily, for any infinite causal chain of caused beings, the complex fact that each of the members of that chain exists/existed is not explained by any complex fact which is only about the causal activities of the members of the chain" (121).

we (very reasonably) assume that only facts involving concrete items (particulars) can be causally efficacious.

In order to save CC and physicalism, it might be tempting for physicalists to accept the existence of a necessary physical being.[46] However, considering that the claim "a necessary being (of some kind) exists" is the conclusion of the first and most thoroughly debated part of the traditional cosmological argument, it must be viewed as a victory for cosmological arguers if this conclusion is granted, even with the qualification that the necessary being is physical. The debate can then move on to the second part of the argument, and address the question of how plausible the idea of a necessary physical being is in relation to the idea of a necessary non-physical being, such as God.[47]

However, cannot a physicalist reject the crucial premise of the argument, namely PSR-P, in the name of ontological economy? Since PSR-P apparently can be used to establish the existence of a non-physical, causally efficacious being, it might be argued that this very circumstance means that PSR-P is a less simple hypothesis than CC. After all, the simplicity of a hypothesis depends in part on its entailments, and in this case it might seem that the entailments of CC are ontologically more austere than those of PSR-P. This means that ontological economy speaks in favor of CC, so that CC is justified to a higher degree than PSR-P, even though the two principles have a similar relation to the empirical evidence.

One problem with this response is that PSR-P does not entail the existence of a non-physical cause. It entails, together with some other premises, *either* the existence of a non-physical cause *or* the existence of a necessary

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[46] Hume suggests this possibility (David Hume, "Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and the Posthumous Essays," ed. Richard H Popkin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett 1980), Part IX, 55). The idea is discussed in C. Stephen Layman, *Letters to Doubting Thomas: A Case for the Existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), chap. 4. Note that granting the existence of an *eternal* physical being (such as a quantum vacuum that has always existed, see for example Lawrence M. Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing* (New York: Free Press, 2012), p. xii) will not help at all. If the eternal physical being is contingent (if it could have failed to exist in some possible world), the PSR-P requires that the fact that it exists has a cause.

[47] There are reasons to think that the non-physicalist position will be easier to defend in this debate, see Edward Feser, "The New Atheists and the Cosmological Argument," *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 37, no. 1 (2013): 171-172.

physical being. This means that the principle itself does not require us to go beyond a physicalist ontology. What might convince us to do this is if we have reason to believe that a necessary physical being does not exist. But this is an independent issue, and not an entailment of the PSR-P. Of course, if it could be shown that the idea of a necessary physical being is inconsistent, then it might be possible to strictly deduce the existence of a non-physical cause from PSR-P, together with the argument for the impossibility of a necessary physical being. Presently, however, such an argument does not seem to be available. What might be available are considerations that show that the existence of a necessary physical being is implausible.

In sum, it seems that the implications of the PSR-P are not a reason to view it as a less simple or coherent hypothesis than CC. To reject PRS-P simply because it entails either the existence of a necessary physical being or the existence of a non-physical cause seems to be rationally unmotivated.

9. CONCLUSION

This article shows that physicalists have a problem. The empirical evidence to which they appeal in support of their fundamental principle — the causal closure of physics (CC) — also supports, to at least an equal degree, a principle (PSR-P) that entails either the existence of a necessary physical being, or the existence of a (merely) non-physical cause of physical beings. The latter alternative is incompatible with CC, and the former is at least unattractive for physicalists. However, since physicalists accept CC *only* on the basis of empirical, scientific evidence, it is unclear on what ground they can reject PSR-P, which is supported by the same scientific evidence and has a higher prior probability. Non-physicalists, on the other hand, can argue that the empirical evidence is insufficient for establishing the truth of any of the principles. This is a plausible position. Considering that CC entails the non-existence of a creator God,[48] it is quite astonishing that so many contemporary philosophers claim that our current scientific evidence gives us sufficient

[48] The idea of a creator God, as it is understood in the monotheistic traditions, is the idea of a non-physical God who is the *sole* cause of the world's existence. The claim that such a God exists is incompatible with CC, even though CC is compatible with causal overdetermination. If there is a non-physical God who is just *one* cause of the world's existence (another cause be-

reason to accept it. Defenders of PSR-P, however, need not question their favored principle just because there is insufficient empirical evidence for it. They can instead follow Alexander Pruss and appeal to transcendental arguments.

The conclusion of this article is that defenders of causal closure face a dilemma: Either they have to abandon ship by rejecting CC and physicalism, or they have to accept that the first part of the cosmological argument succeeds.

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ing something physical), then that God is not the creator-God assumed by the monotheistic traditions.

JEAN-LUC MARION ON THE DIVINE AND TAKING THE "THIRD WAY"

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Abstract. In this article, I will investigate Jean-Luc Marion's influential critique of metaphysical and natural theological approaches to the divine which he regards as "idolatrous", and his own proposal of an "iconic" account of God's revelation which he calls the "third way". Marion's idol-icon distinction, I maintain, developed in his early work "God without Being", is the guiding thread of Marion's philosophical project, and the key for an adequate understanding of his own account. While Marion's account is compelling and has provided new perspectives and insights to the contemporary discussion in philosophy of religion, its uncompromising excessiveness and the outright rejection of all hermeneutics leaves it deeply problematic and makes it hard to see how to follow his "third way".

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Jean-Luc Marion published his first major philosophical work "Idol and Distance" in 1977, his work has been intensively discussed, praised and heavily criticized. In this paper, I will investigate Marion's critique and response of metaphysical and natural theological approaches to the divine and his own account of God's revelation. Marion regards all metaphysical accounts as *idolatrous* insofar as they, according to him, reduce God to an object of human understanding and categorization. Such accounts must be criticized and finally overcome in order to open the way for more appropriate account which recognizes God's transcendence and incomprehensibility while preserving the possibility for us to relate to Him in a meaningful way. This account is called the "third way" which is grounded in Marion's conceptions of the icon and the saturated phenomenon, and draws heavily on the tradition of Christian mystical theology. It consists in approaching God in

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such way that God's incomprehensibility is recognized and maintained. The "third way" would be a purely pragmatic one. However, Marion's account, which presents the subject as the completely passive recipient of the overwhelming divine revelation, faces numerous difficulties. Marion maintains that we must "dwell" in God's horizon opened up by the excessive "experience" of God's revelation, and let him name and call us. But, how is such a subject able to recognize overwhelming experience as the revelation of God, if at the end all relation to God is impossible?

First, I will consider his early critique of metaphysics and analysis of the idol-icon distinction as it is articulated in his work "God without Being" (originally published in 1982). Marion's Icon-Idol distinction will work as a guiding thread throughout the article. In fact, I maintain that Marion's distinction plays a continuous and central role to Marion's philosophical project. Second, I will take a brief look at his famous and influential theory of saturated phenomena which is crucial for the understanding of own views on the divine. Third, through the examination of Marion's notion of saturated phenomena, I proceed to elucidating one of his most recent account of the "iconic way". I will concentrate on Marion's proposal of a "third way" of approaching God, which is articulated in the last chapter of his book "In Excess". Finally, I will raise some critical questions which arise from Marion's somewhat excessive and radical account, and present and discuss critiques that have been made to him.

CRITIQUE OF METAPHYSICS AS ONTOTHEOLOGY

There are numerous different ways to engage with the problem and critique of the so-called ontotheological constitution of Western metaphysics. The source of this conception is Martin Heidegger, especially his later writings, for whom, as is well known, the difference between being and beings or entities is of high importance. The basic claim is that while western metaphysics operates with this distinction, it has not been able to articulate an account of being as such or in itself. For our purposes here, it is not necessary to enter into the extremely complex Heideggerian account of this difference. I will concentrate on those aspect of Heidegger's critique that important with regard to Marion's own thought. Heidegger writes: "The essential constitu-

tion of metaphysics is based on the unity of beings as such in *the universal* and *that which is highest*." (Heidegger 1969, 61.)

Metaphysical thinking demands a first ground for the existence of reality. To answer the question of the being of entities is to look for that which is present in all of them and, thus, what grounds them: the essence or substance of a particular thing determines what it is and what it shares with other particular things. This is what Marion calls "common being". (Marion 1997, 281.) The next step is crucial to Marion. Since an essence, as Schrijvers states, still refers to the empirical and contingent existence of particular beings, it needs to be, in turn, grounded in a something else. This something else is the highest unifying principle, which is identified as the supreme being or God. The Supreme Being, or God, is introduced in philosophical thinking only insofar as an ultimate present ground or foundation is required to maintain the unity and subsistence of all beings. (Schrijvers 2011, 188–189.) Marion states this in the following manner: "[Being understood as ground] transforms the question of being as well into a question of the *ens suprerum*, itself understood as and posited starting from the requirement (…) of the foundation." (Marion 1991, 34.) Metaphysics as a theoretical study has a dual structure. It deals both with the universal "the common being" (ontology), that is, what is present in all beings, and with the unifying highest principle and essence, a supremely particular being (theology). The science of metaphysics can deal with both of these at the same time, Marion maintains following Heidegger, because they intersect and function as reciprocal groundings. Marion writes: "The common being grounds beings and even [particular] essences; in return [a particular] essence [i.e. supreme being] grounds, in the mode of causality, the common being". (Marion 1997, 282.) This is what makes metaphysics onto-theological. In the following, I will reserve the term "metaphysics" as a term referring to metaphysics as onto-theology.

Metaphysics for Marion has less to do with the problem of God as an object of study of philosophy than with a certain *conception* of "God". (See Schrijvers 2011, 186.) To approach God through metaphysics is to reduce him to a pregiven conception of what it means for beings to be, that is, as an entity — as *esse per se subsistence*. This approach consists fundamentally, according to Marion, in reducing God to a concept which makes the divine available to thought; it is "[the] production of a concept that makes a claim

to equivalence with God." (Marion 2001, 13.) The notion of causality, in the passage cited above, is crucial. Metaphysics understands "God" as providing a causal foundation of all empirical beings. In order to be such a foundation God must be a being which as a supreme founder supremely founds himself. God as his own cause: causa sui. And "God" as *causa sui* is now identified as the God of philosophy.[1]

Thus God, according to Marion, is given or indicated a function as a foundational being according to the principle of sufficient reason. God will occupy that place, as Schrijvers states, that reason and rationality will reserve for God. In this regard, the concept of *causa sui* represents the "most complete formulation" of a concept that makes a claim of equivalence with God. This amounts, according to Marion, to idolatry. According to Marion, metaphysics is guilty of idolatry. The "theological discourse of onto-theo-logy" which conceptualizes God as *ens suprerum* and as *causa sui* limits God and the divine. In thinking "God" as causa sui, Marion claims, metaphysics, under the figures of efficiency, cause and foundation, has constructed a conception of God's transcendence to serve its own purpose. "God" understood as *ens suprerum* or as *causa sui* is an idol, which is introduced in to a rational system as a necessary function to account for the totality of beings. (For detailed discussion on Marion's account see Schrijvers 2011, 179–194, Gschwandtner 2016, 10–14.)

TWO MODES OF APPREHENSION

But what does Marion exactly mean by idolatry? The critique of idolatry might rightly bring to mind the old vetero-testamentary rejection, important to Jewish thought, of all craven images and representations of God as blasphemy. However, Marion is not primarily interested in denouncing man-made images of God as idols, as false Gods that should not venerated. His interests run deeper. He wants to know what is fundamentally at stake in an idol: what is it that constitutes an idol.

[1] Heidegger writes: "Metaphysics is theology in that it thinks Being as the highest ground above all beings, ultimately as the ground of itself, causa sui, which is the metaphysical concept of God. Metaphysics is thus in its very nature onto-theo-logic." (Heidegger 1969, 15.)

Marion develops his critique of metaphysics and its idolatrous way of talking about God by introducing a distinction between an idol and an icon. This distinction was first articulated in "Idol and Distance" and further developed in "God without Being". He starts by pointing out that by the two (idol and icon) he does not mean particular things or beings, or a class of beings. In Marion's hands, they indicate "a manner of being" or, more precisely, "two modes of apprehension of the divine in visibility". (Marion 1991, 7, 9) It is important to note that, for Marion, the idol should not be too hastily denounced as illusory. The idol consists in being seen and known by seeing it. Furthermore, one should not interpret the idol as ensuing from an untrue or false experience of the divine: "The idol always marks a true and genuine experience of the divine." (Marion 1991, 27.) The problematic character idol does not, then, derive from a failure, but instead from what Marion calls its "conditions of validity". An idol as an expression of the divine presence is a limited form of apprehension of God. Marion describes the idol as something that "dazzles", "fascinates", and "captivates" the gaze. Using an expression that will later become central for his thought, Marion states that the idol "saturates with visibility" the gaze of the viewer. (Marion 1991, 10. See also Horner 2005, 61.) However, something becomes an idol only when the gaze is fixed on it as the point of its own consideration: "The gaze makes the idol, not the idol the gaze." (Marion 1991, 10–11.) While the first intention aims at reaching the divine, the gaze itself stops at the visible, as Marion puts it. The advent of the divine to visibility in the idol is measured by the scope of the gaze. It is constituted by the cognizing subject. An idol is an image of God which, as Ruud Welten states, is adapted to finite human criteria. It is an image made by human imagination. (Welten 2011 177, 180.) Furthermore, Marion claims that the idol does not reflect so much the divine itself as it does our understanding of ourselves. He introduces the metaphor of an "invisible mirror" in order to elucidate this point. In fact, he points out that the true idol is this "invisible mirror" itself. Briefly put, the idol functions as a mirror which reflects our own desires and aspirations. How we "see" and understand the divine reflects what we want ourselves to be, our self-image. Thus, the "essence" of idolatry is self-idolatry. Marion quotes Feuerbach in support and agreement: "So here also Feuerbach's judgement stands: "it is *man* who is the *original model* of his idol." (Marion 1991, 16.)

