THE JOURNEY OF MODERN THEOLOGY

From Reconstruction to Deconstruction

ROGER E. OLSON

ivp | InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Taken from *The Journey of Modern Theology* by Roger E. Olson

Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.
www.ivpress.com.

Table of Contents

1

Modernity Challenges Traditional Theology

The Context of Early Modern Theology

&

One day in 1802 Napoleon Bonaparte, emperor of France, called astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749–1827), author of a controversial book about the universe based on Isaac Newton's discoveries of natural laws, to explain his cosmology. The emperor asked Laplace about the place of God in his account of the universe, its origin and workings. According to reports of the time, the astronomer replied, "*Je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse-là*" ("Sir, I had no need of that hypothesis").[1]

To the average twenty-first-century European or American Laplace's statement may seem uncontroversial, but at the time it bordered on blasphemy. Napoleon may not have been shaken by it, but church authorities and theologians throughout Europe and North America denounced such ideas as heresy. Laplace, however, was merely expressing what many educated people in Europe were coming to believe—that the physical universe could be explained without reference to a creator or anything supernatural. All the gaps in knowledge of the universe were being quickly

[1]Roger Hahn, *Pierre Simon Laplace 1749–1827: A Determined Scientist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 172.

closed by the scientists of the Age of Reason. Before the Enlightenment and scientific revolutions virtually everyone, Catholic and Protestant, believed God created and controls the universe and that supernatural powers and forces keep it going. By the time of Laplace's publication of *Méchanique céleste* (often translated "Cosmology") in several volumes from 1799 to 1805, many devoutly religious men and women believed science can explain much but could not by itself explain everything about the world—especially its origin and design. Laplace's declaration that the God hypothesis was nowhere needed in the physical sciences came as a shock to them; some readily embraced it and some rejected it. It was now, however, a claim to be reckoned with.

What if science could exhaustively explain the universe? Where, then, would be God? What would be left to believe? Many contemporary people will say religion has to do only with the inner world, the spiritual salvation of the individual, but that is not what very many Christian people believed in Laplace's time and before. Most Christians and other religious people held to belief in what is called natural theology—the absolute, rational necessity of God for any total explanation of the universe. Many Christians scoffed at Laplace and people like him as "infidels"—unbelievers and skeptics. Over time, however, Laplace's point of view gained traction and gradually began to replace natural theology and challenge orthodox Christian claims about God as the creator, sustainer and providential governor of the universe. Christian thinkers who cared about making the faith relevant to the growing modern worldview began looking for ways to rescue Christianity from the burden of increasingly incredible tradition and from the deepening impression that atheism was to be religion's inevitable replacement.

What brought about this crisis and the perceived need to accommodate Christian theology to modernity? Laplace did not create the crisis; he merely expressed it in a way nobody before had publicly stated it. To many he was like the little boy in the fable of the emperor's new clothes who dared to say the emperor was naked. What led up to his stark declaration and its aftermath for theology was a long chain of events in both science and philosophy that define the revolution we call early modernity—the Enlightenment.

1.a. Science Revises the Heavens

It all started with the simplest of ideas, but one destined to revolutionize the Western world. In its December 31, 1999, issue, *Time* magazine announced its "man of the millennium" (which was ironic because the millennium did not officially end until a year later): Johann Gutenberg (1398–1468), inventor of the moveable type printing press. Perhaps it should have been a little-known Franciscan friar from England who was evading the Inquisition and hiding in Munich, Bavaria, under protection of the emperor in 1342. His name was William of Ockham (or Occam) (1285–c. 1349). Among other controversial ideas, Ockham expressed what came later to be known as Ockham's razor—that simple principle that when one cause sufficiently explains a phenomenon, more should not be posited. At the time, and long before and afterwards, people tended to appeal to two causes for most events—a natural one and a supernatural one. For example, if a person became ill, it could be both because of an imbalance in the body's humors and a demon. Also, celestial bodies such as planets were widely believed to be moved both by natural forces among them (such as some kind of magnetic field) and by angels. Ockham, much to the dismay of the church's magisterium, suggested that the simplest explanation was always the wisest and only one. Many scholars see in Ockham and his razor the subtle beginning of a cultural earthquake whose shocks were to be felt much later in the scientific revolution.

Ockham died of the plague in Munich, where there is no monument to his life or work[2] because he was excommunicated by the pope. However, his idea was later expressed in many different forms by luminaries of the scientific revolution such as Newton, who said, "We are to admit no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances."[3] On the basis of Ockham's razor, modern science has gradually discovered the one, natural cause of most, if not all, physical objects and events in the universe and excluded supernatural explanations from the experimental sciences.

[2]This author lived and studied in Munich (1981–1982) and looked for such a monument. I was told there was one in the Franciscan church but could not find it. Perhaps it had been destroyed in the bombing of Munich during World War II.

[3]Quoted in Stephen Hawking, *On the Shoulders of Giants* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2002), 731.

Copernicus proposes a revolution in science, and Galileo carries it out. One of the most unfortunate events in modern Western history was the Catholic Church's condemnation of Galileo Galilei for his defense of the heliocentric model. Adding insult to injury (to the church's reputation) is the fact that he was only semi-officially rehabilitated by Rome in 1992, when Pope John Paul II expressed regret for how he was treated by the church. The details of Galileo's condemnation are so complicated that no attention will be given them here; what is important for our story is what Galileo achieved and its effects on the scientific revolution that helped launch modernity and challenged Christian theology to search for ways to end conflicts with science. Suffice it to say that the church's treatment of Galileo merely for publishing proofs of his discoveries did more to undermine Christianity's credibility in the modern world than any other event.

Before Galileo, unchallenged tradition held that the sun and other celestial bodies revolve around the earth. After all, Aristotle, an influential Greek philosopher almost baptized by the medieval church, said so. More importantly, however, people believed the Bible said so. Psalm 104:5 (NIV) declares,

> He set the earth on its foundations;
> it can never be moved.

To deny that the earth is unmoving and unmovable may seem like a trivial matter to contemporary people, but that is only because they have become used to it. To people in the sixteenth century, Nicholas Copernicus's suggestion that the earth revolves around the sun was shocking, so much so that the Polish astronomer (1473–1543) had to publish his theory as a mere model for making astronomical calculations and not as a statement of literal fact.

Copernicus achieved a great leap of the imagination as he contemplated the complicated model of the solar system universally held in his lifetime. To account for the growing observations of the movements of the heavenly bodies (planets, moons) around the earth it had to posit numerous strange movings forward and backward. To Copernicus it was too complex; he was looking for a simpler model of what we now call the solar system. His imaginative leap was to dare to think that perhaps all the planets, including the earth, revolve around the sun. When he imagined that design, he found it

made for a much simpler, more elegant model that better matched what was being observed in planetariums. He gradually taught his theory to students who spread it around before Copernicus was prepared to publish it. He knew how controversial it would be. For years he worked on a book that would explain and defend this heliocentric model of the sun and planets, but it was published only as he lay dying. *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* was placed in his hands on his deathbed. As Copernicus feared, it created a firestorm of controversy and was widely condemned as heretical. Even Martin Luther declared that the Polish astronomer must be insane.[4]

Why is Copernicus's heliocentric model of the system of the "celestial spheres"—the solar system—called the Copernican revolution? Not because it posits the revolution of the earth around the sun! Rather, it placed observation and mathematical calculation at the center of natural science and began the overthrow of the authority of tradition.

Copernicus's memory has largely been eclipsed by that of Galileo, who first proved the heliocentric model of the universe factually true beyond doubt. Galileo was born in Italy and lived his entire life as a faithful son of the Catholic Church. He studied at the University of Pisa and taught mathematics and astronomy there and at the University of Padua, where he wrote some of his controversial scientific works. He came under suspicion by the Inquisition because he defended Copernicus's heliocentric model of the universe. The powerful Catholic Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) had declared publicly that Copernicus's system could not be held as true unless it could be proven by physical demonstration—something Bellarmine and other defenders of the traditional worldview thought impossible. Galileo thought he could prove it true by physical demonstration using new versions of the telescope that could see farther than those that existed in Copernicus's time. He also tried to prove it true by study of the tides, something that ultimately failed.

In 1616 Bellarmine and the Inquisition ordered Galileo to cease his attempts to prove Copernicus's theory true. For a while he obeyed, but in 1632

[4]Interestingly, a Lutheran theologian, Andreas Osiander, wrote the preface to Copernicus's book. However, he explained that its view of the universe was only a hypothesis meant for convenience of calculations and was not to be interpreted as a literal picture of the planetary system. Andrew D. White recounts Luther's vitriolic reaction to Copernicus in *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1896), 1:126–27.

he published one of his greatest works, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, which laid the foundation for his proof. Ironically, given certain twists and turns of Vatican politics between 1616 and 1632, Galileo was permitted to publish the book. Soon, however, due to new vagaries of Vatican politics, the book and its author came under heavy criticism which led to a trial before the Inquisition. In 1633 Galileo was declared "vehemently suspect of heresy" and placed under house arrest. His books were banned, and he was forbidden to publish any more. However, during his house arrest, he continued to write books that would be published only in Protestant cities or only after his death.