Marion mentions Greek statues, temples, and sacred sites as examples of idols. Such things are perhaps what come first to mind when we think of an idol. However, the main target of Marion's critique is what he calls "conceptual idolatry". Metaphysics is guilty precisely of conceptual idolatry: "[T]he conceptual idol has a site, metaphysics; a function, the theo-logy in onto-theology; and a definition, *causa sui*. Conceptual idolatry does not remain a universally vague suspicion but inscribes itself in the global strategy of thought taken in its metaphysical figure." (Marion 1991, 36.) To conceptualize God is an attempt to grasp and comprehend Him who is in principle ungraspable and infinite. Conceptual grasp is not measured, Marion argues, as much by divine fullness as it is by the scope of human understanding, which fixes the divine in a specific concept. In other words, the measure of the concept "comes not from God but from the aim of the gaze". Thus, according to Marion, the idol never reaches the divine as such. The divine is present in the idol only indirectly, reflected according to the experience of it; fixed by finite human understanding.

Marion's account is directly opposed to the so-called natural theology understood as a the theoretical attempt to prove (or disprove) God's existence through the use of human reason alone or, as Phillip Blond writes, to give human cognition the possibility of knowing God through sensible apprehension of his effects, his creations. (Blond 1998, 5.) Not only are all attempts to provide rational demonstrations and proofs for the existence of God futile, they are also fundamentally idolatrous and blasphemous exercises because they are guided uncritically by hidden and tacit preconceptions of God's nature. They operate with an idolatrous conception of God. Marion writes by referring to Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, and Leibniz: "Every proof, in fact, demonstrative as it may appear, can only lead to a concept; it remains for it then to go beyond itself, so to speak, to identify this concept with God himself. Saint Thomas implements such an identification by an 'id quod omnes nominunt', repeated at the end of each of his *viae* (*Summa theological* Ia,q.2a.3.), as Aristotle concluded the demonstration of *Metaphysics* (A.7.) by *touto gar ho theos* 'for this is god' (1:072b29–30), and as, above all, Leibniz ended the principle of reason asking, 'See at present if that which we have just discovered must not be called God'" (Marion 1991, 32–33.) The same applies to what Marion calls "conceptual atheism": "Proof uses positively what conceptual atheism uses negatively;

in both cases, equivalence to a concept transforms God into "God", in to the infinitely repeatable "so-called gods". In both cases the human discourse determines God. The opposition of the determinations, the one demonstrating, the other denying, does not distinguish them as much as their common presupposition identifies them: that the human (…) might, conceptually, reach God, hence might conceptually construct something that would take upon itself to name "God", either to admit or reject. *The idol works universally, as much for denegation as for proof.*" (Marion 1991, 33. Emphasis added.) Marion then goes on to cite Heidegger: "[A] God who must permit his existence to be proved in the first place is ultimately a very ungodly God. The only thing such proof of existence can yield is blasphemy." (Marion 1991, 35.)

The idolatrous discourse of metaphysics, for Marion, does not reach the divine and, thus, remains utterly inadequate to describe the divine dimension or the truly divine God. One of the main aims of Marion project is to provide an account of a way of approaching and speaking about God which does not succumb to such conceptual idolatry, as he understands it. Gschwandtner acutely states that, for Marion, it is necessary to find "more iconic ways" of speaking about God which no longer rely on traditional metaphysical discourse and conceptual frameworks. What characterizes such "iconic ways" is that, in contrast to "idolatrous ways", they do not proceed from us, but *directly* from God. In his analysis of the icon, especially in "God without Being", Marion employs Christian imagery and language and is indebted to the Christian theology of the icon. (See Horner 2005, 61–65; Gschwandtner 2013, 110–111.)

Unlike the idol, Marion states, the icon is not characterized by a reflective return to ourselves. Instead, the icon always points outside its visible appearance towards the invisible, that is, to the divine. According to Marion Saint Paul's description of Christ as the image/icon of God must serve as a guiding thread for the analysis of the icon. He also draws upon John Damascene's reflection on the icon. Marion writes: "The icon does not result from a vision but provokes one […] Where as the idol results from the gaze that aims at it, the icon summons sight in letting the visible […] be saturated little by little with the invisible […] The formula that Saint Paul applies to Christ, *eikon tou theou tou aoratou*, icon of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), must serve as our norm; it must even be generalized to every icon, as, indeed, John of Da-

mascus explicitly ventures: *pasa eikon ekphantorike tou kruphiou kai deiktike* [eng. *every icon manifests and indicates the secret*] […] The icon, on the contrary, attempts to render visible the invisible as such, hence to allow that the visible not cease to refer to an other than itself, without, however, that other ever being reproduced in the visible." (Marion 1991, 17–18.)

The core idea of Marion's account of the icon, is that the icon inverts the essential moments of the idol. According to Marion, "the contemplation of the icon" does not lead to a conceptual understanding or grasping. The icon cannot be grasped or "fixed". (Marion 1991, 21.) Elsewhere, Marion states that the icon is not an object of understanding, it is not a spectacle. (Marion 2004, 21.) Instead, we find ourselves looked at, engaged by gaze of the other (i.e. God) which overwhelms us and "unbalances the human gaze". (Marion 1991, 24.) Robyn Horner is right in pointing out that what Marion is describing here is a type of kenotic experience. Before the icon the gazer or the ego is emptied of its capacity to control and grasp. One allows oneself to be engaged and, thus, be overcome by the irreducible and inconceivable other, God, who, as it were, looks at me. However, it is important to note that what is crucial for Marion is not only the notion of reversal, but also the notion that the icon *gives* invisibility or God to thought *on its own terms*. (Marion 1991, 24. See Horner 2005, 63–64. See also Welten 2011, 182–182.)

While Marion will rework and revisit his the idol-icon distinction in later works, this "core idea" described above will remain relatively unchanged. In fact, such notions as "saturation", "giving itself on its own terms", "reversal", the idea of an kenotic experience, and all they are supposed to convey, become more and more central to his analysis of religious phenomena and experience.

SATURATION AND POSSIBILITY OF REVELATION

It should be observed that the distinction between the idol and icon is crucial not only for the understanding of Marion's critique of metaphysics, but for his philosophical enterprise in general. In his subsequent writings, he aims to engage in a more purely phenomenological investigation. This change in focus is most evident in his major philosophical work "Being Given" in which he develops his own version of phenomenology known as "phenom-

enology of givenness". In this work, the distinction between idol and icon no longer refers to two oppositional modes of seeing or apprehending the divine. Instead, he incorporates these notions in his famous theory of saturated phenomena. Idol and icon are now identified as two positive instances of such phenomena, that is, works of art and the other person respectively.

Marion develops his theory of saturated phenomena in various works and essays, especially, in his major phenomenological work "Being Given". Marion's analyses are dense and complex and he develops his theory in conversation with many other philosophers, most notably, Husserl, Heidegger, Kant, Leibniz, Levinas, and Henry. Many of Marion's insights rely on the thoughts of these thinkers. However, it is not necessary here to venture too far into Marion's examination of saturated phenomenon. For my own purposes, it suffices to lay out the basic characteristics of Marion's account. Thus, the obvious question arises: what are saturated phenomena?

A saturated phenomenon is fundamentally, according to Marion, *that which gives itself to us completely without condition or restraint*; on its own terms, as it were. Marion writes: "Because it gives itself without condition or restraint, the saturated phenomenon would offer the paradigm of the phenomenon finally without reserve […] it alone appears truly as itself, of itself, and on the basis of itself, since it alone appears without the limits of horizon or reduction to an I and constitutes itself." (Marion 2002, 218–219.) With the notions of "horizon" and "the I" Marion refers to Immanuel Kant's and Edmund Husserl's philosophies. Marion has in mind Husserl's notion of the constituting activity of the intentional-transcendental subjectivity or ego. Briefly put, intentionality is a meaning-giving activity: consciousness is always consciousness of something *as* something. Furthermore, every meaning-giving act, as Steven Crowell acutely puts it, is teleologically oriented toward intuitive fulfillment. Such a fulfillment occurs when the intended object is given in itself in experience as it is intended by the ego. However, no object is given completely. For example, when I perceive the cube in front of me, I perceive only one side of it, even though I intend it as a whole. Thus, when in perceiving the cube as a cube, I co-intend at the same the other sides of it, which are not intuitively given. The perceptual content or meaning is, as Crowell states, norm-governed in a specific way. It can fail: it may turn out that what I took to be a cube was not a cube at all when perceived from an-

other perspective. This is made possible by the phenomenological essence of perception: it is teleologically oriented toward further acts of perception that would either intuitively fulfill its content or alter it, that is, confirm it or disconfirm it. Intentionality is a correlational relation between the experiencing subject and the world. Thus, it is not entirely accurate to say that there is meaning because there is a constituting subject. Rather, both the subject and the world are necessary for there to be meaning because "to speak of meaning is just speak of that very teleology in its function of disclosing what it is *to be* a thing of such and such a sort, given in such and such away." (Crowell 2014, 24–25.) Thus, the ego constitutes its object as this or that by a synthetic activity by fixing a meaningful unity through multiple perspectives. To affirm this, as Husserl does, is just to insist on the horizontality of intentional experience. An object is always given against larger context, a horizon of meaning.

In Marion's view, Husserl's account is deeply problematic. First, Marion maintains that Husserl fails to comply with the phenomenological method and its fundamental principles or, to put more accurately, does not see its full potential. According to the phenomenological method of bracketing (*epokhee*) the philosopher must put aside all metaphysical and naive preconceptions concerning the world through and affirm the authority of intuition: things must be considered only insofar as they give themselves to us. However, according to Marion, in Husserl such givenness is almost never actually realized. Intuition is usually partially lacking to intention, as fulfillment is lacking to meaning or content, Marion claims. Husserl is only concerned with objects and objectivity. (See Marion 2002a, 12–14, 191.) Second, both poles of the intentional correlation, the I and the world as the horizon of meaning, as necessary conditions of meaningful experience and givenness, limit and restrain the particular phenomenon and its appearing. The phenomenon appears only insofar as it is constituted by the transcendental ego within a horizon. Hence, it does not appear truly as itself, of itself, and on the basis of itself, that is, without constraint and condition, as Marion would want. In fact, Marion contends, staying true to the requirements of the phenomenological method and principles and taking them to their very limit, will enable us to see the possibility and give description of such phenomena which appear and give themselves without condition or restraint. Unlike Husserlian intentional objects, Marionian saturated phenomena are charac-

terized by intuitive excess; intuition surpassing the intention. Marion calls them "paradoxes" insofar as they are characterized as that which happens counter (*para*) to received opinion and appearance (*doxa*). Saturated phenomena give themselves to intuition with such an excessive force that there is no possibility for us to comprehend, grasp, or conceptualize them. They exceed all our preconceptions and pre-understanding and, thus, defy all hermeneutics. In fact, seen from a phenomenological point of view they are not to be considered as objects at all. However, one must bear in mind that in this context by "object" is meant, to use a Kantian turn phrase, whatever conforms to our understading and knowledge; whatever is given *to us* through constitutive and meaning-giving activity of transcendental subjectivity against a context or horizon. An intentional object is always on *for us*. (Marion 2008, 44–47. See also Marion 2002a, 225–228)

An important part of Marion's analyses is his distinction between five different instances or types saturated phenomenon. The first three are said to be saturated with regard to horizon and the fourth with regard to the subject or the I. The fifth represents a special case which is saturated with regard to both horizon and the I. Marion uses Kant's theory of the categories of pure understanding in laying out the different types of saturated phenomenon. For Kant, these categories are the *a priori rules*, as Mason affirms, for organizing the sensory manifold and to structure intuition, and for providing unity and determinacy to experience. They are necessary transcendental conditions for the possibility of objective knowledge and experience. Marion attempts to show that each type of saturated phenomena surpasses and dislocates the categories to which they correspond.

First, some phenomena are saturated in terms of quantity. Historical events are named in this context. They overwhelm us with information and, thus, cannot be controlled. Second, there are phenomena saturated in terms of quality which appear under the aspects of the "unbearable" and "bedazzlement" as they overwhelm us by their excessive visibility. The works of art and paintings are such phenomena. Marion coins the term "idol" for this type saturated phenomena. Third, the human flesh or embodiment is a privileged instance of a saturated phenomenon in terms of relation, because of its possibility to appear immediately as if there was no relation. Fourth, Marion names the face of the other person as the phenomenon saturated in terms of

modality. The face is irreducible and free from all references to the subject and refers to it as "the icon". The fifth type is the most interesting and important as well as the most problematic one. It is also the one that concerns us here since it is particularly crucial for Marion's phenomenological analyses of religious phenomena. It is a phenomenon saturated to the second degree, that is, in terms of all the above categories. It is the phenomenon of the revelation of the divine. (see Marion 2002a, 225–241. See also Mason 2014)

The problem that emerges with the introduction of the notion of revelation, is how is one able to give a *purely* phenomenological description of such a phenomenon which is so evidently full of religious and theological baggage. An illuminating example of this is the introduction the figure of Christ as its paradigm of the saturated phenomenon of revelation and in "Being Given". Marion, however, emphasizes the philosophical nature of his analyses and investigations even though he frequently refers to theological topics and sources in support. Marion maintains that phenomenology examines and describes possibilities. Thus, in a way responding to Dominique Janicaud's famous criticism and claim that Marion's thought represents a form crypto-theology, Marion writes that as a phenomenologist he is primarily interested in describing revelation of God as a "mere possibility" and, as it were, he does not presuppose its actuality or reality. Answering the question regarding the "actual manifestation or ontic status" of Revelation, with an capital R is, according to Marion, "the business of revealed theology", not phenomenology. (Marion 2002a, 235–236.) Thus, Marion claims, that he is engaging any sort theology, nor is his philosophy a form of crypto-theology.