Later, the world came to know of Galileo's mistreatment at the hands of the Catholic Church. It is widely believed that those who condemned him knew he was right, but they did not want his proof of Copernicus's heliocentric model disseminated publicly. Of course, it was too late. The credibility of the church sank to a new low in the eyes of educated men and women of Europe. The war between science and traditional religion in Christendom had begun, and science was destined to win virtually every battle from then on.

Galileo was dismayed by the controversy over his scientific discoveries and their publication. His main long-term contribution to the war between science and theology was inadvertent, which is to say he never intended it to be a declaration of war. That was his "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina," written in 1615 and published in 1636 in Strasburg, a Protestant city. The letter had to do not so much with any specific scientific theory or discovery as with the roles of science and theology in the creation of knowledge.

The Grand Duchess Christina was the widow of Ferdinand de Medici, Duke of Tuscany, who had appointed Galileo to his professorship at the University of Pisa. The duchess was interested in potential conflicts between the new sciences and the Bible and asked for an explanation from a friend of Galileo, who conveyed the request to him. Galileo's response reveals a new attitude toward the relationships between science, the Bible and theology, one that caught on and became standard especially among devout scientists throughout the scientific revolution. (Not-so-devout scientists such as Laplace would adhere to it as well, but in a different way that did not afford respect to theology or perhaps even the Bible.)

It is impossible to grasp how revolutionary Galileo's explanation was without realizing that before it theology had been widely considered the queen of the sciences. (In that honorary title, given to theology during the Middle Ages, "science" means any and every orderly, disciplined way of studying and thinking. It was not limited to the physical sciences.) The revolutionary aspect of Galileo's new model for understanding the role of theology in relation to the physical sciences is his implicit declaration of independence for the latter from the former. In the long run, at least, it contributed to the dethroning of theology and its relegation to the status of a pseudo-science in the eyes of many Enlightenment thinkers. That was almost certainly not Galileo's intention, but true to the law of unintended consequences, it had that effect.

In the letter, Galileo confirmed to the duchess that he held the heliocentric model of the universe to be fact and not merely a device for making calculations about the future locations of planets and moons (which is how many of Copernicus's defenders managed to hold and promote it). That admission indirectly led to his much later trial and condemnation. More importantly, however, he declared that the physical sciences of observation such as astronomy rule in matters of knowledge about the physical universe even when they seem to contradict the Bible and do contradict theological tradition and doctrine. He argued that when such conflicts arise, it is theology that must adjust its thinking and teaching and not science. In effect, he was restricting theology to the spiritual sphere of salvation and living the Christian life (ethics) and enthroning the physical sciences of observation and deduction in its place in the physical sphere. Instead of one throne, there would now be two. Gradually, throughout the ensuing centuries, science's throne rose higher in the academic world.

Galileo went to great lengths to affirm the inspiration and authority of the Bible, but he appealed to the principle of accommodation to explain why it sometimes seems to state as fact things that cannot be true, such as God having eyes and hands and feet. Not everything in the Bible is meant to be interpreted as literal. Also, and more controversially, he stated that "the intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how one goes to heaven, not how heaven goes."[5] The real revolutionary statement in the letter, however,

[5]Galileo Galilei and Stillman Drake, *Discourses and Opinions of Galileo* (New York: Anchor Books, 1957), 173–216. Galileo knew that this epigram was not his originally; he was quoting another source. This saying had been around for some time before Galileo.

has to do with science's competence and theology's lack of competence in matters pertaining to physical reality so that theology's interpretations of the Bible in such matters *must be revised* when the material facts of science contradict them. Here is one statement to that effect:

> That in the books of the sages of this world there are contained some physical truths which are soundly demonstrated, and others that are merely stated; as to the former, it is the office of wise divines to show that they do not contradict the holy Scriptures. And as to the propositions which are stated but not rigorously demonstrated, anything contrary to the Bible involved by them must be held undoubtedly false and should be proved so by every possible means. Now if truly demonstrated physical conclusions need not be subordinated to biblical passages, but the latter must rather be shown not to interfere with the former, then before a physical proposition is condemned it must be shown to be not rigorously demonstrated—and this is to be done not by those who hold the proposition to be true, but by those who judge it to be false. This seems very reasonable and natural, for those who believe an argument to be false may much more easily find the fallacies in it than men who consider it to be true and conclusive. Indeed, in the latter case it will happen that the more the adherents of an opinion turn over their pages, examine the arguments, repeat the observations, and compare the experiences, the more they will be confirmed in that belief.[6]

Careful study of that declaration reveals what Galileo intended—that the burden of proof in matters of possible conflict between the Bible and science lies with theology if it insists on maintaining a traditional doctrine in conflict with science, and that it will fail if it resists the material facts of science. In the rest of the letter Galileo made clear his intention: that theology must bow to science in such cases and reinterpret Scripture so that it fits what science proves.

Once again, that may not grate on contemporary ears as it did on the ears of Galileo's contemporaries. Theologians were outraged when the letter was published in 1636. Some foresaw the consequence that Galileo himself may not have intended—the overthrow of theology as a science at all, especially in matters outside the realm of the spiritual (salvation, Christian life, church order).

[6]Ibid.

Newton pictures the world as a great machine. But we have not yet come to the biggest shock science had in store for theology. Science only began to revise the heavens with Copernicus and Galileo; it radically revised the heavens with Newton—again, against the scientist's own intentions. Newton's discoveries and others' interpretations of them seemed to relegate God to the spiritual realm, to the inner world of the human person, and out of the heavens—the physical universe and its workings.

Born in England and trained in theology, philosophy and mathematics, Newton was a precocious student who may even have been some kind of savant. He became a fellow, a teacher, of Trinity College, Cambridge University, in his early twenties. (His teaching location is ironic in that he did not believe in the Trinity, something he kept mostly to himself to avoid controversy.) Throughout his career as a professional mathematician who dabbled in many subjects, Newton was most interested in, and devoted most time to, biblical studies. He was obsessed with identifying the year of the second coming of Jesus Christ—a fact usually overlooked in college and university courses where he is studied. He was a devout but unorthodox Christian who harbored doubts about the deity of Christ and the Trinity. Still, in spite of his heretical beliefs, he thought of his scientific discoveries as supporting divine providence rather than undermining it. It disturbed him not at all that his discoveries seemed to make supernatural causes unnecessary; he interpreted his mechanical universe ruled by cause and effect as the sphere of God's providence. The study of natural laws, physics, was to him "thinking God's thoughts after him."

By many accounts, Newton was the greatest and most influential scientist who ever lived.[7] His *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, published in 1687, is considered one of the great classics of modern science. It laid the foundations for the mechanistic worldview that has been so beneficial to science and that challenged much traditional theology insofar as it ruled out miracles. Newton himself did not conceive that his worldview ruled out miracles; only his disciples and later interpreters drew that conclusion. Without doubt, however, it made belief in miracles more difficult and raised the question of how any supernatural events could be reconciled with the universe ruled by mathematically describable natural laws.

[7]Daniel Burt, *The Biography Book* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 315.

Every high school student has heard the story of how Newton discovered the law of gravity. According to the legend, the scientist was sitting under an apple tree when an apple fell on his head and he instantly thought of the law of universal gravitational force—as if it suddenly popped into his head like the goddess Athena in full armor supposedly popped out of Zeus's head in Greek mythology. That is the stuff of legends and myths. However, it is probably based on something true; Newton may have told friends that he first thought of the law of gravity while reflecting on the fall of an apple from a tree. Like Copernicus's imaginative leap toward the heliocentric solar system, Newton's discovery of gravity may have been a great leap of the imagination sparked by a physical event observed.

$$F = G\frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$$

Fig. 1.1

What many people do not understand about Newton's law of gravity is that it, like all the rest of Newton's laws of nature, is mathematically describable (see fig. 1.1).

The purpose of providing the equation is not to lead into a detailed explanation but only to point out what many do not, but should, know about Newton's law of gravity and by extension all his laws of nature, including inertia. These are intended to be universal laws that can be described mathematically so that they can be used to predict future events in the natural world. Without them people would never have landed on the moon (or done much else in modern science). In other words, theoretically, if one knows the exact location and velocity of any body and all the bodies in relation to it, with Newton's laws he or she can predict precisely where it will be at any given time in the future. That means the universe of things, bodies, material entities, is closed to outside interference. Any supposition of possible outside interference throws a monkey wrench, so to speak, into the machine of nature, making it impossible to predict anything precisely.