Despite his reservation concerning pure phenomenology being capable of accounting for the actual manifestation of divine Revelation, Marion does seem to think that his phenomenology of givenness and the theory of saturated phenomena provides tools for further phenomenological investigations of religious phenomena. While phenomenology, according to Marion, cannot decide if a Revelation can or should ever give itself actually, it can determine that if ever Revelation does give itself, "it could have, can, or will be able to do so only by giving itself" according to fifth type of saturated phenomenon. (Marion 202a, 235.) Indeed, one of the main motivations behind Marion's phenomenological investigations of givenness and of the possibility of revelation is to account for the idea of an iconic gift (of the divine giving itself in

the icon in its own terms) which was already present in his previous work but remained uninvestigated. Welten acutely points out that Marion intends to develop *a phenomenology* which specifies the antagonism between idol and icon, which he was not able to do in "God without Being", because of the theological presuppositions guiding that work. Marion no longer focuses on the different ways of apprehending and talking about God. Instead, he concentrates on investigating whether or not it is possible for us to receive that which does not proceed from our own understanding, that which gives itself in its own terms: the possibility of revelation. If God is precisely not an idol and the revelation of the divine gives itself, then the structure of this givenness must be accounted for without presupposing anything about God, not even his invisibility. This is an essential condition of the phenomenology of God. (See Welten 2011, 186–190)

Yet, in all fairness one must ask whether one is able maintain such a dispassionate and unprejudiced attitude, especially, with regard to religious phenomena. As noted before, one important feature Marion's critique of metaphysics was that it is informed by an erroneous and idolatrous preconception of God. Even if one might grant that Marion is by and large correct in his Heideggerian diagnosis of traditional metaphysics and even accept it, it remains the case that Marion's own philosophical exercise is informed by the Christian mystical theology and Judeo-Christian monotheistic conception of the divine. Furthermore, he constantly refers to Biblical texts, Patristic and medieval source, and to contemporary theologians in agreement and sometimes taking support from them for his own philosophical purposes. This is so even though it may be argued that Marion does not regard such sources (the Bible in particular) as philosophical authorities, and that he maintains that their use must be supported by purely phenomenological investigations. What Marion seems to be arguing for is not only the possibility of revelation in general, but he seems to aim at philosophical justification of Christian religiosity in particular, be it in a non-metaphysical and quasi-mystical form. His description of the possibility of revelation as the ultimate saturated phenomenon and Christ as its paradigm draws clearly upon the Christian theological tradition and understanding of religiosity. While I am not advocating Janicaud's view of Marion as crypto-theologian, I want to make a somewhat more careful observation that his Christian mystical "preunderstanding" of

the relation with divine to hold to the strict distinction between Revelation and revelation and keep them strictly apart from each other might prove to be more difficult to Marion than it seems at first sight.

TAKING THE "THIRD WAY"

Marion claims that the field of religion can simply be described as that what philosophy excludes, that is, the possibility of revelation and of transcendence in general. In "Saturated Phenomenon" Marion argues that this difficulty and antagonism has their root in the fact that religious phenomena cannot simultaneously be considered both as religious and objective. Marion writes: "any possible 'philosophy of religion' would have to describe, produce, and constitute phenomena. It would then find itself confronted with a disastrous alternative: it would be a question either of addressing phenomena that are objectively definable but lose their religious specificity or of addressing phenomena that are specifically religious but cannot be described objectively." Marion also asserts that a phenomenon that is a strict sense religious must "render visible what nevertheless could not be objectified." Marion proceeds to asserting that theology's requirements could help phenomenology to overcome its own limitations and, thus, deliver "the possibility of revelation, hence possibility as revelation, from the grip of the principle of sufficient reason", that is, from the grip of conceptualization and metaphysics. (Marion 2008, 16-17, 18-19; See also Mckinlay 2010, 180–182.) It is somewhat unclear what is by "theology's requirements" here, but I take it that they include, at least, requirement to understading revelation self-disclosing activity of a wholly other and transcendent God who ways and nature remains unknown and impenetrable to finite human reason. Thus, positions which advocate strong metaphysical and theological realist views are henceforth rejected. One must find other routes in order to provide a philosophical account of the divine, and access to God. Marion aim is to provide such an account.

Marion uses his theory saturated phenomenon to make space for the philosophical study of religious phenomena, God in particular; to render visible what nevertheless could not be objectified. In the last last chapter of "In Excess" entitled "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of It". There he engages in a lengthy and scrutinous discussion on Christian negative and mystical

theology, especially that of Dionysius the Areopagite. There Marion responds to Jacques Derrida's critique of negative theology and apophatic discourse, and formulates his own view on mystical theology and religious exprience. Marion also returns, in a way, "God without Being", and employs his theory of saturated phenomena to account for the meaning of prayer.

Marion reminds his readers that Derrida's attack against the so-called "negative theology" has nothing to do with the reproach, usually made against "negative theology", according to which such theological endeavor leads inevitably to radical atheism under the pretext of "honoring in silence". On the contrary, Derrida's argument's point is more subtle and fundamental. He maintains that "negative theology", despite its best efforts, persists in making affirmative statements about God, especially about His existence, while simultaneous denying them. Thus, "thereby to point out its failure to think God outside of presence and to free itself from the 'metaphysics of presence'." (Marion 2002b, 132.) For Marion, of course, this amounts to saying that mystical theology remains metaphysical — a claim which he directly deems as unfounded. He then proceeds to showing that Derrida's treatment of mystical theology as "a play between affirmation and negation" leads to completely missing the main and essential point of such a theology. According to Marion, one can find in the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite "a third way" of proceeding, which "does not hide an affirmation beneath a negation, seeing as it means exactly to overcome their duel, just as it means to overcome that between the two truth values wherein metaphysics plays itself out." (Marion 2002a, 173)

In the last section of "In Excess" Marion brings together the "third way" and his account of saturated phenomena. He starts by presenting two possible ways, the kataphatic and the apophatic way, of interpreting of Husserl's account of a phenomenon. According to the first interpretation, "the intention finds itself confirmed, at least partially, by the intuition". It is kataphatic insofar as kataphasis, according to Marion, "proceeds through a conceptual affirmation that justifies an intuition". The second, in turn, may be labeled as apophatic since in it "the intention can exceed all intuitive fulfillment, and in this case the phenomenon does not deliver objective knowledge on account of a lack." For Marion, apophasis "proceeds by negating the concept because of an insufficiency in intuition". However, both of these alternatives remain

within the horizon of predication (of naming, identification, and conceptualization), and thus within metaphysics. But, according to Marion, the relation between intention and intuition can, of course, be understood in a more radical "third way" through the description of saturated phenomena. Marion writes: "In this third way, no predication or naming any longer appears possible, as in the second way [apophasis], but now this is so for the opposite reason: not because the giving intuition would be lacking (…) but because the excess of intuition overcomes, submerges, exceeds—in short, saturates—the measure of each and every concept. What is given disqualifies every concept." (Marion 2002b, 158–159). The given which "disqualifies every concept" is God's revelation as the most saturated phenomenon.

The intent of this analysis is to make us see the failure and inadequacy of both kataphatic and apophatic language and approaches vis-à-vis the divine. The Dionysian and Maronian "third way", instead, consists neither in affirming nor in denying/negating something about God. God in his complete transcendence is beyond all predication and predicative language. In accordance with "God without Being", predicative language is denounced as idolatrous: "idolatry of the concept". (Marion 2002b, 150.) Such an idolatrous approach seeks to enter "God within the theoretical horizon of our predication" (Marion 2002b, 157.), that is, to reduce Him to an object of understanding. The "third way" instead by providing a proper "iconic way" of approaching God. It constitutes a "new praxis" which is made of "denomination". Gschwandtner explains that for Marion the point of denomination is neither naming nor not naming, but "un-naming", that is, denying and eliminating "the pertinence of all predication". (Gschwandtner 2014, 151.) Marion claims that the "third way" is a "*radical* apophasis", which leads to another type of knowledge. It is radical insofar as it supposed to *overcome* both apophatic and kataphatic approaches in single stroke.

This other type of knowledge would consist in knowing "in and through ignorance itself, to know that one does not know, to know incomprehensibility as such—the third way would consist, at least at first glance, in nothing else". To follow the "third way" is to recognize that *understanding* God is at same time and *at once* acknowledging that in fact we do not know Him as such at all, "but something less than God, seeing as we could easily conceive an other still greater than the one we comprehend. For the one we compre-

hend would always remain less than and below the one we do not comprehend." Marion proceeds to stating that incomprehensibility belongs to the "formal definition" of God. (See Marion 2002b, 154.) This seems to be a surprising move since all attempts to provide any definitions with regard to God, be it formal, were deemed as unacceptable. Of course, one could point out that Marion too has to use language to express his views, and thus he must conceptualize, name, define, and predicate. But, at the end even such a "formal definition" too must be radically denominated and negated according to the procedure "radical apophasis". Or, Marion could be taken to be making a Phillipsian point. Briefly put, one must move beyond what such sentence as "God is incomprehensible" seems to mean on the surface, as it were, move beyond the literal propositional content of such claims, and describe what they really mean. "God is comprehensible" is not an indicative sentence, or a factual statement. Instead, it is an expression of faith, an expression of the believer's fundamental commitments which guides and gives meaning to her life. However, this not what Marion seems to be saying, and if he does, he does not state it clearly. A more accurate interpretation Marion's claim is the following. What Marion, as a phenomenologist, wants to say is that looking from a phenomenological (and Kantian) point-of-view, God is never nor can He be given as an object of comprehension for us. God's incomprehensibility is, as he puts its elsewhere, His impossibility *for us*. (See e.g. Marion 2010b, 87–138.) To say that "God is incomprehensible" is not say anything about God, but something fundamental about us. Yet, even in this case it seems, at very least, odd to provide "formal definition" *of* God, which amounts to putting God under a concept. But maybe Marion is willing to grant this much, though I have my doubts.

Be as it may, for Marion the incomprehensibility of God means we must ultimately remain silent. (See Gschwandtner 2014, 151) However, Gschwandtner points out, this silence does not amount to turning away from or even to outright denial of God. Instead, it is "an appropriate silence" in which the direction of the relation between me and God is reversed. For Marion, this iconic "third way" consists in approaching God in such way that God's utter transcendence and incomprehensibility is acknowledged. It is matter of orienting to oneself to the divine in the proper and correct way, to expose oneself to God who addresses me and letting myself to be the intentional object,

as it were, of God's activity. According to Marion, the "third way" is a purely pragmatic one. (Marion 2002b, 157.)

But, how is this to be understood? If God and his revelation are totally ungraspable and cannot and *ought* not to be talked about, how does one even start approaching God in the right way. For it seems that, to put in terms of "God without Being", if there is an infinite distance between the one who views the icon and the divine, all "access" to God, even a pragmatic one, is denied for the start?

PRAYER AS ACCESS

In "In Excess" Marion maintains that prayer offers such an "access", even though, in an indirect way. Following Dionysus, Marion understands prayer as "not consist[ing] in causing the invoked one to descend into the realm of our language (he or she exceeds it, but also is found always already among us) but in elevating ourselves toward the one invoked by sustained attention. The approach of prayer always consists simply in de-nominating—not naming properly, but setting out to intend God [*le viser*] in all impropriety (…) As such, the de-nomination operated by prayer (and praise) according to the necessary impropriety of names should not be surprising. In effect, it confirms the function of the third way, no longer predicative (whether this mean predicating an affirmation or a negation) but purely pragmatic." (Marion 2002b, 144.) Gschwandtner points out that Marion's account of prayer is primarily an elucidation of the impossibility of stating anything adequate about God. Prayer would be an entirely passive "iconic" response to the phenomenon of revelation that overwhelms me. Gschwandtner writes: "Prayer simply serves as a name for the awe inspired by the unnamable and as a way of claiming that such awe is no longer predicative." (Gschwandtner 2014, 152.) It is interesting to note that already in "God without Being", Marion describes in similar terms what he calls there "the contemplation of the icon". While contemplation does not lead to a conceptual grasping or fixing of the invisible, it is not described solely in negative terms. According to Marion, the contemplation of the icon is essentially about reverence and veneration. And, it is only through veneration and worship that the invisible God becomes present in the visible icon. He writes: "[I]n reverent contemplation of the icon

[…] the gaze of the invisible, in person, aims at man. The icon regards us — it concerns us, in that it allows the intention of the invisible to occur visible […] not to be seen, but venerated." (Marion 1991, 19.)

While Gschwandtner is surely correct, Marion's account nevertheless seems to make room for one possible way talking about God. Surely, Marion contends, one cannot pray without saying something and without naming, that is, without recognizing the one to whom one prays. However, in prayer, Marion claims, one speaks to God indirectly. To speak in an indirect way, is not to attribute something to something, but to speak of and approach God *as* the principle of goodness, for example. It is to go in the direction of, reckoning with, and to deal with God. Marion writes: "In this way, prayer and praise are carried out in the very same operation of an indirect aim (…) always only to de-nominate as . . . and inasmuch as . . . what this intention can glimpse and interpret of it." (Marion 2002b, 144.) Mackinley calls this indirect speech the "apophatic as". (Mckinley 2010, 214.) Nevertheless, while there seems to be for Marion an indirect way of talking about God, at the end the infinite distance between the one who prays and God remains impenetrable. Marion states: "Access to the divine phenomenality is not forbidden to us; in contrast, it is precisely when we become entirely open to it that we find ourselves forbidden from it—frozen, submerged, we are by ourselves forbidden from advancing and likewise from resting." (Marion 2002b, 161–162.) The "apophatic as" of prayer seems to be nothing more than the realization of the incomprehensibility of God. The "third way" consists in resisting the temptation of idolatry by making distance ever greater between us and God by constantly reaffirming the incomprehensibility of God. Such is proper way of accessing the divine. He writes: "It is not much to say that God remains God even if one is ignorant of God's essence, concept, and presence—God remains God only on condition that this ignorance be established and admitted definitively. Every thing in the world gains by being known—but God, who is not of the world, gains by not being known conceptually. The idolatry of the concept is the same as that of the gaze: imagining oneself to have attained and to be capable of maintaining God under our gaze, like a thing of the world. And the Revelation of God consists first of all in cleaning the slate of this illusion and it blasphemy. […] The Name—it has to be dwelt in without saying it, but by letting it say, name, and call us. The Name is not said by

us; it is the Name that calls us. And nothing terrifies us more than this call," (Marion 2002b, 150–162.)

It should be noted that what Marion writes about prayer applies to our relation with the divine in general. Prayer works as a paradigmatic case of a "correct" religious experience and language which, as he writes, "marks the transgression of the predicative, nominative, and therefore metaphysical sense of language". Prayer also marks the end of metaphysical speculation about God and natural theology by revealing their blasphemous and idolatrous nature. (Marion 2002b, 145.) Yet, Mason rightly notes that while in God's case the language of objects ceases as a possibility, there a sense in which naming and predication remain operative in God's revelation. But the roles are now reversed. In accordance with his description of the saturated phenomenon of revelation, it is no longer the I who acts, names or predicates. The saturated phenomenon of revelation is utterly overwhelming and given in such an excessive fullness that the recipient is incapable of intentionally constituting or grasping it. It is no longer the subject who acts, instead it the one upon whom the saturated phenomenon acts. Marion calls this a "counter-experience" or "counter-intentionality" in which the recipient itself is constituted. (See e.g. Marion 2002b, 113; Marion 2002a, 215-216. See Gschwandtner 2014, 152.) It is God's revelation which names and predicates about me. In speaking to God, I no longer seek to find a name for or describe God; instead, it is God who acts on me, and I am, thus, as Mason puts it, "inscribed within the horizon of God making language performative rather than merely descriptive." (See Mason 2014, 30. (Marion 2002b, 157.) In a similar manner as in "God without Being", the one who speaks to God or contemplates the icon, is an utterly passive recipient of the revelation of God which, in Marion words, imposes on us, and in its intuitive excess overwhelms and obsesses me leaving me in stupor and terror. The definition of the saturated phenomenon of revelation is strikingly similar to the definition of the icon in "God without Being". In fact, in the last paragraph of "Saturated Phenomena" Marion describes the overwhelming effect of the phenomenon of the revelation of God as leading to "the paradox that an invisible gaze visibly envisages me and loves me." (Marion 2008, 47–48.)

Marion holds that we must "dwell" within God's horizon, let God "say, name, and us". However, one must be asked, however, and here I join many

others, that if the saturated phenomena and, especially, the phenomenon of revelation are as excessive as Marion takes them to be, to the point of being constitutive of us who receive them, then how are we to recognize it? If I am not capable of grasping or interpreting such a phenomenon at all how am I to make distinction between a common-law, the first-order saturated phenomena, and the fifth type of saturated phenomena of revelation? How do I, for instance, recognize that I am venerating an idol instead of an icon? Marion is known for his critical stance towards philosophical hermeneutics as for him any interpretative understanding of a given phenomenon based on a preunderstanding introduces restraints and conditions for the appearing of the phenomenon. But, certainly Marion would agree that we are capable, for example, to conceptually idolize God and the Word (e.g. causa sui), by way of affirmation or negation, and, thus, succumb to conceptual idolatry. But, whence do I start in order to receive the correct interpretation of the words given by the Word on its own accord?

In the first pages of "God without Being" Marion acknowledges the possibility of an icon turning into an idol and vice versa and seems to suggest that the change in status, from idol to icon, occurs only in veneration. McKinley in his commentary on this passage points outs that Marion himself suggests that what is required is that the viewer herself decides to make a reverent approach. (McKinley 2010, 169) Thus, the gazer must deliberate and make a decision whether to venerate the icon and receive it as the focus his veneration or not. Surely, in a similar manner, active engagement from the part of the recipient of revelation is also required in order to pass from an "idolatrous way" to the correct way "iconic way" of relating oneself to the divine which consists in "admitting ignorance", "to dwell" in God's horizon, "letting" him call me and so forth. What this suggests is that the recipient of the saturated phenomenon cannot be an utterly passive one. Some interplay is required. Furthermore, surely it is the I who must actively reaffirm the incomprehensibility of God. Gschwandtner makes a similar remark with regard to prayer. She asks: "What does it mean to recognize the divine gaze in prayer, to "feel" the divine calling me or bearing upon me, to sense God speaking to me?" According to Gschwandtner, all of these require significant amount of interpretation in order to "see" God's gaze and his voice correct Marion way. Marion might emphasizes the bedazzling effect the divine gaze has on the one who

prays, but "identifying this effect as an effect of the divine gaze is, however, a hermeneutic exercise. Obviously, such an identification does not happen in a vacuum but is always deeply informed by a whole (and varied) tradition of how God is understood to call or affect people." (Gschwandtner 2014, 157.) As noted above, Marion relies heavily on his own deeply Christian background, which informs his philosophical work and guides his thinking. And, it seems that for a person to receive God's revelation in proper Marionian way, she must herself, in one way or another, be informed by such a tradition.

CONCLUSION

According to Marion we are required to receive God's revelation in the right way, that is, according to the "third way". Taking this road means rejecting all metaphysical, ontotheological, approaches as erroneous and idolatrous, and traditional natural theology as well. This rejection does not, however, mean a total abandonment of all philosophical analysis of religious phenomena. Instead, one must in a sense start anew and give a more adequate philosophical account which provides a "iconic way" of approaching the divine while acknowledging God's incompressibility and transcendence with regard to us. Marion is critical of philosophical hermeneutics, yet, his views are difficult to understand without taking into consideration his own theological background. And while Marion's account is compelling, its uncompromising excessiveness makes it to see how to follow his "third way". Where does one start?

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IS TRADITIONAL NATURAL THEOLOGY COGNITIVELY PRESUMPTUOUS?

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1. INTRODUCTION

Is there any definite evidence that God exists? Various theories have emerged in response to this question. Paul K. Moser's response, known as 'volitional theism', reorients religious epistemology away from traditional natural theology toward a focus on something called 'personifying evidence of God' that emerges from divine self-manifestation in human experience. It contends that a God worthy of worship would typically provide only evidence intended to be morally transformative of a person toward God's moral character. According to this response, God would not give humans evidence for God's reality on the basis of the alleged evidence of traditional natural theology, and we should not expect otherwise, given God's redemptive moral character.

Given a suitable concept of God as redemptive toward humans, we can see that traditional natural theology is cognitively presumptuous toward God in a manner one might call 'arrogant' or 'prideful'. Suppose one considers, with no undefeated basis for rejection, that as worthy of worship and hence morally perfect, God would morally challenge humans whenever needed, including when they receive genuine evidence of God's reality, as they are tempted to become prideful about it. Suppose also that, without due evidential support, one expects God to supply evidence of divine reality via the alleged evidence from traditional natural theology (say, from traditional ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments) that does not morally challenge one in receiving such evidence. In that case, one would be cognitively presumptuous in expecting, without due support, God as morally perfect to supply the relevant evidence via traditional natural theology.

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Why should one suppose, if one should, that the evidence from traditional natural theology is indicative of, or even comes from, a morally perfect God worthy of worship rather than some lesser, morally inferior "god"? Arguably, one should not suppose this at all, as this would be cognitively presumptuous relative to a morally perfect God set on the redemption of humans. Regardless of whether the morally loaded term 'pride' is appropriate, the key consideration, according to volitional theism, is that traditional natural theology is cognitively presumptuous relative to a God worthy of worship, owing to a dubious, ungrounded assumption about evidence of God's reality. We shall clarify this often-neglected consideration.

Trent Dougherty and Brandon Rickabaugh (henceforth DR) have criticized the view (put in their own language, not Moser's) "that the robust practice of natural theology reeks of epistemic pride."[1] They offer three main charges against Moser's position. First, Moser's criticism of traditional natural theology unduly focuses on a truncated characterization of natural theology. Once we broaden natural theology to include the pursuit of knowledge of God from divine self-revelation in the natural world and human nature, so the claim goes, it becomes clear that traditional natural theology is not arrogant, but rather a humble response to such revelation. Second, the distinction between *personifying* evidence and *spectator* evidence, which figures in Moser's argument against traditional natural theology, faces crucial problems, such as that there is no such thing as spectator evidence. Third, Moser's view of divine revelation devalues the role of prevenient grace. We shall make some needed corrections to how DR have mischaracterized Moser's view, and show their main charges to be faulty.

2. CLARIFYING 'TRADITIONAL NATURAL THEOLOGY'

DR's first charge against Moser is that his conception of natural theology is too narrow and should be broadened to a Thomistic characterization. We begin, therefore, with what we mean by 'traditional natural theology'. Inquirers into the

[1] T. Dougherty and B. Rickabaugh, "Natural Theology, Evidence, and Epistemic Humility," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9 (2017), 1. The previous description, in the current paper, of the 'cognitive presumptuousness' of traditional natural theology more accurately captures Moser's view than does DR's talk of "reeks of epistemic pride." We recommend against the kind of polemical rhetorical flourish favored by DR. This kind of excess gives a bad name to much of so-called 'Christian apologetics', particularly in the USA, and we prefer not to stoop to it.

existence and nature of God are, we assume, seeking at least evidence that justifies various beliefs about God. We divide evidence into two kinds: *privately available* evidence and *publicly available* evidence.[2] Publicly available evidence is evidence that any capable inquirer has access to, at least with due effort and reflection. By 'capable', we mean that one's cognitive resources, including one's perceptual apparatus and reasoning faculties, are in good working condition; so, one can acquire information from the outside world and make good inferences based on one's cognitive resources. Examples abound of publicly available evidence. Consider the claim that Barack Obama was the 44th President of the United States. There is abundant publicly available evidence for this claim. Any capable inquirer, having the needed cognitive resources, could collect footage of: Obama being sworn into office, Obama giving state-of-the-union addresses, thousands of people working alongside Obama and calling him 'Mr. President', and so on.

Privately available experiential evidence is itself available only to the individuals actually presented with that evidence in their experience. Differing from *reports about it*, such evidence is not automatically shareable by another capable inquirer, even via the rigorous exercise of that inquirer's cognitive resources. Consider the claim that God is now self-manifesting to me, via my being convicted in conscience of my selfishness. Let's suppose that this claim is true, and is justified by my overall experience in the absence of undefeated defeaters, such as a defeater from having an obvious experience of being under the influence of mind-altering drugs. So, I have undefeated evidence for the claim that God is now self-manifesting to me, via my being convicted in conscience of my selfishness. This particular evidence via *my* conscience is only available to me; only I have access to *this* experiential evidence of being convicted by God of my selfishness.

I could tell you about my being convicted in conscience by God (as I am doing), and even describe the qualitative texture of the experience in question: its intensity, duration, and so on. That, however, would be public testimonial evidence *about* my being convicted in conscience and my relevant evidence; it would not be my private experiential evidence of my being convicted in my conscience by God. My private evidence of being thus convicted by God is not something I can

[2] This, of course, is not meant to characterize evidence exhaustively; various other distinctions apply to evidence. For a detailed sample, see Paul K. Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and Moser, *Philosophy after Objectivity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

give you. I am not in a position to supply such evidence, to you or anyone else, in the way God does in divine self-manifestation. In addition, you will not have such evidence if *God* does not give you a similar experience of divine self-manifestation in your conscience. In particular, you cannot produce such evidence just by the exercise, however rigorous, of your cognitive resources. In this regard, my evidence of God's intervention is not automatically shareable by other capable inquirers, even via rigorous exercise of their cognitive resources. It thus is privately available evidence for me, and not publicly available.[3]

Given a distinction between privately available evidence and publicly available evidence, we can offer an illuminating characterization and assessment of traditional natural theology. Such natural theology is the search for publicly available evidence concerning the existence and nature of God. It attempts to discover evidence that any capable inquirer looking in the right places could find, if with due effort and reflection. Its purview does not cover potential evidence that is privately available, such as evidence from various ways that God specially self-reveals God's presence or existence to individuals. This characterization of traditional natural theology fits with how most advocates of "natural theology" use the term.

The traditional natural theological arguments, such as ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments, depend on premises whose alleged supporting evidence is publicly available to all capable inquirers. For example, a proponent of a cosmological argument may ask us (a) to consult current theoretical physics to establish that the universe had a temporal beginning in the finite past and (b) to conclude, eventually, that a God-like being must have been (or at least was) the primary cause in the origin of the universe.[4] Such evidence from theoretical physics is publicly available to all capable inquirers. Many people, of course, would not (fully) understand the complexity of the relevant physics, but such people are not altogether unable to understand it. Given enough dedication and training, they could understand the physics and become equipped with the alleged evidence for

[3] For details on the cognitive role of conscience regarding God, see Paul K. Moser, "Divine Hiddenness, Agapē Conviction, and Spiritual Discernment," forthcoming in *Discernment for Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception*, eds. Paul Gavrilyuk and Frederick Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), and Paul K. Moser, *The God Relationship: The Ethics for Inquiry about the Divine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), chapter 5.

[4] Such an argument, like the Kalam cosmological argument, may also ask us to endorse the alleged synthetic *a priori* claim that everything that begins to exist has a cause.

the conclusion that God exists. In addition, ontological arguments are paradigm cases of natural theology. The premises in this family of arguments depend on reason alone to conclude that God exists. Evidence for these premises is allegedly available to anyone who is able to reason properly; it thus is publicly available evidence for all capable inquirers.

Publicly available evidence has different cognitive features from privately available evidence. Consider, for instance, publicly available evidence that is just *de dicto* (or, just propositional rather than *de re*). This is just one species of publicly available evidence, but it is familiar. It can be transmitted without epistemic loss through suitable testimony. Consider such publicly available evidence as the evidence that the earth's core is composed of an iron-nickel alloy. Some of us who accept this evidence have not done the experiments necessary to confirm this evidence. We are justified, however, in believing this about the earth's core, owing to the testimonial evidence from geologists whose findings are documented in peer-reviewed journals. Publicly available evidence that is just *de dicto* has this feature of transmission that privately available evidence does not.