This is why Laplace could claim that he had no need of the God hypothesis to explain the cosmos and how it functions. The world picture painted by Newton, intentionally or not, is that of a great machine that functions on its own in perpetual motion. The point is that only by imagining it as such can science predict the future—something essential to practical application of modern science. For example, soon after Newton's discovery of laws of nature, an astronomer named Edmond Halley predicted

the precise year of the return of a comet later named after him. Using Newton's physics and mathematics, Halley predicted its return seventy-six years after its last appearance. It did indeed return in 1758—exactly seventy-six years after its appearance in 1682.

Feats like that demonstrated to everyone the competence of science based on natural laws understood as mathematically describable, which means unbreakable. If that is so, what does that mean for religion and especially for Christian belief in a supernatural God who acts providentially, with purpose and intention, in response to prayer? What about miracles? What about angels and demons? What about free will? So many questions for theology were raised by Newton's world picture that went beyond anything Newton himself asked or answered. Some Christian thinkers rushed to save the day by declaring Newton's physics proof of God; natural laws reflect a purposeful intellect who created them and uses them to work out his eternal purposes. Other Christian thinkers concluded it does not matter because religion has only to do with ethics—what ought to be—and not with physics, what is. Yet others suggested that if God is the author of the natural laws, as Newton himself believed, he can alter them and still keep the universe running in an orderly fashion so that science can do its business of calculating and predicting. All these and more answers will appear in our story of modern theology's attempts to respond to the acids of modernity.

The scientific revolution challenges traditional Christianity. The year was 1650—near the beginning of the modern era (which many date to 1648, the end of the Thirty Years' War). Bishop James Ussher of Ireland (1581–1656) published his landmark book *Annales Veteris Testamenti*, translated in 1658 as *Annals of the World* (not an exact translation of the Latin title), which revealed the date of the creation of the world as October 23, 4004 B.C. Ussher, a widely respected scholar, calculated the date of creation based on numerous factors turned up in his research, but his main source was the Bible itself. His methods need not detain us here. The point is that his chronology was widely accepted and worked its way into the footnotes and study notes of many English Bibles. For centuries conservative Christians depended on Ussher's research and conclusion; it was embraced by many as equal with Scripture itself. To deny that God created the entire universe in 4004 B.C. was tantamount to denying the authority of the Bible.

In 1925 American statesman and anti-evolution activist William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925) testified for the prosecution (and was, in fact, the lead prosecutor) at the famous Scopes "monkey trial" in Dayton, Tennessee. His combative counterpart, defense attorney and anti-fundamentalist crusader Clarence Darrow, asked Bryan about the age of a certain rock. Between 1650 and 1925, of course, much had happened in science. Using Galileo's methods and Newton's laws of physics and other discoveries of the scientific revolution, geologists had come to agreement that the earth was far older than Ussher claimed. By 1925 that the earth was millions of years old was settled fact for most educated people in Europe and North America. There were hold-outs like Bryan who, together with many other conservative Christians, saw modern science as the enemy of God. They often confused two issues—the age of the earth and evolution. Since evolution was in their view godless and reduced human beings to animals, they rejected the scientific claims about the great age of the universe as well.

Bryan looked at the rock held in Darrow's hand and paused. Bryan was a smart man and in many ways a modern man. He had served as Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson and had been his party's nominee for president in three elections. Then he said, "The Rock of Ages is more important than the age of rocks." Even some of Bryan's anti-evolution supporters laughed. Much of America laughed. (The Scopes trial was the first event broadcast live over radio nationwide.) Anti-evolution fundamentalists were humiliated and built their own colleges to protect their children from the godless atheism of modern science. There they continued to teach that the world was created about ten thousand years ago and that evolution is an atheist conspiracy to overthrow religion. Not all fundamentalists did this, but it became one way many fundamentalists fought back in the ongoing war between science and religion.

Progressive Christians, by contrast, often capitulated uncritically to the latest trends in science. They made peace with science by embracing whatever scientists said, even if it was merely a hypothesis yet unproven. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw many progressive, liberal Protestant theologians hastening to deny miracles because they thought to defend them would only extend the warfare between science and religion that religion seemed always to lose. One such progressive or

liberal Protestant thinker was Andrew D. White, author of the influential two-volume *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* mentioned earlier. In 1898 he concluded that the "dissolving away of traditional opinions regarding . . . sacred literature" was simply "the atmosphere of thought engendered by the development of all sciences during the last three centuries. Vast masses of myth, legend, marvel and dogmatic assertion, coming into this atmosphere, have been dissolved and are now dissolving quietly away like icebergs drifted into the Gulf Stream."[8] Many Christian theologians, as we shall see, agreed readily with him and sought to reconstruct Christian doctrines so that they would not be swept away by the tide of scientific discoveries.

What were and are some of Christian theologians' approaches to the war between modern science and traditional theology? What follows are generalizations; the approaches are probably as varied as the thinkers who proposed them. One was taken by Bryan and his fundamentalist cohorts: modern science, although valuable for some of its inventions, is to be resisted insofar as it conflicts with the literal, traditional interpretation of the Bible. Bryan and the fundamentalists followed a conflict model in relating to the scientific revolution and its results. Most of them, however, accepted that the earth revolves around the sun—a fact pointed out by their critics such as progressive Protestant pastor and theologian Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969), who thundered from his pulpit in New York City's Riverside Church: "Shall the fundamentalists win?" His answer in that 1922 sermon was a resounding "No!"—meaning "unless we liberal Christians let them!"

Fosdick well represents another Christian approach to the war between modern science and theology: a dualist, accommodation model. Like most progressive, liberal Protestants of his time Fosdick was tired of the war between science and theology and opted to accommodate to whatever scientists said—including no miracles (because of the uniformity of nature most scientists then believed Newton's laws required). He urged modern Protestants to keep up to date with science and not fight against it. After all, he preached and wrote, Christianity is not about how the heavens go, or how old the earth is, but about the gradual dawning of the kingdom of God on

[8]White, *History*, 2:393.

earth through love and "Christian brotherhood." Fosdick provided a generation of twentieth-century American Christians with books explaining the true essence of Christianity as ethical living, the social gospel, which has nothing to do with the things science studies.[9] This approach is dualist in separating science and theology into almost watertight compartments where they cannot conflict because they are about entirely different subjects. It is radically accommodationist in bowing to every scientific discovery even if that discovery is only a hypothesis yet to be proven (e.g., the naturalistic view of the universe as uniformly and universally ruled by natural laws to the exclusion of miracles).[10]

Finally, some nineteenth- and twentieth-century Christians responded to the war between science and religion growing out of the scientific revolution by cautiously correlating science's material facts with revelation's venerable truths. This is the integrationist or correlationist approach to accommodation and is very similar to what Galileo intended in his letter to the Grand Duchess Christina. Mediating theologian Bernard Ramm (1916–1992), trained in science and theology, took this approach in *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*,[11] in which he argued against both other approaches and called for Christian theology to adapt to the "material facts" of science (such as the age of the earth) without capitulating to every scientific hypothesis, model or theory (e.g., naturalistic evolution).

Much modern theology is dominated by overt or covert attempts to respond to the scientific revolution. To a very large extent, this book is that story.

1.b. Philosophers Lay New Foundations for Knowledge

The year was 1784; the so-called Enlightenment in European culture was at its peak, and some philosophers were beginning to question its high-flying claims about autonomous human reason and its potential to be objective, know reality as it is in itself apart from revelation or faith and solve human-

[9]See Harry Emerson Fosdick, *A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956).

[10]To be fair, not all fundamentalists rejected science entirely; the conflict model was practiced by them in varying degrees. Similarly, not all progressive Protestants accommodated to every whim of modern scientists, but they tended to rescue theology from defeat at the hands of science by separating them so that science explains the physical world while theology seeks to explain the social world and way forward toward the kingdom of God on earth.

[11]Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

ity's problems. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) published his essay "What Is Enlightenment?" to breathe new life into the movement. The way to do so, he thought, was to distill Enlightenment thought down to its basic principle—something all enlightened people could agree on.

People begin to think for themselves. What was Kant's answer that resonated with so many educated people first in Europe, then in America and later around the world? It is so simple that many twenty-first-century people, including many who think of the Enlightenment as something pernicious, live by it and take it for granted: *Sapere aude!*—"Think for yourself" or "Dare to know!" His first three sentences sound like a declaration of independence from authoritative tradition:

> Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* "Have courage to use your own reason!"—that is the motto of enlightenment.[12]

Kant's essay goes on to reject knowledge imposed on people by religious and political authorities. For him, the essence of enlightenment is daring to question and use one's own reasoning ability to decide what to believe.