DR apparently reject the proposed approach to natural theology, and opt for a broader, Thomistic conception of natural theology. They claim that natural theology "tracks general revelation," and they propose to expand the scope of general revelation. General revelation, they claim, is any "information conveyed about God through the natural world and human nature."[5] This may seem initially plausible, but it emerges as implausible when DR expand it to include "observing God's activity in … our own life [and]…evidence available in the practice of spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and prolonged self-examination."[6] Once evidence from the latter disciplines is included in *general* revelation, the conceptual space for *special* revelation becomes so small that the familiar distinction between general and special revelation is no longer recognizable. If prayer and such spiritual disciplines as meditation, fasting, worship, and silence count as (bases for evidence from) general revelation, the category of special revelation becomes unrecognizably, if not vanishingly, small. So, the proposed expansion seems *ad hoc*.

The spiritual disciplines in question are precisely the places where most theorists of divine revelation would say that *special* revelation would occur, if it occurs

5 Dougherty and Rickabaugh, "Natural Theology," 5.
6 Dougherty and Rickabaugh, "Natural Theology," 7.

at all. For instance, one might think that God would specially self-reveal God's presence to a person through human conscience or through prayer. We say "specially" self-reveal, because it is given with particularity rather than broad generality among people. The relevant experience is evidence only for the particular person who actually receives it in his or her experience, and it is not publicly shareable by every capable inquirer with suitable cognitive resources. Such revelation lacks the generality of general revelation, because it is not distributed generally by God to all people with suitable cognitive resources. We see here a connection between some kinds of special revelation and privately available evidence. The familiar arguments of traditional natural theology, in contrast, propose publicly available evidence that differs from the evidence of such special revelation.

DR claim that, "all theological knowledge is grounded in God's gracious self-disclosure," and suggest that this point is lost on Moser. They overlook, however, that their talk of "grounded" is ambiguous between the idea of *direct* grounding and the notion of *indirect*, perhaps even highly indirect, grounding. It is compatible with Moser's foundationalist view that all knowledge of God is *ultimately* grounded in special revelation and privately available evidence directly from divine self-manifestation.[7] Traditional natural theology, however, does not offer such evidence directly from divine self-manifestation. So, the point in question is not lost here at all, although it is harmless against volitional theism.

3. PERSONIFYING EVIDENCE AND SPECTATOR EVIDENCE

Along with the distinction between privately available evidence and publicly available evidence, we should consider a distinction between personifying evidence and spectator evidence. According to Moser's *The Evidence for God*,[8] spectator evidence "makes no demand or call on the direction of a human will or life," in particular, toward "an authoritative call to humans from an authoritative God," whereas personifying evidence does. The talk of "direction of a human will or life" here is clearly intentional or goal-directed, and not merely causal. So, it will not be satisfied by the mere acceptance of an assertion. Instead, it involves the idea of

7 For details, see Moser, *The God Relationship,* chapter 3.

8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 37. See also Moser, *The Elusive God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 46–47.

responding to an authoritative divine call on one's life-aim. (This is explicit in *The Evidence for God* and in *The Elusive God;* see the pages referenced in note 8.)

Personifying evidence will shape and direct the volitional center, and thus the life, of a person relative to God; spectator evidence will not. Finding out from a geology textbook, for instance, that the earth's core is made of an iron-nickel alloy is thus not volitionally transformative in the relevant sense. Such evidence does nothing to direct one's volitional center toward divine goodness. Lacking that kind of transformative role, such evidence qualifies as spectator evidence. One can appropriate it without transformation of one's volitional center relative to one's life-direction. Not all evidence is like this; some is volitionally transformative relative to a divine call on one's life-direction. An authoritative call by God in one's conscience, for instance, to love one's enemy unselfishly offers evidence that is relevantly transformative when received cooperatively. At least two options arise from such evidence in my conscience: I can cooperate with the call to self-sacrificial *agapē,* thereby directing my will and life favorably toward divine goodness; or I can reject or at least ignore the call, thereby hardening my heart against divine goodness.

DR claim that there is no such thing as spectator evidence because "all evidence ultimately consists in experiences with assertoric force, experiences that assert the world is a certain way, which therefore puts normative pressure on us to accept their claims."[9] *If* all evidence were of the latter sort, this would pose no problem for volitional theism and its approach to spectator evidence. It is misleading, however, to claim that the experiences in evidence "assert" something, even if they *represent* something or other. Indeed, this is a kind of category mistake, given that experiences by themselves do not make affirmations or predications at all. In addition, even if all experience in evidence has a representative feature, only some evidence has a normative feature bearing on one's life-direction relative to divine goodness. All genuine evidence *may* prompt one to adopt some conceptual or propositional content, but not all evidence prompts one to have one's volitional center transformed toward divine goodness. DR's claim about experience in evidence is thus no threat; it is compatible with the distinction of volitional theism between personifying and spectator evidence.

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[9] Dougherty and Rickabaugh, "Natural Theology," 11.

DR cite Moser's following description of personifying evidence: "*…this evidence becomes salient to inquirers as they, themselves, responsively and willingly become evidence of God's reality*, in willingly receiving and reflecting God's powerful moral character-specifically divine, unselfish love for others, even one's enemies."[10] They claim that this is not a clear notion of evidence, and they wonder if the evidence mentioned is personifying or propositional evidence. DR state: "If [it's] the former, then it's deeply flawed, because then it appeals to the very notion it purports to explicate. If Moser means the latter, then propositional evidence is appropriate proximate evidence for God, since it is the operative evidence according to what he says."[11]

Two considerations undermine the criticism. First, the talk of evidence in the quotation is just talk of a truth-indicator (the latter involving Moser's core notion for understanding the idea of evidence).[12] So, the relevant notion of evidence need not, and does not, include the key idea of *personifying* evidence; the latter idea goes beyond the basic notion of evidence as a truth-indicator. As a result, there is no conceptual circularity here.

Second, DR mistakenly pit personifying evidence against propositional evidence. This is a category mistake. Personifying evidence can be either propositional or non-propositional evidence. It could be the direct experience of comfort, mercy, grace, and love in human conscience from a morally perfect God, and that would typically be non-propositional evidence. Alternatively, personifying evidence could include a thought, in propositional form, communicated to a human by God through conscience, and that would be propositional evidence. The operative evidence in a particular case will depend on the details of that case, such as whether a special revelation in the case is propositional rather than non-propositional in nature.[13] That, of course, would be up to God, and the relevant evidence will not automatically be shareable by other inquirers.

DR's third main claim is that Moser's view "devalues the role of prevenient grace."[14] Prevenient grace, as DR understand it, "comes before effectual grace, and is based neither on knowledge of special revelation nor any explicit knowledge of

10 Moser, *The Evidence for God*, p. 2.
11 Dougherty and Rickabaugh, "Natural Theology," 13.
12 For details, see Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
13 For elaboration, see Moser, *The God Relationship,* chapter 5.
14 Dougherty and Rickabaugh, "Natural Theology," 16.

God at all."[15] It is doubtful, however, that volitional theism devalues prevenient grace in any way. For instance, as *The Evidence for God* makes clear,[16] a recipient of personifying evidence need not recognize that God is the one offering the personifying evidence. One may not be aware of the source of the personifying evidence but still find oneself having, and even cooperating with, such evidence. One of the explanatory strengths of volitional theism is that people with personifying evidence for God need not be aware that God is the source of their transformative evidence. Many such people could call God by different names or even be agnostic about God's existence. This is an explanatory virtue of volitional theism, especially given the reality of religious diversity. Prevenient grace fits well with volitional theism.

A God worthy of worship, being morally perfect, would be profoundly redemptive in a manner that makes changing people's volitional centers more important than achieving their intellectual assent to God's existence. Beliefs do matter in some ways, of course, and they can add depth to a divine–human relationship, but they are not as important, redemptively, as the moral transformation of people into the likeness of God's morally perfect character. Indeed, this consideration figures in an explanation of why a God worthy of worship would not be interested in the spectator evidence sought by traditional natural theology. The latter evidence would yield, by itself, at most an opportunity for intellectual assent to God's existence.[17] A God worthy of worship, however, would not be primarily concerned with people acquiring knowledge of the proposition that God exists. Human transformation toward God's moral character, for the sake of divine–human fellowship, would come first.

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15 Dougherty and Rickabaugh, "Natural Theology," 13.

16 See Chapter 5, particularly in connection with the example of the young girl on an isolated island.

17 For specific doubts that the arguments of traditional natural theology yield the reality of a personal God worthy of worship, see Moser, *The Evidence for God,* chapter 3. See also Moser, *The God Relationship,* pp. 223–27, 324–28. Significantly, for all of their rhetoric favoring natural theology, DR do not offer an argument that yields the reality of such a God. This is a striking omission. We doubt that they have a good argument to offer.

4. CONCLUSION

We now can return, in conclusion, to the cognitive presumptuousness in traditional natural theology. A God worthy of worship would rightly prioritize and value human volitional transformation toward God's moral character over propositional knowledge that God exists. This kind of God would not seek to have people come to know that God exists via spectator evidence; so, we should not expect such a God to supply such evidence for divine reality. Having spectator evidence of God's existence without the accompanying divine redemptive call would be damaging to an inquirer, if only by having the inquirer think of God without a divine challenge to conform to divine goodness in contrast to human pride. A god who separates this intended redemptive component from evidence for divine reality is not the morally perfect God worthy of worship, but is at best a lesser, morally inferior god. Traditional natural theology leaves us at most with such a lesser god, relative to the worship-worthy God who seeks human redemption, and not just human belief, via evidence from divine self-manifestation.

Traditional natural theology is cognitively presumptuous in assuming, without due support, that the evidence for divine reality is accessible to all capable inquirers with adequate cognitive resources, as if the evidence were offered indiscriminately for all such inquirers. This assumption unduly neglects the volitional consideration of a human life-direction that would be crucially important to a redemptive God of moral perfection. Such a God would attend to what a human *wills* in relation to God and divine goodness, and the evidence for divine reality, correspondingly, would be sensitive to this volitional consideration. John's Gospel moves in this direction in its attributing to Jesus the remark that if anyone *wills* to do the will of God, that person will know whether certain claims are from God (John 7:17). The direction of one's willing (and living) would be crucial to a redemptive God of moral perfection, and our epistemology of evidence for God should accommodate this lesson. The volitional theism defended here aims to do so, with help from its distinction between spectator and personifying evidence for God's existence. An important result is that traditional natural theology emerges as cognitively presumptuous. In that regard, it is cognitively defective.

AGATHOLOGICAL RATIONALISM AND FIRST-ORDER RELIGIONS

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In one of the recent issues of the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*[1] Janusz Salamon has argued that the project of second-order religion put forward by Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican (henceforth TMM)[2] presupposes a watered-down vision of religion, or more of a philosophical worldview than a religion — an opinion with which I must agree. Salamon objects to TMM's idea, whose main function seems to be providing only an explanation why our Universe exists and why it is ordered as it is, without giving us any axiological content and eschatological hope. A true religion — true in the sense that it satisfies some minimal set of conditions which religious believers have in mind speaking about religion — cannot fail to provide some such axiological content, including moral principles and some reply to the question about the meaning of life. This is precisely the job that first-order historical religions, like Christianity, Judaism, Islam or Buddhism do. Salamon argues that the main task of religion is not to answer the cognitive questions concerning the beginning and the order of our Universe — questions that Millican and Thornhill-Miller are particularly interested in — but rather address the existential questions, like: what is the meaning of my life and of the life of my loved ones in the face of suffering and death. I find this existential and axiological bias, by and large, well-justified and uncontroversial.

[1] Janusz Salamon, 'Atheism and Agatheism in the Global Ethical Discourse: Reply to Millican and Thornhill- Miller', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 7 no. 4 (2015), 197-245.

[2] Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican, 'The Common Core/Diveristy Dilemma; Revisions of Humean Thought, New Empirical Research, and the Limits of Rational Religious Belief', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 7 no. 1 (2015), 1-51.

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However, it seems to me that we should not discard too easily the cognitive content of religion. For example, if the question of why there is something rather than nothing is raised, one can answer it in a theistic manner by pointing to God the Creator as the explanation of why there is something rather than nothing. An atheist can answer the same question by referring to a random coincidence of physical events or to a physical, natural necessity of some brute facts or states. Any religion should have in its intellectual resources an answer to this kind of metaphysical questions, thus providing an alternative to the naturalistic view of the Universe.

I also agree with Salamon's response to TMM that first-order religions can be rational and that it is not true that all such religions (i.e., religious beliefs held by their adherents and generated by them) are positively irrational. The main idea of TMM is that all first-order religions are irrational mainly because of their diversity and the mutual incompatibility of their creeds' propositional content. On the other hand, they think that science provides at least some reasons for believing that the physical Universe is fine-tuned and this might provide a point of departure of an argument that would ground second-order religious belief in the existence of a divine Designer of the fine-tuned Universe. They also believe that such new second-order religion could bring a range of social and psychological benefits analogical to those which first-order religions offer, and hence could replace all first-order religions which TMM consider to be irrational without exception.

When defending the rationality of first-order religions, Salamon resorts to his own philosophical view of religion which he calls agatheism, because it identifies the Absolute or the Ultimate Reality with the Ultimate Good (*to agathon* in Greek) and sees religious beliefs as products of 'agathological imagination'. The key point of his position in discussion with TMM is that the agatheistic defence of the rationality of first-order religious beliefs is grounded not in the considerations of the facts about the physical Universe, but in the realm of human values. As he puts it: 'agatheism ascribes to the Ultimate Reality the function of being the ultimate ground and ultimate end (*telos*) of all that is good, thus making sense of the teleological and value-laden nature of our self-consciousness, of our thinking about our existence as of self-conscious, ra-

tional and free persons whose actions are explained by reference to value-laden reasons, not merely to efficient physical causes.'[3]

I suggest that Salamon's agathological conception of rationality of religious beliefs (for brevity: agathological rationality) implies that all believers of a given first-order religion can fall into three epistemic classes:

(a) ordinary believers

(b) reflective believers

(c) hyper-reflective believers

Ordinary believers are those who grew up in a certain religious tradition, maintain it by going to church, synagogue or temple, and live their lives in a way recommended by that tradition. They simply believe in all the things they have been taught as belonging to their home religious tradition, and stick to their own tradition without questioning the truthfulness and accuracy of their creed, and without considering in any critical manner the question of the truthfulness of alien religious traditions. Reflective believers, in turn, seek to answer certain troubling questions, they reflect on their own religion and try to respond to objections raised by sceptics, atheists and other critics of their religious tradition or of religion in general. Hyper-reflective believers are like reflective believers, but they go one step further, namely, they are ready to admit that it is *possible* that other first-order religion(s) can be equally close or closer to truth of the matter and may grasp the Ultimate Reality more truthfully than their own religious tradition does. Hyper-reflective believers continue to trust in the God of their own tradition, but they also allow for the *possibility* that adherents of some other religion may be right in believing in the Divinity that is worshipped in their tradition because it satisfies their expectations regarding the divine perfection (something Salamon expresses in terms of 'agathological verification').

On Salamon's view, hyper-reflective believers have a special epistemic instrument at their disposal called 'agathological imagination', which allows them to evaluate the rationality of first-order religions. Agathalogical imagination

[3] Janusz Salamon, 'Atheism and Agatheism...', p. 202.

— one may also call it axiological intuition — allows them to evaluate whether and to what extent God or the Ultimate Reality (the Divine) of a given first-order religion is *sufficiently* perfect, in the sense of being maximally good.

Now, we are ready to formulate some critical points concerning agathological rationality of first-order religions. Salamon's agatheism seems to imply that if two first-order religions fulfil the requirements of agathological rationality in the same degree, then they are equally rational and believing in them is equally rational, too. If two first-order religions fulfil the requirements of Salamon's agathological rationality differently, then they are not equally rational and believing in them is not equally rational, either. It may perhaps be the case that some first-order religions do not fulfil the requirements of agathological rationality at all, and such religions and believing in them will be irrational. Thus, on Salamon's view about the rationality of religious beliefs, it is possible that

(1) two (or more) first-order religions can be equally rational meaning that they are simply rational;

(2) some first-order religions can be more rational than others;

(3) all first-order religions can be irrational;

(4) all first-order religions can be rational.

Surely, Salamon and Thornhill-Miller and Millican, refer to different concepts of rationality of religious belief. Salamon's rationality of religious beliefs is based on axiology and TMM's view of rationality of beliefs is grounded in the standards of science. Given Salamon's agatheism, I assume that, possibly, all first-order religions could be irrational because it is agathological imagination which is the final criterion of their rationality, and agathological imagination works in time, and, hence, it can change. There is no reason, as far as I can see, why in Salamon's agatheism option (3) should be a priori eliminated. Therefore, it is at least possible that all first-order religions are irrational in an agathological sense. The question whether they all *are* irrational in this agathological sense, or only some of them, is left open. In other words, Salamon is focusing on what agathological imagination is and how it works but he has less to say about the final results of this work. *Are* all first-order religions equally rational or are all of them irrational? Or perhaps some of them are irrational, but then

which ones? Salamon presumably excludes option (3) (all first-order religions are irrational) since he is arguing against TMM's idea of second-order religion while defending first-order religions. However, why option (3) is rejected requires a better explanation.

Let us repeat, Salamon, as I understand his position, holds that all first-order religions can be rational (in his agathological sense of rationality), whereas Thornhill-Miller and Millican claim that all first-order religions are irrational (given their understanding of rationality of beliefs). Both sides of the debate assume that an internal coherence of the system of our beliefs is a necessary condition of their rationality and that a given (rational) belief should cohere with the whole body of knowledge of an epistemic agent.

Keeping all this in mind, we may ask the following: what is the position of a hyper-reflective believer who sticks to a particular first-order religion like Christianity? He either believes that Christianity is equally rational as other first-order religions or that Christianity is more or the most rational of them. It would be irrational and incoherent *ex definitione* for a Christian hyper-reflective believer to believe that Christianity is less rational than other first-order religion(s) and still to believe in a Christian God. However, a hyper-reflective believer allows for the possibility that some other first-order religion(s) can prove more rational (in agathological sense) than Christianity. This is so because agathological intuition is always working and the future is open. Therefore, it is possible that our present agathological intuition will be refuted and replaced in the future by another. Thus, a hyper-reflective believer is someone who holds that

(i) his/her own first-order religion is at least as rational as some other first-order religions, but it may well be more or the most rational of them

and

(ii) other first-order religions may, conceivably, be assessed in the future as more rational than his/her own religion.

The question arises if the above-sketched position is a coherent view. A hyper-reflective Christian believer believes, for example, that Jesus is God and that God's nature is truine. He also believes that such a 'social' nature of God is more satisfactory for agathological imagination than a belief that God

is a 'a metaphysically single being', or that the Divine or the Ultimate Reality is impersonal. But still he holds that *it is possible* that other first order religions which reject Christ's divinity are closer to God or to the Ultimate Reality, or simply to the truth. In brief, a hyper-reflective Christian believer believes that Jesus is God and that it is a *good* thing that Jesus is God. However, that believer also holds (as a hyper-reflective believer is obliged to hold) that it is possible that *it is not a good* thing that Jesus is God. Agathological operator 'it is good that…' plays here a crucial role since we are discussing the agathological notion of rationality.

At first glance it seems to be a coherent view. Surely, one can believe that *p* and believe that it is possible that not-*p*. However, here arises another question: is that believer still a Christian? Or, more generally: is such first-order agatheistic religion really a first-order religion? Let us remember that first-order religions consist of yet another element which is inherent and irreducible part of their creed: religious authority. A religious authority is based on some traditions, recorded past events, divine revelations, written texts, social and religious institutions, etc. As grounded in the past that authority is in a sense necessary and closed to any revision or falsification.

Christianity — as the first-order religion — teaches us that Jesus is the Son of God and that it is a good thing that Jesus is the Son of God. But surely it does not teach us that it is possible that it is not a good thing that Jesus is the Son of God. We would probably get into the same dilemma if we considered any specific belief constituting the creed of any other first-order religion. Therefore, my point is that it is not coherent to be a believer of a first-order religion (a hyper-reflective believer in particular) and, at the same time, to be an agatheist. Salamon proposes a new religion or, more accurately, a new spiritual worldview deeply rooted in the Platonist philosophical tradition. But his proposal is rather an alternative to first-order religions — just like TMM's second-order religion is an alternative to them. The difference between Salamon's view on the one hand and Thornhill-Miller and Millican's proposal on the other, concerns the foundation of religious beliefs. Salamon's philosophical construction is based on axiology and TMM is based on cosmology. In fact, both views are deeply rooted in the Platonist philosophical tradition: the former because of the idea of the Good, and the latter because of the idea of the Demiurge.

My view is that 'true' first-order religions are grounded mainly in religious authority and in the past. An ordinary believer of a certain first-order religion, say, an ordinary Christian believer, believes that if his God decided to act in some way, He really acted in that way. The very fact that there exist people who believe that a Christian God could not have wished to act or could not have acted so-and-so because such divine action would be at odds with human imagination or it would contradict human science does not necessarily weaken the rationality of that ordinary Christian believer. That believer can think that God he believes in is truly omnipotent and that He really did things which are beyond the imagination of philosophers and scientists — the agathological imagination included. That ordinary believer can rationally think in the following terms: if God could not do all the things that the religious authority says He did, and if His acts have to be comprehensible to our human imagination and compatible with the current state of scientific knowledge, He would not be a true and almighty God.

If so, what are the prospects for a promising global, or at least regional, dialogue between the believers of various first- and second-order religions? Alas, they are not as bright as many would like them to be. But such a dialogue need not be a hopeless task. As in the case of any dialogue, the outcome much depends on the will to respectfully listen to and think over what the others say. Accordingly, I consider the proposals put forth by Branden Thornhill-Miller, Peter Millican and Janusz Salamon to be interesting, important and worth listening to — with due criticism since critical thinking is part of our tradition.

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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Trent Dougherty and Justin P. McBrayer (eds.): *Skeptical Theism: New Essays*. Oxford University Press 2014, 337pp.

The problem of evil is a big topic in philosophy of religion, and skeptical theism is a big topic in the debate over the problem of evil. The problem of evil in general and skeptical theism in particular are especially hot research projects right now. This edited volume on skeptical theism is indeed timely.

The problem of evil is a problem of understanding how a perfectly good God could allow for the existence, quantity or quality of evil. The usual reply has been in terms of theodicy: proposing God's reasons for allowing evils. Skeptical theism instead invokes our cognitive limitations to defuse the problem. *Very* roughly: we should not expect — or, at least, cannot tell whether we should expect — to understand the reasons an infinite being would have for allowing evils. Slightly more precisely, the problem could be framed as the following atheistic argument: There are evils God has no reason for permitting; if God exists, then there would be no such gratuitous evils; therefore, God does not exist. The first premise has been supported by a 'noseeum' inference: We have not discovered such reasons; therefore, there probably are none. Skeptical theism could then be framed as questioning the noseeum inference: given the cognitive gulf between us, God might very well have reasons we have not discovered.

But things are not nearly so simple: skeptical theism can be qualified in various ways, supported in various ways, and challenged in various ways. That work is the substance of this volume. Indeed, as it turns out, there are quite different ways of framing skeptical theism and its target.

Trent Dougherty and Justin McBrayer have brought together new essays from preeminent contributors on the topic as well as newer lights. There are 22 contributions in total. The contributions are uniformly original and in-

sightful. Some are groundbreaking. The volume is comprehensive and balanced. It does not advertise itself as a 'debate book', along the lines of some popular series. But much of the volume consists in debates between the contributors. While most of the chapters can be read independently, the volume as a whole has an excellent synergy.

It has four parts. There is no real introduction. There is an analytic table of contents with chapter abstracts, but these are hard. However, so long as they have enough background in philosophy, readers new to the topic aren't thrown into the deep end; the chapters usually begin with the relevant basics.

Part 1 addresses various epistemological problems. It opens with a debate between Jonathan Matheson and Dougherty over the compatibility of phenomenal conservatism and skeptical theism. Very roughly, phenomenal conservatism states that things are probably as they appear to be. Should we then conclude, contrary to skeptical theism, that apparently unjustified evils are probably unjustified? Other general epistemological question are taken up by the subsequent chapters by John DePoe, Chris Tucker, Todd Long, and E.J. Coffman. Part 1 concludes with a more theological chapter by Nick Trakakis exploring how Maximus the Confessor reconciles the apparently paradoxical emphasis on both dogma and humility within the Christian tradition.

Part 2 focuses on the epistemological principle of 'CORNEA' in particular. Very roughly, CORNEA states that our not having discovered something (such as God's reasons) is evidence for it not being there only if we would have expected to discover it were it there. Kenneth Boyce focuses on CORNEA to defuse the threat of skeptical theism turning into global skepticism: Might God have reasons we have not discovered to deceive us systematically about the external world? Next is a chapter by Michael Almeida carefully framing a couple of problems of evil, and disputing the relevance of skeptical theism as well as the scope of our cognitive limitations. This is followed by an extended exchange between Paul Draper, on the one hand, and Timothy Perrine and Stephen Wykstra, on the other, over the power of skeptical theism. Their disagreement is finally diagnosed by Lara Buchak.

Part 3 addresses theological problems with skeptical theism, and includes some of the most diverse contributions to the volume by J.L. Schellenberg, Michael Bergman, Wes Morriston, Erik Wielenberg, Andrew Cullison and Kevin Timpe. The chapters by Morriston and Cullison are among the most

impressive in the volume. Drawing upon Hume's insights about the mixture of goods and evils we discover, Morriston parodies skeptical theism with skeptical demonism to reject each. Skeptical demonism is the hypothesis that the world is run by a malicious demon with diabolical reasons we have not fathomed for allowing some goods. Curiously, in the final substantive footnote Morriston remarks that:

Plausible arguments for saying that an omnipotent and omniscience being must be perfectly benevolent are in short supply. But the following argument for rejecting demonism seems promising to me. Suppose it is necessarily true (all else equal) that one ought to promote the welfare of others. Then an *omniscient* being would know that this is so, and would (if we can assume a fairly modest version of moral internalism) have at least *some* inclination to promote the good of creatures. But a perfectly malicious demon would have no such inclination. It follows that the Demon (as defined above) does not exist (p. 234).

Does not the argument Morriston finds 'promising' make for just the sort of argument he finds in 'short supply'? Perhaps he means as much. But the argument seems to me to be the way skeptical theists much go against skeptical demonists. Contrary to an omnipotent an omniscient God, an omnipotent and omniscient demon is impossible. But a less than omnipotent and omniscient demons must be a more arbitrarily limited kind of being, and thus have a lower intrinsic probability than an omnipotent and omniscient God. The probability of theism — skeptical or not — on the mixture of goods and evils there are will then be higher than that of demonism — skeptical or not.

Cullison's chapter answers a theological problem developed in the previous chapter by Wielenberg: Just as God might have reasons we have not fathomed for allowing other evils, might he not have such reasons for deceiving us in religious contexts — when he makes promises or reveals religious truths? Cullison develops two ways for skeptical theists to avoid the problem, one of which is an original kind of skeptical theism that questions not whether there is reason for God to allow some evil but whether God might allow the evil even where there is no such reason.