Many people take that approach to thinking and believing for granted, but that it is the right approach was new in the Enlightenment. Someone might point back to heroes of free thought such as Socrates and Luther, both of whom broke from the consensuses of belief in their own times and dared to think for themselves. However, they stand out as exceptions to the rule; before the Enlightenment it was generally thought wrong to think for oneself, and many who did died for it. For thousands of years the social expectation was to believe whatever authorities said whether they be traditional dogmas in religion or kings or customs. Kant was not calling for a new, revolutionary approach to knowing and believing; he was setting forth what he believed was the essence of the Enlightenment that had been going on for more than a century. He wanted its principle of free thought to be

[12]Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader*, ed. Paul Hyland (London: Routledge, 2003), 54.

openly embraced by princes, kings and emperors. And he did much to bring about that embrace.

Sometimes the phrase "the Enlightenment" is used to cover both the scientific revolution (see 1.a.) and the revolution in philosophy that is the topic of this section. Sometimes it is used for only the philosophical revolution that corresponded to the scientific revolution. However, what matters is to grasp how revolutionary both together were in overturning ancient ways of thinking and knowing and replacing them with new mental habits. Most people can grasp that about the changes happening in science during the Enlightenment; they are more concrete and tangible in their results. For many, however, it is more difficult to understand why the corresponding changes in philosophy were just as earth-shaking and challenging to religion and especially Christianity. The acids of modernity brought about by modern philosophy were just as corrosive for traditional religion as were the ones created by the new sciences.

Philosophy has always been theology's main conversation partner, and for more than a thousand years, before the rise of modernity with the Enlightenment, philosophy was considered theology's handmaid. That is, philosophy was theology's servant. And throughout much of that millennium, philosophy was done by theologians or monks. During the high Middle Ages in Europe, if a person taught philosophy in a university he (it was always a he) was expected to either be ordained, that is, to be a priest, or live like one, that is, to be celibate. Even the Protestant Reformation did little at first to change that custom. Before the seventeenth century almost all philosophers in Europe were clergymen or lived the kind of life expected of clergy *and had to think within the boundaries of ecclesiastical tradition*. It was dangerous to think for oneself.

A case study in this is the twelfth-century philosopher Peter Abelard (1079–1142), who taught at the University of Paris. He was not ordained, but in true medieval fashion he was expected to live a celibate life. And he was expected to teach philosophy within the framework of authoritative tradition, which was Augustinian—the thought of the fifth-century church father Augustine (354–430). However, much had been added to and taken away from Augustine's thought by the twelfth century; it had been interpreted and reinterpreted. But those alterations had to be approved by popes.

(Most often, however, they happened gradually and were not even recognized as alterations.) The most influential philosopher of Abelard's time was a recently deceased French-English abbot named Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109). Anselm used reason, logic, to prove traditional Christian beliefs, but he emphasized that he always approached that task with faith. His motto was "I believe in order to understand." In other words, faith seeks understanding. A good Christian, he and almost everyone else believed, accepts authoritative tradition and then puts reason in its service by adding proof to what is already believed by faith.

Abelard dared to question tradition and ecclesiastical authority. For one thing, he did not think celibacy should be a requirement for philosophers; he secretly married his patron's daughter. His patron sent thugs to break into Abelard's apartment and castrate him. More importantly, however, Abelard wrote a book whose title reflected his life's work: *Sic et Non* ("yes and no," circa 1121). There he demonstrated that authoritative tradition was flawed because one could find contradictory beliefs within it. Philosophy's task, for Abelard, was not merely to comment on traditional beliefs but to question them. For that Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), preacher of the crusades, started a campaign to persecute Abelard, and Abelard almost certainly would have been burned at the stake had he not died of natural causes first.

So, Kant's principle of "think for yourself" was not entirely new with the Enlightenment. But there it took on a new, deeper dimension and was meant for all people. Within a short period of time during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it became acceptable to do philosophy outside the confines of the church and its tradition. It became acceptable and even required to question tradition and authorities in order to be considered a true philosopher. Because philosophy had always been theology's main conversation partner, the changes in philosophy challenged theologians. What were they to do with the new approach to thinking, believing and knowing? It took a long time for theologians to realize that they had to take Enlightenment thought seriously and not just react against it as something pernicious and evil. But even before they did that, they were being affected by it and, in small steps and to varying degrees, accommodating to it.

Descartes carries out a Copernican revolution in philosophy. Our story of the philosophical Enlightenment and the philosophical side of mo-

dernity begins in a small, stove-heated room in a house in Ulm, Germany, on November 10, 1619. Seldom is one date so little known and yet so momentous in terms of revolutionizing culture for centuries afterwards

René Descartes (1596–1650) is one of the most interesting philosophers in history. Many biographies of him have been published over the years, and new ones continue to appear 350 years after his death. He was a peripatetic intellectual and soldier, traveling all over Europe, fighting in battles, spying on influential political leaders for the Jesuits,[13] dabbling in occult "sciences" and teaching and writing. Most importantly for our story, however, is Descartes's determination to think for himself and to discover certain knowledge, that is, knowledge that could not be doubted, to shore up both the budding scientific revolution and religion whose doctrines were made increasingly doubtful in the aftermath of the Reformation and during the religious wars that ravaged Europe in the seventeenth century.

Descartes described what led up to his earth-shaking breakthrough in thought that helped launch the Enlightenment and modern world:

> Some years ago [referring to 1619] I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently based upon them. I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last.[14]

By "the sciences" Descartes did not mean just the physical sciences but all the disciplines taught in universities, including theology. Notice two things about this confession. First, long before Kant wrote "What Is Enlightenment?" Descartes was determined to think for himself. Second, he was seeking new foundations for truth and a method of discovering truth that would provide certainty. Before this, most people in Christian Europe assumed that faith plus reason, both working together within the context of tradition, provided certainty. Descartes was no longer convinced and dared to question everything.

[13]The fact that Descartes was a spy for the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, who in turn worked for Catholic royal families such as the Hapsburgs, is well established by A. C. Grayling in *Descartes: The Life and Times of a Genius* (New York: Walker & Company, 2005).

[14]Quoted in ibid., 56–57.

On that November day in 1619 Descartes was traveling to the coronation of the new Holy Roman Emperor but was waylaid by intense winter weather. In that tiny room in that Ulm inn Descartes ruminated about the sorry state of so-called knowledge—not only his own but everyone's. That day and the night that followed seem to constitute one of the few known dates when the world changed. According to one biographer, that day and night "has gone down in anecdotal history as one of the fulcrums on which the Western world has turned."[15] Exactly what happened there and then is somewhat unclear because Descartes wrote about it much later and some of what he said was contained in diaries and notebooks now lost, but people who knew him well and wrote about him shortly after his death told the story based Descartes's own accounts. Apparently, if they are right, sometime during that day and night in Ulm Descartes broke through to a whole new way of seeking and finding knowledge. He laid it out eighteen years later in *Discourse on Method* (1637). According to many interpreters of philosophical history, this essay is "the dividing line in the history of thought. Everything that came before it is old; everything that came after it is new."[16]

Realizing that much, if not all, he had been taught was uncertain and some of it untrue, Descartes decided to start over and work toward certainty by doubting everything. He realized that his five senses could be deceiving him; they often do. Therefore knowledge based on sense experience is always uncertain. So he bore in and dug down into all that he knew, doubting everything, until he realized there is one thing he could not doubt—his own existence. "In this way, Descartes became one of those rare figures in history who have given the world a sentence that is a touchstone."[17] It is *cogito, ergo sum*—"I think, therefore I am." In other words, Descartes could not doubt his own existence as a thinking self because in order to doubt he had to think and in order to think he had to exist. This, then, was bedrock—the thinking self's own existence. From there Descartes deduced the logically necessary existence of God and the world and many other things dear to philosophy, religion and science. Insofar as ideas are clear and distinct and made nec-

[15]Russell Shorto, *Descartes' Bones: A Skeletal History of the Conflict Between Faith and Reason* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 16.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid., 20.

essary by logical connection with this bedrock, they must be believed. They constitute knowledge because of their rational certainty.

Descartes had much more to say in *Discourse on Method* and other writings such as *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), but the details of his epistemology need not detain us here. The relevant point is that, together with Galileo, Descartes launched the Enlightenment by daring to think for himself, apart from tradition, even to the point of doubting everything and then basing all knowledge on his own existence rather than God's. From Descartes on, then, modern thought has been obsessed with certainty, and knowledge has often been reduced to what can be proven with logical and/or evidential proofs. Gradually, the realm of knowledge came to exclude things doubtable, and much that Descartes himself thought was true beyond a reasonable doubt later came to be doubted. What is important about Descartes is not what he believed but how he believed it.