Finally, part 4 addresses moral problems about skeptical theism. The first chapter by Stephen Maitzen is also among the best in the volume. The chapter develops the threat of moral paralysis posed by skeptical theism: If there are

reasons we have not fathomed for which God allows evil, might there not be such reasons favouring our not intervening to prevent evil either? The chapter engages with Daniel Howard-Snyder, who is given a right of reply. Howard-Snyder points out some misinterpretations, but I wonder whether Howard-Snyder properly interprets Maitzen: no evidence is provided that Maitzen relies on an implausible principle imputed to him (p. 303). The final chapter in the volume by Ted Poston addresses the threat skeptical theism poses for natural theology: If we're so much in the dark about God's reasons, can we invoke such reasons to show why God would bring certain phenomena about, and thus use such phenomena to confirm theism? Poston carefully frames a version of skeptical theism that allows for this.

I predict that some of the chapters will become classics in the literature on skeptical theism in particular and on the problem of evil in general. The chapters by Cullison, Maitzen and Morriston are at once accessible and powerful. The volume has only a general bibliography at the end, rather than a bibliography for each chapter. I presume that the anthologies will figure out a way to reprint the chapters with their individual bibliographies.

Reviewing such a volume is maddeningly frustrating. Given the number and intricacy of the contributions, I have no idea how to more informatively summarize the volume. Given the breadth and depth of the contributions, I have no big idea that was not addressed. So I will just conclude with simple endorsement. The volume will be of interest to anyone working on philosophy of religion in general and on the problem of evil in particular. Subsequent research on the problem of evil must take this volume into account. But it will interest those working beyond philosophy of religion too. Much of the debate about skeptical theism connects with topics in ethics and, especially, epistemology.

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Tyron Goldschmidt (ed.): ***The Puzzle of Existence: Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?*** **Routledge 2013, 295pp.**

1. Introduction

Why is there anything at all? *The Puzzle of Existence* offers a treasure of cutting-edge answers to this classic question. The answers are diverse, as are the philosophical approaches. Yet this sixteen-author volume is remarkably unified: each chapter puts in place a different piece of a big puzzle. The result is new groundwork for inquiry into our most ultimate 'why?' question.

There is much to like about the book. The writing is impressively clear. Meanwhile, the material is sophisticated, innovative, and rigorous. Seasoned philosophers and interested students alike will learn much. Readers will also appreciate the careful tone of the book: the authors, all of them, display the twin virtues of intellectual humility and clear-mindedness.

The most intriguing and impressive feature of the volume is its synergy. Every chapter contributes in some significant way to assessing what Goldschmidt (the editor) calls 'the most traditional answer', which is in terms of a supreme, necessary being. That answer divides into several pieces: (i) there is something (rather than nothing) because there *couldn't have been nothing*; (ii) there couldn't have been nothing because there is something that *must be*; and (iii) there are *contingent, concrete* things (rather than none) because the necessary being created some. In this review, I shall consider some of the significant issues and arguments the authors bring up in connection with these explanations.

2. Necessary Existence

There is something because there *must be*. That's the simplest answer. Why believe it? The volume offers at least six reasons. First, O'Connor gives a nuanced argument from contingency: basically a necessary concrete reality empowers the best ultimate (most complete) explanation of why there are contingent (non-necessary) things (chapter 2). Notably, O'Connor allows there to be brute, unexplained contingent facts. He argues that there is still

a certain (defeasible) *theoretical advantage* to having a complete explanation of contingent existence. Second, Oppy marks out an ingenious pathway from his preferred theory of modality to a necessary reality (chapter 3). The gist of it is that, if we have a necessary reality in hand, then we may analyze *possible* states as ones that have an objective chance relative to a prior actual state (cf. pp. 46-50). Third, Leslie artistically explains why he thinks ethics requires existence — and why a non-reason-less reality, such as ours, would include a necessary axiological foundation (chapter 8). Fourth, Heil challenges the very intelligibility of the alternative — i.e., that there could be nothing (chapter 10). Fifth, Lowe marks out a pathway from the necessity of abstracta to the necessity of concreta (chapter 11). Lowe's argument appeals to those who think abstracta are *dependent* entities and that there must be some. Finally, there is McDaniel's argument: if there were no things, then there would be their *absence*, which has some grade of being (p. 277). Each argument provides a pathway from a significant metaphysical framework to a necessary something (or to the necessity of something).

What about the Subtraction Argument, which purports to show that *concrete* things could be subtracted, one by one, until there are none? Rodriguez-Pereyra defends a nuanced version (chapter 12), and Efird and Stoneham back the argument with a plural-criteria theory of modality (chapter 9). The Subtraction Argument crucially requires that every concrete thing be *contingent*. That requirement is not implausible on Rodriguez-Pereyra's definition of 'concrete thing' as 'spatiotemporal thing.'

Even still, the Subtraction Argument leaves unaddressed the question of whether a *non-spatial* thing (even a *causally-powerful* one) could be necessary. Therefore, the argument, even if sound, does no immediate damage to the above arguments for a necessary (concrete) reality.

3. Contingent Existence

Several authors develop important objections to certain *reasons* to believe in a necessary reality. More exactly: they challenge the role of necessary existence in explaining why there are *contingent things*. I'll review those objections and consider some replies.

First, there is the difficulty of seeing how a necessary reality *could* produce a contingent thing. Lange expresses a related difficulty: 'I do not see

what necessary fact might explain [the totality of contingent facts]...' (p. 239). Thus, Lange motivates a different theory: contingent reality is ultimately explained in terms of that which is *naturally* necessary — i.e., necessary given the basic laws.

Interestingly, there are materials for a response elsewhere in the volume. Oppy, for example, motivates a theory of modality that implies that a necessary thing(s) could *indeterministically* cause contingent things (pp. 49-50). Moreover, O'Connor offers the theistic theory that a necessary reality could have non-necessitating *reasons* for creating certain contingent things (p. 25), where those reasons may explain (to some extent, at least) why a necessary thing creates certain contingent things. In a similar way, perhaps a naturalist could appeal to probabilistic tendencies that are essential to a necessary foundation. Lange doesn't address these options.

Second, there are objections to a sufficiently general *principle of explanation* that would apply to contingent reality. For example, Goldschmidt points to a familiar problem of circularity (else: modal collapse) that arises from supposing that that there is an explanation of every contingent fact, including the alleged fact that a necessary being causes things (p. 8). Kleinschmidt poses additional, 'mereological' counterexamples to this general principle of explanation (pp. 64-76). Her arguments are clever and display depth of insight into the metaphysics of mereology. The objections here are significant because without a *general* principle of explanation, it is unclear why we should think there is any explanation of contingent reality.

Kleinschmidt and O'Connor offer ways forward, however, by motivating weaker principles of explanation. Kleinschmidt (pp. 64-76) argues that theories with greater explanatory power are to be preferred, other things being equal. O'Connor argues that contingent truths or events have an explanation unless there is an explanation of why they don't. Both principles allow there to be an explanation of contingent existence, and each constitutes a defeasible reason to think there is one, or so one may argue.

Third, there are objections to the *inference* from 'each contingent reality has an explanation' to 'there is a necessary reality'. Ross, for example, argues that there is no contingent *totality* (such as a conjunction of all contingent facts or a set of all contingent things), and that therefore no necessary reality *explains* a contingent totality.

Maitzen also challenges the inference to a necessary first cause: he argues we can explain why there are any contingent concrete things by mundane facts about *certain* contingent, concrete things, such as the fact that there are penguins. You object: but surely no F could explain why there are *any Fs at all*. Maitzen is ready with a reply: if *being F* is explained by a more fundamental property, *being G*, then surely the fact that there are Gs explains why there are Fs, *even if* every G is an F (cf. p. 264). He effectively deals with several other tempting objections, too.

Another way to block the inference to a necessary first cause is to suppose that contingent reality is adequately explained by its sheer *likelihood*. Then no necessary reality is required to play the explanatory role. Kotzen offers an innovative evaluation of this option by investigating the probability of an empty world in terms of 'measure theory' (chapter 13). He concludes that we aren't in a position to see that a world with (contingent concrete) things is indeed vastly more likely than an empty world — but it's still a live option.

The volume contains resources for addressing the above considerations. For example, Lange (chapter 14) argues for a 'distinctness-condition' that is inconsistent with Maitzen's proposed explanation — though Maitzen may reject the distinctness-condition.

More significantly, no damage has been done to the proposal that there is an explanation of the 'plural-referring' fact that there are *all these* actual contingent concrete things. This proposal avoids Ross's set-theoretic worries because there need not be a *totality* of all contingent things; and it sidesteps Maitzen's observation that certain Fs can explain why there are any Fs — because even so, surely no Fs can explain why there are *those very* Fs. O'Connor (chapter 2) and Hughes (chapter 5) each propose something in this neighbourhood.

On the other hand, Hughes expresses healthy scepticism about such a principle. Why think, for example, that for any contingent *x*s, there is a cause or explanation of their existence? In reply, Kleinschmidt's principle of explanatory power may supply at least *some* reason to prefer an explanation in any given case. After all, the plural principle of explanation is a simple principle that accounts for the many *apparent* cases of causation (deterministic or indeterministic) as well as the many *unapparent* 'cases' of uncaused happenings. Perhaps, then, a 'plural' principle of explanation is reliable enough to

shift the burden of proof to the sceptic of a necessary causal foundation, just as Rodriguez-Pereyra's principle of subtraction may shift the burden of proof to the sceptic of an empty spatiotemporal world.

Finally, McDaniel complicates the entire inquiry by proposing that there are many *ways* or *modes* of being (chapter 16). He argues, furthermore, that our English 'is' expresses a non-fundamental mode of being, and that therefore, our question, 'why *is* there something rather than nothing?' is not about fundamental reality and is not fundamentally interesting.

Nevertheless, it seems we can still make sense of the question: why are there the contingent causally-capable non-absences? And we can still appreciate the significance of an answer in terms of a necessary causally capable non-absence. That remains so even if being a causally-capable non-absence isn't a fundamental way to be.

4. What Must Be?

Several authors address questions about the *nature* of a necessary foundation of contingent things. For example, Oppy motivates a naturalistic account because it enables a simpler theory. The simpler theory is preferable, he argues, other things being equal. Leslie, on the other hand, argues that not all else is equal: he is persuaded by an 'ethical' intuition that the deepest, most satisfying ultimate explanation of concrete reality is the *value* of existence (chapter 8). This axiological explanation implies that the necessary foundation is maximally great, says Leslie. Oppy isn't convinced. He rejects Leslie's framework because he doubts that the *goodness* of a thing could explain its existence (p. 58).

Even still, Oppy's preferred theory of modality arguably implies that a necessary causal foundation would at least be *maximally powerful*, since it would have the power to head every possible causal chain. That's one step in the direction of maximal greatness. Someone might motivate further steps using Oppy's preference for simplicity: the simplest theory of a necessary foundation, one might think, is that it is, in total, *maximal* with respect to great-making features. Of course, a greatest *possible* being isn't necessarily the same as a *perfect* being. Still, it would be significant if the necessary foundation were maximally great, whether it is a 'natural' reality or not.

There is another route to maximal greatness. Suppose a necessary causal foundation (as a whole) would lack *arbitrariness*: so, for example, the necessary reality wouldn't be shaped like a bike — why *that* shape rather than another? Then, if the least arbitrary degree of greatness is *maximal* (else: *perfect*), one might infer that a necessary causal foundation (as a whole) would be maximally great. On this proposal, while Conee may be right that a certain type of Ontological Argument fails to show that a maximally great being must, in fact, exist (chapter 7), there may be reason to think that a reality that must exist would, in fact, be maximally great. Oppy doesn't break this line of thought.

Finally, the Subtraction Argument, if sound, would show that a necessary foundation is not spatiotemporal.

5. Conclusion

Intriguingly, one finds threaded across the chapters a novel assessment of a traditional, broadly Anselmian answer to the ultimate 'why' questions. Each chapter has a key piece — such as important objection, an answer to an objection, or reasons to accept a certain premise or inference. What is especially fascinating, and ironic, is that most of the authors aim for targets that, by themselves, have little to do with defending a traditional answer. It's as though no piece contains the whole picture, but fitted together they display new materials for thinking about an old solution to the puzzle of existence.

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Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (eds.): *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press 2016, 295pp.

Crudely stated, the problem of divine hiddenness (hereafter PDH) asks why God, if there is a God, is not more evident or apparent or obvious. In 1993, J.L. Schellenberg published *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Cornell Univ. Press; hereafter *DHHR*) which helped spur an entire subsection of philosophy of religion devoted to PDH, spanning several books and

countless journal articles, including (for instance) Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (eds) *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (Cambridge Univ. Press) in 2002.

In this volume, Green and Stump consider new perspectives on PDH by bringing together a collection of fifteen essays that aim 'to come to grips with this problem in a new, deep way' (p. 2). 'Taken together', the editors write, 'all the essays present a deep and powerful reflection on the problem of divine hiddenness and its implications for religious belief' (p. 2). The book claims to be 'of great interest to researchers and advanced students in philosophy of religion and theology' (back cover).

This volume unfolds in six parts; in Part I, 'The Argument from God's Hiddenness against God's Existence', the sole essay is Schellenberg's ('Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy', pp. 13-32), whereby he advances an argument against a perfectly loving God from what he calls nonresistant nonbelief (pp. 24-25); those familiar with Schellenberg's work will note, since *DHHR*'s initial 1993 release, that he still thinks PDH points toward atheism but that he now holds to *ultimism*, 'which says only that there is a metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically ultimate reality of *some* kind' (p. 32). This ultimate reality can be personal or non-personal; in this essay he argues for the latter (cf. also his recent *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God* [Oxford Univ. Press, 2015]).