Lest anyone think Descartes was anything else, we need to make clear that he thought of himself as a devout Christian. He did not intend to tear down or destroy Christian dogmas; he desired to give them a firmer foundation than ever they had. Is it his fault that later rationalists used his method to undermine traditional, orthodox Christianity? Or is there something inherently unchristian about Descartes's method—regardless of whether he used it to prove the existence of God and the soul and other Christian doctrines? The French Catholic mathematician, philosopher and mystic Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) thought so. Much later the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) agreed with Pascal. Both, and many other Christians, believed that, in spite of his good intentions, Descartes's method served to undermine authentic Christian faith by replacing faith with reason. Before Descartes the watchword was "I believe in order to understand"; after him, for all kinds of Enlightenment rationalists influenced by his approach to knowledge, the watchword became "I believe only what I can understand." Faith was being replaced by autonomous human reason; knowledge was being redefined as that which can be known with certainty by autonomous human reason functioning apart from revelation, tradition or faith.

What became of Descartes, perhaps the first truly modern man? The end of his story is almost as interesting as the story of his great insight and new

method of acquiring knowledge. Like Galileo, the French philosopher entered into correspondence with a royal acquaintance named Christina, only in his case she was the queen of Sweden (1626–1689), whose father, Gustavus Adolphus, led Sweden to victory in the Thirty Years' War. Christina was, by all accounts, not a particularly good monarch, but she was intellectually gifted and sought to bring the best of European culture, including philosophy, to her country. She invited Descartes to come to Stockholm to tutor her in philosophy. He went reluctantly, for he had an aversion to cold. Christina had him stand, bareheaded, at 5:00 a.m., tutoring her in an unheated library in her palace. Descartes hated it: "I think that in winter here, men's thoughts freeze like the water."[18]

In February 1650, less than a year after arriving in Sweden, Descartes fell ill, presumably from the frigid conditions, and died. But that was far from the end of Descartes. Soon after his death a near cult developed around his philosophy and his person so that in 1666 his body was disinterred, his bones put in a special copper box and transported to Paris where, in 1667, they were reburied in a church with great ceremony and even celebration (of his life) by his followers known as Cartesians. Between 1667 and contemporary times, the bones were lost—probably during the French Revolution.[19] However, Descartes's skull, which somehow had been left in Sweden, was recovered and now sits in the Museum of Man in Paris where it can be seen by the public. Ironically, the skull of the man who started an intellectual and cultural revolution that helped overthrow the dominance of traditional religion over people's thoughts is now a relic and the goal of philosophical pilgrims, much as saints' relics were worshiped by religious pilgrims in the Middle Ages.

Why so much focus on Descartes? Because he stood at the turning point between premodern and modern Western culture and profoundly challenged traditional ways of knowing and thinking about God and other matters dear to religion in general and Christianity in particular. He brought about a Copernican revolution in philosophy. Beginning with him, philosophy would no longer be the handmaid of theology and theology would no longer be the queen of the sciences. Beginning with him,

[18]Grayling, *Descartes*, 231.
[19]The story of Descartes's bones and skull is told in great detail by Shorto, *Descartes' Bones*.

knowledge began to be redefined as what people can prove (or justify) rationally apart from faith. In spite of his possibly good intentions, with Descartes, belief in doctrines founded on faith or tradition became opinion at best and superstition at worst. Autonomous human reason was inflated to become the criterion of all knowledge. The thinking self became the center of the world of thought, investigation and discovery. God was dethroned from the center and made a postulate of autonomous human reason. As much as theology tried to ignore Descartes or reject his rationalism and that of Enlightenment thinkers after him, it eventually had to deal with them. Descartes helped launch the modern world with its acids of modernity to which modern theology had to respond.

Locke argues for "reasonable Christianity." Descartes's rationalist method of grounding knowledge on self-evident foundations believed to be true a priori (i.e., without experimentation by sense experience) was not the only pillar of early Enlightenment thought. A somewhat different version of foundationalism arose in England in the later seventeenth century and flourished there and in North America throughout the following centuries. It is known as empiricism and rejects a priori truths of reason as the foundation for knowledge in favor of a posteriori (based on experimentation by sense experience) foundations for knowledge. The father, or at least main representative, of this Enlightenment approach to thinking and knowing was John Locke (1632–1704), like Descartes a Christian but one who revolutionized religious thought as well as politics and science. His best-known disciple was Thomas Jefferson, who worked Locke's ideas about politics and government into his Declaration of Independence (of the United States from Great Britain) in 1776. Jefferson was also influenced by Locke's ideas about religion and Christianity.

Perhaps Locke would not have approved, but in 1820 Jefferson, then in retirement from public life, took a razor to his Bible and created what he called "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth," which became the title of what later was called the Jefferson Bible. Jefferson's goal was to compile a New Testament (he did not care about the Old Testament except as literature) free of all irrational elements and composed exclusively of those teachings and actions of Jesus that Jefferson considered reasonable. Miracles were cut out, as were any sayings of Jesus offensive to enlightened

minds. What was left was a relatively brief list of Jesus' sayings and deeds from the four Gospels; the Bible was reduced to a prop for Enlightenment morality. Locke may not have approved, but surely Jefferson was influenced by *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). That manifesto of rational Christianity went through six printings in the following years and is still published and read by students of philosophy and religion in the early twenty-first century. It is a classic of Enlightenment religious thought.

Locke's life is not nearly as fascinating as that of Descartes, so his story will not detain us. He was a public intellectual in England who lived for a while in exile in Holland, a hotbed of Enlightenment philosophy and science because of its unique toleration of free thought. Locke worked as a tutor in various aristocratic families and became a civil servant in various agencies of the British government. So influential was he that, while in Holland, he helped select the new royal family for England after the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688. While he was moving and working in different positions among the elite of English and Dutch society, Locke wrote several ground-breaking treatises that became classics of Enlightenment thought: *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), *A Discourse on Miracles* (1701), *A Letter on Toleration* (1689) and *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. These writings, especially *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, brought Locke into great controversy with church leaders in England over what they considered his rationalism, possible unitarianism (denial of the Trinity) and alleged implicit denial of the deity of Jesus Christ and his miracles.

Without question Locke's ideas were new and bold, but he "was always of the mind that his writings did full justice to the Christian faith."[20] According to Locke, quite in distinction from Descartes, the human mind is a *tabula rasa*—a blank slate with no innate ideas; knowledge does not begin with a priori truths such as one's own existence. Locke thought that approach to knowledge got a person nowhere outside the mind. He was interested in providing a philosophical basis for the scientific revolution as well as the political changes coming in Europe and America.

[20]I. T. Ramsey, "Editor's Introduction," in John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity with a Discourse on Miracles and Part of A Third Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. I. T. Ramsey (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), 8.

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke proposed an alternative rational approach to knowledge:

> *All ideas come from Sensation or Reflection.* Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper [*tabula rasa*], void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from *experience*. In that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.[21]

Notice that phrase "can naturally have" in the final sentence. In other words, as a Christian, Locke was not denying (or at least wanted to appear not to be denying) supernatural knowledge through revelation and faith. However, that slight exception hardly makes a dent in his overwhelming emphasis on sense experience as the foundation of all true knowledge.

For Locke, then, normally speaking, all human knowledge derives from empirical foundations, from sense experience, another type of Enlightenment foundationalism. Much that we know is reasonable reflection on, that is, deduction from, sense experiences. We do not just have sense experiences; we interpret them using logic. Still, knowledge begins with simple ideas impressed on the mind by the five senses, and what follows in reflection and deduction must be based on and rooted in those. The implication is that anything we cannot experience through the five senses probably should not be considered knowledge.

Locke was the father of that branch of Enlightenment philosophy called empiricism. Descartes's approach to knowledge is usually distinguished from it as rationalism in the narrow sense of knowledge as rational, logical deduction from self-evident truths such as one's own existence. Locke's Enlightenment thought looks to the world outside the self as the source of

[21] John Locke, "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," in *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader*, ed. Paul Hyland (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 41.

knowledge but nevertheless places the knowing self at the center of the universe of knowledge. It is the knowing self that has the sense experiences, reflects on them and creates complex ideas out of them.

Locke thought his new empirical philosophy was a great benefit to religion and even to Christianity. What it did was cut out all speculation about things beyond human experience and focus religion on what truly matters—ethical behavior. Locke's preface to *The Reasonableness of Christianity* is revealing about his biases and motives: "The little satisfaction and consistency that is to be found in most of the systems of divinity [systematic theologies] I have met with, made me betake myself to the sole reading of the Scripture (to which they all appeal) for the understanding of the Christian religion."[22] And what did he find in his "sole reading of the Scripture"? Primarily a "body of Ethics, proved to be the law of nature, from principles of reason, and reaching all the duties of life."[23]

Locke did not deny Jesus' miracles or his divinity, but he did downplay or neglect them. For him, Jesus was first and foremost "the Messiah," a great teacher of virtue who saves by his example. What Locke did not say is as instructive as what he did say. He never mentioned the Trinity, for example. He probably thought of that doctrine as extrabiblical speculation, unrelated to anything in human experience, and therefore unimportant. He would have gotten into trouble with the authorities for explicitly denying it or any other dogma of orthodoxy, so he left it aside. Locke's reasonable Christianity was a much scaled-down version of orthodox Christianity that focuses on ethics and morality. But what was most controversial about Locke's version of Christianity is the role he accorded autonomous human reason in it. Locke argued for belief in God's revelation in Scripture even though he drastically truncated the gospel. "Whatever God has revealed is true and must be the object of our faith," Locke insisted. However, and this is what was most radical about *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, "what actually counts as having been revealed by God, *that* must be judged by reason."[24] In his essay on miracles Locke declared that

[22]Locke, *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 24.
[23]Ibid., 62.
[24]James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 107.

> no mission can be looked on to be divine, that delivers any thing derogating from the honour of the one, only, true, invisible God, or inconsistent with natural religion and the rules of morality: because God having discovered to men the unity and majesty of his eternal Godhead, and the truths of natural religion and morality by the light of reason, he cannot be supposed to back the contrary by revelation; for that would be to destroy the evidence and the use of reason, without which men cannot be able to distinguish divine revelation from diabolical imposture.[25]

Later empiricist Enlightenment thinkers went further than Locke dared to go in redefining Christianity. Some of them are known in the annals of intellectual history as deists. Many consider Locke the true father of deism. It is impossible to know what he would have thought of the English deists' reconstructions of Christianity, but there is no doubt they thought they were his disciples (see 1.c.).

Enlightenment thinkers reconstruct philosophy and religion, and others push back. Throughout all this time from Descartes to Locke and beyond, the vast majority of European and American Christians were blissfully unaware of what was happening among the philosophers. There was little to no grasp of something momentous going on that would eventually shake the very foundations of culture including religion. Nevertheless, these new ideas in philosophy began to trickle down, first to the educated elite of society and then to the growing middle class who, by the 1700s, were finding the new ideas in philosophy, at least as they understood (or misunderstood) them, a welcome relief from the authoritarian dogmatism of the established churches and political authorities.

Throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Enlightenment, including both the scientific revolution and the revolutions in philosophy, was taught in European and American universities as a great liberation movement within culture, freeing people from the shackles of dead traditions and leading the way into the light of freedom to think and discover, to question and find new answers. "Modern" became a compliment; people embraced modernity with enthusiasm even when they did not understand its full implications. Religion and politics were the two fields of life most affected by the

[25]Locke, *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 84.

Enlightenment; it tore away at the traditional roots of both and sought to replace them with new plants. The French and American revolutions of the late eighteenth century were both stimulated by the Enlightenment, as were the ideas about government that replaced the overthrown ones. Divine right of kings was replaced by social contract; gradually hierarchical structures fell down and were replaced by individual rights. Traditional religion, especially theology and doctrine, were equally challenged and undermined. Several new ideas about religion and theology, inspired by the Enlightenment, came in to replace them. That will be the bulk of our story of modern theology.

Only conservative Christians and defenders of monarchy seemed uncomfortable with Enlightenment ideals until the beginning of what is called postmodernism in the late twentieth century. Postmodernism seeks to practice incredulity toward all metanarratives[26]—including the Enlightenment metanarrative. A metanarrative is a "big story" (usually a philosophy or ideology) that claims to explain everything. One loud protest against the Enlightenment and the modernity it spawned appeared in 1990 from secular philosopher Stephen Toulmin (1922–2009). *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* raised questions about how liberating the Enlightenment was.

First, Toulmin lays out in stark form the "principal elements, or timbers, of the Modern Framework."[27] For example, "The 'human' thing about humanity is its capacity for rational thought or action" and "Emotion typically frustrates and distorts the work of Reason; so the human reason is to be trusted and encouraged, while the emotions are to be distrusted and restrained."[28] Toulmin argues that these and other principal elements of modernity, inspired by the Enlightenment, are ambiguous, and we should be ambivalent toward them. The Enlightenment and modernity have not been unmixed blessings. Toulmin concludes:

> At the outset, Modernity struck us as simple, straightforward, and beneficent. Here, at the far side of Modernity, its history proves more complex than we

[26]Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979).
[27]Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 109.
[28]Ibid., 109–10.

> thought. To begin with, we saw the story of Modernity as the onward march of human rationality, but this has turned out to hide ambiguities and confusions. Whether the seventeenth-century enthronement of "rationality" was a victory or a defeat for humanity depends on how we conceive of "rationality" itself: instead of the successes of the intellect having been unmixed blessings, they must be weighed against the losses that came from abandoning the sixteenth-century commitment to intellectual modesty, uncertainty, and toleration.[29]

Many postmodern people are less charitable than Toulmin about modernity. And not all of them are conservative Christians. Postmoderns in general are uneasy about modernity's claims about human reason and the ways in which the Enlightenment and modernity were hijacked and used to support and defend their vested interests by society's elites.

And yet, even many Christians eventually found value in at least some elements of modernity, and many felt compelled to go beyond reactionary rejection of the Enlightenment and modern science and begin to make peace with them. The story of how people who considered themselves both Christian and thoroughly modern sought to come to terms with the Enlightenment begins with a group of eighteenth-century thinkers who wrote about Christianity and sought to reconstruct it in the light of modernity. They are often lumped together as deists. A better term for them would be "natural religionists." The next section turns to their projects of combining early modern thought with Christianity in some kind of mutually transforming, integrative hybrid.

1.c. Deists Create a New Natural Religion

On a single day in 1697, in Dublin, the capital of Ireland, one book was publicly burned twice by the city's official hangman. One copy was burned in front of the Parliament House Gate. The book burning was ordered by the Irish Parliament, one of whose members publicly suggested that the author of the book should be burned with it.[30] The offending and offended book was one of the first treatises on the new religion later known as deism, better called natural religion. Its author was a noted Irish writer and sometime philosopher, John Toland (1670–1722). The book was *Christianity Not Mys-*

[29]Ibid., 174.
[30]Haig A. Boxmajian, *Burning Books* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 115.

terious with the subtitle *A treatise shewing, that there is nothing in the gospel contrary to reason, nor above it: and that no Christian doctrine can be properly called a mystery* and was published the year before its public burning. Fortunately for Toland he was not in Ireland when his book was burned; he was living and working in England. Toland was a disciple of Locke. He sought to apply Locke's rational philosophy to religion and Christianity in particular.

As explained in the previous sections of this chapter, the founders of the Enlightenment and scientific revolutions of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were all Christians who at least pretended to be devout and orthodox. There is some reason to believe some of them may not have been devout or orthodox, but they did not attempt to oppose traditional Christianity. Some of their philosophical musings and scientific models conflicted with traditional, orthodox teachings of the churches, but that was not as obvious during their lifetimes as later. To a certain extent, Descartes and Locke, for example, became controversial for Christian thinkers and leaders because of their disciples, the deists or natural religionists. After *Christianity Not Mysterious* was published, many astute readers noticed how rooted its logic was in Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Reading *Christianity Not Mysterious* indicated to many readers that it seemed to be almost a commentary on Locke's book, which had been published a year earlier. Was Toland simply bolder than Locke whom he greatly admired? Locke's book seemed less radical, but Toland's book raised questions about Locke's intentions.

Some years after Toland's book was published another deist manifesto appeared by another admirer of Locke—Matthew Tindal (1657–1733), who admitted inspiration from Toland. Tindal's 1730 book was titled *Christianity as Old as the Creation* with the subtitle *the gospel a republication of the religion of nature*. It became widely regarded as the "Bible of deism."[31] The author's thesis was that "the truths of Christianity have always been available to rational people from time immemorial. Hence, if the basic truths of religion can be known rationally, religion has no need of revelation at all."[32] Like Toland's book before it, *Christianity as Old as the Creation* created a furor;

[31]Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment*, 110.
[32]Ibid.

laws were passed in England forbidding any published attack on Christianity. A Tindal volume following up on *Christianity as Old as the Creation* was suppressed by officials and never published. Some openly deist writers were jailed. Some critics suggest that the only reason Tindal called his religion Christianity was to avoid prosecution. After all, he was not attacking Christianity! He was explaining and defending true Christianity.