In Part II ('God's Hiddenness: Overlooked Issues'), Meghan Sullivan describes 'The semantic problem of hiddenness', (pp. 35-52), where she examines the ability of language to accurately convey information about God (cf. p. 37). Helen De Cruz's essay on PDH and the cognitive science of religion (CSR) is stimulating. One longstanding debate in the PDH literature is whether nonbelief in God really is nonresistant (or inculpable), and some theists suggest that sin can produce in humans resistant (or culpable) nonbelief; De Cruz argues from the findings of CSR, however, that nonbelief is *not* a result of sin but is rather 'a result of our evolutionary history' (p. 58). Comparable themes concerning nonbelief are found in John Greco's essay 'No-fault Atheism' (pp. 109-25); he writes that the '"flawed atheist" response' to PDH, often given by theists, 'is unsupported by an adequate epistemology of religious belief' (p. 109). He also engages recent work in social epistemol-

ogy to make his case. Both De Cruz's and Greco's work will challenge theistic explanations that nonbelief arises from sin.

Paul K. Moser's 'Divine Hiddenness and Self-Sacrifice' (pp. 71-88) and Evan Fales's 'Journeying in Perplexity' (pp. 89-105) both make up Part III ('God's Hiddenness: Faith and Skepticism'). Like Schellenberg, Moser is a leading voice in the PDH literature and one facet of his argument here is that, just as God has sacrificed his Son for humans, humans can 'overcome divine hiddenness' by cooperating 'with the self-sacrificial love [from God] on offer' (p. 87). One remark from his essay will stand out to readers: 'Perhaps hiddenness', he writes, 'is ultimately more characteristic of humans than of God' (p. 87). Fales responds to much of Moser's past work on PDH; he also examines the relationship between divine silence and the problem of evil by analyzing Eleonore Stump's work on evil and suffering, particularly regarding its emphasis on the biblical book of Job (Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* [Oxford Univ. Press, 2010]); readers will find Fales's comments on Job, with reference to Stump's *Wandering in Darkness*, to be thorough and insightful, although for those who have not read Stump, Fales's argument can be tedious to follow.

Part IV is titled 'Reasons for Hiddenness and Unbelief.' Daniel Howard-Snyder's piece, 'Divine Openness and Creaturely Nonresistant Nonbelief' (pp. 126-38), challenges Schellenberg's argumentation, found in this volume's first chapter, on the nature of nonresistant nonbelief; this is a particularly helpful article since it gives the reader a chance to see how a theist can engage much of Schellenberg's opening essay. (Greco's essay, mentioned earlier, also falls under Part IV.)

The analytic-philosophical PDH literature is often concerned with Christian theism; but part of this volume's strength is its diversity. Part V, 'God's Hiddenness and God's Nature in the Major Monotheisms', contains stimulating essays on PDH from Islamic and Jewish perspectives (John McGinnis and Jerome Gellman's articles respectively). Comparably this volume also considers PDH and Eastern conceptions of God (from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Eastern Christianity) in N.N. Trakakis's essay. Similarly PDH is typically spelled out to be a cognitive or an epistemic problem; but both Yujin Nagasawa and Ian DeWeese-Boyd, in separate essays, analyze PDH from a more *experiential* perspective. Nagasawa's interest, for example, 'is on God's hid-

denness from *devout believers*' (p. 246) — not analyzing formal arguments from PDH against God's existence — and he uses gruesome stories of the persecution of Japanese Christians in the seventeenth century in order to inquire why God seemed absent in their suffering. Both Nagasawa's and DeWeese-Boyd's essays are in Part VI, 'God's Hiddenness: Suffering and Union with God.'

Sarah Coakley's contribution, also in Part VI, explains how St. John of the Cross can dissolve a contemporary philosophical dilemma (i.e., PDH); Coakley's essay is insightful, although the 2002 Moser and Howard-Snyder volume on PDH already contained an article on John of the Cross and PDH, so Coakley's piece feels repetitive. Still, what other past theologians and philosophers, I wonder, can be utilized in the current analytic PDH discussion?

The Stump and Green volume also shows the *continued* scholarly importance of Schellenberg's original 1993 atheistic argument in *DHHR*, even if Schellenberg's own thought on PDH has since progressed; one critical premise in his 1993 argument there is that if a perfectly loving God exists, then reasonable nonbelief does not occur. Michael Rea's essay in this volume ('Hiddenness and Transcendence', pp. 210-225; in Part V) argues that Schellenberg's conception of God and God's love (in the mentioned premise) hinges on a faulty conception of God as a *heavenly parent* and that such a conception of parental divine love is foreign to historic Christian theology, given divine transcendence, in which case Schellenberg, at least in his 1993 atheistic argument, may have in mind a 'straw deity' (p. 224). Nonetheless, I suspect that the last word on *DHHR* 1993, even after more than two decades, has yet to be written.

My own conjecture is that this volume, much like the 2002 Moser and Howard-Snyder volume, will set the standard in the literature for years to come on PDH. Green and Stump ought to be commended for bringing together such a fine collection of essays, all of which analyze one of the most important themes in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. This volume is truly a must read.

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Hud Hudson: *The Fall and Hypertime*, Oxford University Press 2014, 211pp.

The view that science and religion are in some kind of conflict with one another has become something of a commonplace in much contemporary scholarship. It is far less common, though, that we are told precisely what the nature and extent of this conflict is supposed to be. It is also — as Hud Hudson notes in the opening pages of his new book *The Fall and Hypertime* — something of a rarity that the role for philosophy within such controversies is so much as mentioned. In Hudson's view, this is a mistake. Philosophy '(especially contemporary analytic philosophy) deserves a clearly marked place at this conversational table' (p. 1). Hudson suggests a number of roles philosophers could play once properly seated, including helping us to 'reveal the boundaries of our representational and cognitive capacities' (ibid.), recommending an appropriate degree of 'intellectual modesty' (p. 2), and much more besides. For the purposes of the current work, though, Hudson focuses on one particular (and surprising) role for the analytic philosopher: peacemaker. In Hudson's view, the philosopher can show that many of the most heated putative conflicts between science and religion are, in fact, not genuine contests between these two camps, but rather, skirmishes 'between metaphysics and metaphysics' (p. 76).

To illustrate this point, Hudson chooses to focus on the question of whether an extreme literalist interpretation of the biblical story of the fall (according to which the first human beings were specially created by God a mere few thousand years ago, and then proceed to eat the forbidden fruit and so forth) is in conflict with some of the conclusions reached by modern science (concerning the age of the Earth, the evolutionary origins of human beings, and the like). Doubtless, many will think that this question is hardly in need of serious consideration, but Hudson demurs. While Hudson does not himself subscribe to this extreme literalist view, he maintains that this view is not in direct conflict with any of the deliverances of modern science. Rather, it is only in conflict with these scientific results when they are taken in conjunction with certain controversial metaphysical theses. Given this, Hudson

maintains, 'it is possible for a literalist to grant all the alleged implications of our modern worldview informed by astronomy, physics, geology, paleoanthropology, genetics, and evolutionary biology' (p. 186). Before we consider this rather surprising claim in detail though, it's worth stressing that the appeal of *The Fall and Hypertime* certainly isn't confined to those with an interest in the (apparent) conflict between modern science and biblical literalism (or in the interplay of science and religion more generally). During the course of his arguments, Hudson discusses an impressive array of topics including the metaphysics of time (pp. 78-88), scepticism in epistemology (pp. 113-32), and the problem of evil (pp. 161-7). As such, even those who find themselves unconvinced by, or uninterested in, Hudson's central claim, will still discover much of value in this book. For the rest of this review, though, I will focus almost exclusively on the central claim.

So, what could possibly motivate the claim that there is no conflict between the extreme literalist interpretation of the fall and the deliverances of modern science? In order to defend this surprising conclusion, Hudson proposes to 'tell a *just-so story* accommodating both the relevant verdicts of our modern worldview and a full-blooded realism' concerning Adam, Eve, the Garden of Eden and so forth (p. 194). Key to this just-so story is postulating a second temporal dimension of 'hypertime'. Appealing to hypertimes allows us to say, for example, that a certain event which didn't take place in our past (it doesn't, to frame things in terms of a 'block' view of time, occur at an earlier moment in the temporal block) *did* occur in the *hyper*-past (it occurred as part of a different temporal block which existed at a previous *hypertime*). The concept of hypertime is, doubtless, one which is unfamiliar to many philosophers, and it is disappointing, then, that Hudson never provides a clear and accessible introduction to this difficult concept for the novice reader. Nor is there space to give an adequate account of the nature of the hypertime view here (those looking for a useful introduction to the relevant ideas are encouraged to consult G. C. Goddu (2003). 'Time travel and changing the past: (Or how to kill yourself and live to tell the tale)'. *Ratio*, 16(1), 16-32). All that matters for understanding the outline of Hudson's account of the fall, though, is the key distinction between what *was* the case and what *hyper*-was the case. According to Hudson's account:

> In the beginning […] God created a spacetime and its contents whose earliest stages of growth witnessed the forming of a man from the dust of the ground, the planting of a garden into which he was placed […] the extraction of a rib from and creation of a companion for him […] and a rebellion that took the form of eating forbidden fruit. […] Finally, driven out of the garden, they and their world underwent a spectacular change.
>
> At the hypermoment the pair exited the garden […] God annihilated every piece of the block save that region on its outermost edge thus occupied by these ancestors of ours and then embedded that very region and its contents in a new block — a block sporting a several-billion-year history, replete with ice ages, long-dead hominids […] even a big bang. (pp. 190-1)

According to this story, then, the past history of the human race — and the universe more generally — is exactly as our best science would have. Yet, there is another history, a *hyper*-history of the world, according to which the first human being hyper-was created from the dust of the ground, ate the forbidden fruit, and so forth. Thus we are, Hudson maintains, able to endorse both extreme literalism and all of the deliverances of modern science. Ingenious though Hudson's account undoubtedly is, I was far from convinced by his central claim. In fact, I worry that in trying to construct a position compatible with both extreme literalism and contemporary science Hudson ends up with a position which is in tension with both.

Beginning with literalism, Hudson's story entails that it is not, strictly speaking, true that the world was created a few thousand years in the past, nor is it true that there was some time at which God specially created the first human beings. Instead, the world was (or hyper-was) created a few thousand years in the hyperpast, and the first humans specially created at some previous hypertime. When it comes to the *actual* past, however, things are exactly as modern science has it (and not at all as the literalist maintains); hardly music to the literalist's ear. Hudson (pp. 192-3) considers this worry, but doesn't seem especially troubled by it. Since, as he correctly notes, the biblical writers (along with the Church Fathers and others in the tradition) lacked the theoretical resources to so much as mention hyptertime, or to distinguish between history and hyperhistory. As such, we might reasonably conclude that even if Hudson's account of the fall were correct, such concepts could not be expected to be found in either scripture or tradition. What's more, it would be perfectly natural for the biblical writers to talk in terms of the events they

narrate happening in the past (rather than the hyper-past). The trouble with such a defence is not that it is unconvincing in itself, but that it too closely parallels the explanations offered by many non-literalists as to why the scriptures are silent with respect to, say, the big bang, or evolution by natural selection. That is, it provides precisely the kind of explanation which the extreme literalist, *qua* extreme literalist, is committed to rejecting. Someone unwilling to tolerate the thought that 'yom' as used in the book of Genesis might denote an unspecified period of time rather than a literal day is unlikely to be satisfied with the claim that 'was' as used in the claim that 'the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters' means something vastly different from its standard use in the claim that 'it was raining yesterday'.

Although Hudson seems optimistic about his ability to respond to such worries, he does not devote much time to considering them. Rather, he reminds the reader that these are theological objections, and that, since 'theology is not science', this does nothing to undermine his primary aim to 'block conclusive dismissal of literalism by way of appeal to the science of our modern worldview' (p. 193). Importantly though, it is *the literalist's* position which Hudson is trying to make compatible with this worldview, meaning that these theological worries cannot be dismissed as easily as Hudson suggests. Even if it were uncontroversial that Hudson's account is compatible with current science, this is no help to the literalist if this account isn't itself a literalist one.

What's more, it is far from clear that Hudson's view *is* compatible with current science. Certainly it is compatible both with any empirical observations which those engaged in the various sciences might make, and with all of the standard conclusions — concerning physical laws, evolutionary biology, and so forth — which have been drawn from these. We might worry, though, that there is more to being compatible with our 'modern scientific worldview' than this and that Hudson's account is still in tension with modern science in some other respect. Even assuming that we had independent reason for accepting the existence of hypertime (and Hudson certainly offers some very impressive arguments for this conclusion), the account of the world's (hyper) history which Hudson offers still seems to be outcompeted by a number of rival explanations. Most obviously, explanations which make no reference to biblical gardens or divine gerrymandering of temporal blocks are liable to be more successful in terms of their simplicity and elegance. And it seems to be

very much a part of the scientific worldview which Hudson's account is designed to appease that (all else being equal) we should prefer theories which are simple and elegant. Given this, there remains a conflict between Hudson's account of the fall and this scientific worldview. These claim are, I admit, rather controversial, and a defender of Hudson may well respond that considerations of simplicity and the like are (in this context at least) more properly the domain of *metaphysics*, rather than science. There is hardly space to adjudicate such debates here but I would have liked to see Hudson say a little more about exactly what he takes to demarcate the scientific from the metaphysical (especially given the crucial role this distinction plays in his central argument).

Although I have focused above on Hudson's central argument, I should mention in closing that, strange as it may seem, the success or failure of that argument is not especially important to the value of the book as a whole. Even those who ultimately reject Hudson's main claim will still find much of value in *Hypertime and the Fall*. Hudson delivers an immensely rewarding piece of philosophy, one which brings a truly impressive depth and breadth of knowledge to bear in a wonderfully novel way (the original and insightful discussion of omnipresence in chapter seven alone is worth the price of admission). I also found myself agreeing wholeheartedly with a number of the subsidiary claims Hudson makes in the course of his argument (in particular, his defence of 'crazy' metaphysical views on p. 15). Overall then, while the book is by no means easy going — I wouldn't, for example, recommend it as a starting point for those not already well-grounded in the literature on the philosophy of time — it certainly rewards the efforts of those who stick with it.