Deism is a broad and ambiguous category, as is its better alternative, natural religion. Many students learn that deism is the belief that God created the world as a watchmaker creates a watch, with built-in laws, and then abandoned it or merely watched it operate without interference. The stereotype is of the deist God as an absentee landlord who is so transcendent as to be virtually useless for religion except as a moral governor of the universe who rewards good behavior and punishes (after death) bad behavior. Although there is some truth in that stereotype, it is not the whole story of deism. Natural religion is a better label because all the deists of the eighteenth century agreed on one thing—there is a religion of reason natural to all rational people that needs no special revelation from God or faith. Their views on God and God's relation with the world varied greatly. As a lot, they were trying to apply the new Enlightenment principles of Descartes and Locke and other early modern thinkers to Christianity to make it rational and truly modern.

Lord Herbert of Cherbury anticipates deism. A favorite argument among scholars of natural religion is when it began. Like most broad movements in thought, it is hard to pin down its exact starting point. Surprisingly, full-fledged natural religion seems to have begun early, before its time, that is to say, before there was a movement of deism. Lord Edward Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648) was a British free thinker who wrote *De Veritate* (*On Truth*), first published in 1624. In it, the intellectual aristocrat, a baron and knight who served as a diplomat and general public intellectual, sought to solve the problem of Christian pluralism arising out of the Reformation. Thousands were being killed in the name of religion as Catholic and Protestant armies swirled around the Continent in a seemingly senseless orgy of violence known as the Thirty Years' War. France was the arena of another religious war—the Huguenot civil wars. (The Huguenots were French Protestants.) They included massacres on both sides in the name of God. Lord Herbert's own England was

embroiled in a series of conflicts between Puritans and Anglicans that would soon break out into full-fledged revolution against the king.

In the midst of all that turmoil Lord Herbert put pen to paper and proposed a universal religion of pure reason composed of "Common Notions" agreed on by all reasonable people. He enumerated these ideas in five sentences:

1. There is a Sovereign Deity;
2. this Deity must be worshiped;
3. piety is closely linked to virtue, to good living;
4. wrongdoing must be expiated by repentance;
5. there is reward or punishment after this life.[33]

Lord Herbert expanded on these basic notions, borrowing from the tradition of scholastic theology but arguing that all of this can be found through reason alone without revelation. His intention was to provide a universal, rational religion to replace the many sects of Christianity so that the bloodshed could stop.

One interesting side light to *De Veritate* is that Lord Herbert was doubting whether to have it published. He knew how controversial it would be, not because his five principles would be rejected but because his claim that they can be based on reason alone would be considered heretical by many critics. (He was right about that.) By his own testimony recorded later, he was convinced to publish the book by a sudden loud noise in a cloudless sky.[34] Apparently Lord Herbert was still enough of a Christian to believe God gives signs to guide people (which is not to say it *was* a divine signal).

De Veritate did stir up controversy, but its author managed to weather it and go on to write on other subjects and die of natural causes the year the Peace of Westphalia was signed ending the Thirty Years' War. After his death his magnum opus was published—an exhaustive book on comparative religion seeking to support his claim that his five principles of natural religion are, indeed, universal in all world religions.

What was the significance of Lord Herbert's natural, universal religion of reason? One scholar suggests that "the importance of *De Veritate* is that it

[33]Ibid., 104.
[34]Ibid., 105.

made possible for subsequent thinkers to profess belief in God, yet to abjure revealed religion and established Christianity; the liberating effects of such a possibility for thinkers immersed in the daring discoveries of the new scientific age should not be underestimated."[35] Without doubt, then, Lord Herbert was at least a precursor of the deist movement of natural religion yet to come to full flower. He was also, along with Galileo and Descartes, one of the first modern men even if his fame is not as great as theirs. What made him modern? He dared to think freely about religion unbound by tradition and ecclesiastical authority. He had a greatly inflated view of autonomous human reason reaching out toward its omnicompetence. Finally, he omitted miracles or anything supernatural from his natural religion of reason. Later deists and natural religionists, especially religious free thinkers of the eighteenth century, would build on and extend his work.

Toland interprets Christianity rationally. When most people think of deism, names like Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine come to mind; they are often the examples of deism given in high school and college history textbooks. Better examples, because they influenced Jefferson, Paine and a host of later popularizers of deism, are Toland and Tindal. They and their controversial books have already been mentioned. Now it is time to take a closer look at real deism as exemplified by these two eighteenth-century writers who brought deism, or natural religion, to its scholarly apex.

First, however, it will be helpful to step back a moment and consider what conventional religion was like in the late seventeenth and early to mid-eighteenth centuries—a time of exploding new knowledge and budding free thought. For the most part conventional religion was static; nothing new was considered a sign of faithfulness by most people—the masses and the ruling elite alike. Theology was mired in scholastic debates over old controversies such as the order of the divine decrees of creation and predestination. Calvinism and Arminianism were still two main options dividing Protestant theology, and both assumed Scripture to be infallible and tradition to be authoritative.

A typical theologian of this time was Francis Turretin, who died in 1687, just a few years before the publication of Toland's *Christianity Not Myste-*

[35]Ibid.

rious. Turretin's influence was strong among Protestants through his massive system of Reformed theology, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (1679–1685), which was widely read and discussed among the faithful of Protestant orthodoxy. Typical of most Christian scholars of that time, Turretin was a determined defender of biblical inerrancy and authority. He went so far as to propose that the vowel points of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament to Christians, were inspired by God. He knew very well that they did not exist in the original manuscripts of the prophets, but he also knew that unless those vowel points added by the Masoretes, a group of eighth-century Jewish scholars, were inspired by God the exact meaning of portions of the Old Testament would be impossible to discern. This was the kind of Christian theology that seemed unreasonable to deists and free thinkers like Toland and Tindal.

One commentator on natural religion notes that

> in an intellectual climate in which critical biblical scholarship was virtually unknown and unconventional religious thinking of any sort looked on with suspicion, religious belief was generally presented as a unitary package in which the dubious and the simply unbelievable [e.g., Turretin's assertion of the divine inspiration of the Hebrew vowel points] were intermingled with the basic truths of faith. To an intelligentsia which had little freedom to voice criticisms of religion, treatises such as that of Tindal [and Toland] were a means by which they could continue to believe in God while justifying the futility of disputes between Christian sects.[36]

To many educated people, then, the deists' attempt to discover and expound a religion of reason, compatible with the new learning in philosophy and science, came as a breath of fresh air in the midst of an otherwise arid and sterile theological landscape.

Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* is a clever, and some would say coy, expression of natural religion. It is obviously indebted to Locke's ideas about religion and is firmly imbedded in the Enlightenment emphasis on reason. Nowhere does Toland openly deny any dogma of Protestantism (although he is not afraid openly to reject Catholic doctrines such as transubstantiation), but he subtly undermines the whole structure of traditional,

[36]Ibid., 109.

orthodox Christianity by insisting that nobody should, or even can, believe that which is ultimately mysterious. He implies, at least, that much orthodox doctrine falls into that category. So it must be purged to arrive at reasonable Christianity.

Toland's thesis is stated clearly: "Whoever reveals any thing, that is, whoever tells us something we did not know before, *his words must be intelligible, and the matter possible*. This rule holds good, let *God* or *man* be the revealer."[37] He was not rejecting revelation; he accepted that God has revealed truths the human mind cannot discover by itself. What he rejected was the belief that any revealed truth could be beyond human reason, that is, incapable of comprehension, unintelligible to the human mind when it is functioning properly. He rejects the call "to adore what we cannot comprehend"[38] and states, "The first thing I shall insist upon is, that if any Doctrine of the *New Testament* be contrary to Reason, we have no manner of Idea of it."[39] In other words, Toland was not just arguing that people should not believe doctrines that are mysterious, in his particular sense of that word, but that they cannot really believe them and requiring them to do so leads to skepticism and rejection of the faith. The only specific, concrete example he offers is the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation—that in the Mass of the Catholic Church the bread and wine literally turn into the body and blood of Christ. This he considered magic and beyond human comprehension, unintelligible nonsense, a mystery nobody can really believe. But one has the sense that Toland believes there are many similar irrational beliefs in general Christian orthodoxy and Protestant theology as well, though he does not mention them. He leaves to his readers to draw analogies between transubstantiation, which it was not illegal to deny in England, and doctrines of the Church of England (and other Protestant churches) that it was illegal to deny.

What about original sin, total depravity, and the necessary illumination of the Holy Spirit—doctrines dear to classical Protestantism? Don't these help people to understand why they ought to and can believe in what is ul-

[37]John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, in *John Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious: Text, Associated Works and Critical Essays*, ed. Philip McGuiness et al. (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1997), 41.
[38]Quoted in Peter Gay, ed., *Deism: An Anthology* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1968), 54.
[39]Ibid., 55.

timately mysterious to their minds? Toland rejects those beliefs as having anything to do with his argument. (He is careful not to deny them absolutely.) According to Toland, original sin does not result in any necessary defect of reason itself but only in "willful misuses of reason."[40] Appeal to "the illuminating and efficiacious Operation of the Holy Spirit" is unnecessary and unhelpful in trying to make inherently unreasonable doctrines believable.[41] What about revelation? Cannot God reveal truths that transcend reason's ability to comprehend them? Toland brushes aside any notion that divine revelation can violate reason. Truths once revealed, even if they could not have been reached by reason alone, must conform to natural reason, else they cannot be known. The deist rails against fideism—belief that some doctrines must be embraced by blind faith against reason. Reason is sovereign even over revelation.[42] For him, as for most if not all deists, there can be only one ultimate authority for religion, and that authority must be reason or else there will forever be the clash of competing claims about revelation and its truths that led to the wars of religion.

Toland's view of religion, its truth and knowledge of it, could not be made clearer than in this statement that begins much like Descartes long before with self-evident (a priori) truths:

> Were it not for those self-evident Notions, which are the Foundation of all our Reasonings, there could be no intellectual communication between God and Man; nor, as we are fram'd, can God ascertain us of any Truth, but by shewing its Agreement with those self-evident Notions, which are the Tests by which we are to judge of everything, even the Being of a God, and Natural Religion.[43]

What "self-evident Notions" was Toland referring to? At the least, one would be the law of noncontradiction, which rules out of all reasonable discourse, even out of knowledge itself, absolute logical contradictions such as (in a classical philosophical example): A = -A (A equals not A). Toland believed that traditional Christianity too often included such contradictory doctrines; one can only guess what they might be. The only one he openly

[40]Ibid., 68–69.
[41]Ibid., 62.
[42]Ibid., 118.
[43]Ibid., 116–17.

attacks is transubstantiation, but it is reasonable to assume he would have included, had it been legal to do so, the hypostatic union (two natures in one person of Jesus Christ) and the Trinity. Toland revered Jesus Christ but probably did not think him divine. He believed in the possibility of miracles but severely limited belief in them. He admitted that God, who created nature, may certainly alter its course. However, some claimed miracles are impossible even for God because they involve contradictions. Again, even miracles must be reasonable.

> No *Miracle* then is contrary to Reason, for the Action must be intelligible, and the Performance of it appear most easy to the Author of *Nature*, who may command all its Principles at his Pleasure. Therefore all those *Miracles* are fictitious, wherein there occur any Contradictions, as that *Christ* was born without opening any Passage out of the *Virgin's* Body; that a Head spoke some Days after it was sever'd from the Body, and the Tongue cut out; with Multitudes of this kind that may be met with among the *Papists* [Catholics], the *Jews*, the *Brahmins* [Hindus], the *Mahometans* [Muslims], and in all the Places where the Credulity of the People makes 'em a Merchandize to their Priests.[44]

What Toland is saying here is *not* that miracles are not contrary to reason but that the idea of a miracle is itself not necessarily irrational within theism—belief in God. However, the emphasis is placed squarely on a certain incredulity toward concrete miracles stories. One gets the distinct impression that he is unlikely to believe in any miracles, but he does not say so. The miracles he mentions as impossible because irrational are ones most people who might have read his book (i.e., educated people) would also reject because they are extrabiblical and border on superstition. But one has to wonder what Toland really believed about miracles and the supernatural. His inclination is most decidedly toward skepticism if not outright disbelief. Later deists, going further along Toland's trajectory, rejected miracles.

What was Toland's intent? He would say he was rescuing religion, specifically Christianity, from the dustbin of history where it would be relegated if it were not brought up to date with the Enlightenment and scientific revolutions. His critics and enemies said he was a cynical heretic, even

[44]Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, 89.

an apostate, out to destroy religion. It may be impossible to know the truth of the matter. It is almost certain that he was out to undermine traditional Christianity. That he thought his project was a positive one, to rescue Christianity by reconstructing it for the sake of relevance, is probable.

What did Toland believe in and value in religion and Christianity? If we take him at face value, he believed in God. Unlike the popular caricature of deism, Toland, one of deism's main thinkers, did not think of God as an absentee landlord watching from a distance. In fact, Toland referred to himself as a pantheist—someone who believes God and nature are one and the same.[45] Furthermore, Toland believed every normal human being possesses a capacity called reason that enables him or her to distinguish truth from falsehood, and he believed that natural reason governs all knowledge, including religious belief. Finally, Toland believed that religion's primary function is to establish morality, to undergird and guide public and private ethical thinking and behavior. As Alexander Pope wrote, "For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight; His can't be wrong whose life is in the right."[46] What Toland did not believe is that traditional doctrines, forms of worship and ecclesiastical structures are sacrosanct. They are all open to criticism and radical revision as required by Enlightenment-based reason and science.

Tindal rejects special revelation. Tindal was Toland's successor as much as Toland was Locke's successor. He pushed deism and natural religion farther along the trajectory set by Descartes and Locke and the Enlightenment in general. He has been called "the most learned of all the Deists,"[47] and his *Christianity as Old as Creation* has been called "the deists' Bible."[48] Its overall thesis is that "if the basic truths of religion can be known rationally, religion has no need of revelation at all."[49] By revelation Tindal meant special revelation—truths revealed by God that cannot be known through rational reflection on nature alone. He did not mean to reject general revelation—truth about God knowable through reason working with nature

[45]Stephen H. Daniel, "Toland's Semantic Pantheism," in *John Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious: Text, Associated Works and Critical Essays*, ed. Philip McGuiness et al. (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1997), 306.
[46]Ernest Campbell Mossner, *Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason: A Study in the History of Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 57.
[47]Ibid., 75.
[48]Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment*, 110.
[49]Ibid.

alone. In fact, for Tindal, as for many deists after him, true Christianity and natural religion—universal truth about God knowable to all people always and everywhere—are the same:

> If God was always willing, that all men should come to the knowledge of his truth; and there never was a time when God intended men should have no religion, or such an imperfect religion which could not answer the end [purpose] of its being instituted by an infinitely wise legislator, this seems to my bewildered reason to imply that there was from the beginning but one true religion which all men might know was their duty to embrace. And if this is true, I can't well conceive how this character can conflict with Christianity without allowing it, at the same time, to be as old as the creation.[50]

For Tindal, as for most or all later deists, whatever is knowable about God has always been available to the senses and to reason. This includes, Tindal argued, God's existence, God's expectations of people and the fact of rewards and punishments in this life and in the next.[51] Whatever is important to Christianity is identical with the rational religion of nature; whatever is unknowable by reason and therefore not part of natural religion cannot be essential to Christianity. One commentator on Tindal's rational, natural religion explains that

> *Christianity as Old as the Creation* is what has been called "constructive Deism" at its best. Relatively moderate in tone and extremely shrewd in argumentation, it appropriated what was most persuasive in liberal Christianity, and left the supernatural component of that Christianity behind. Miracles and revelations, to the extent that they are authentic, merely confirm what God has revealed to the reason. The only true religion is Natural Religion, that is, a religion that acknowledges the fatherhood of God and the moral law of the universe.[52]

Another commentator on deism and especially Tindal noted:

> Natural Religion, which is about the only kind of religion that Tindal recognizes, is but an ethical system on a theistic background; it consists in ob-

[50]Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (London: Routledge/Thames Press, 1995), 7. (I have made the text clear for readers of modern English; Tindal's text is in old English, which contains, for example, "f" in place of "s.")
[51]Gay, *Deism*, 102–9.
[52]Ibid., 102.

> serving the rules that reason discovers. And anything added to this is a blemish. The whole of religion, according to the Deists, consists in performing all the duties of morality.[53]

What did people attracted to deism see in its much truncated, reconstructed account of Christianity? First, it offered a form of Christianity without dogmas to fight over; thus, insofar as it would be accepted, there would be no more wars of religion. Second, it offered a form of Christianity seemingly immune to the acids of modernity and especially to the onslaughts of the scientific revolution. Deism, natural religion, was wholly compatible with the new worldview of nature's uniformity—closed to miracles and supernatural divine interventions. Finally, deism preserved what many considered most important in religion and Christianity—morality. For Toland, Tindal and most other deists, God is the great architect and moral governor of the universe and Jesus is a prophet and example of human moral perfection.[54] This is the kind of Christianity many enlightened people of Europe wanted—one that is rational, moral, tolerant and immune to the passions of persecution and corrosive effects of modernity.

Deism's influence on America's founding fathers is well known and documented, in spite of some revisionist historians who wish to downplay it. Jefferson is a case study of deism's influence on them. Like Toland and Tindal, and under their direct influence, "Jefferson believed that reason, not revelation, was the path to true religion."[55] Therefore Jefferson famously included in "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth" (the Jefferson Bible) only what he considered consistent with natural reason, leaving out all the miracles and hard sayings of Jesus. The reason was that "Jefferson questioned many of Christianity's central beliefs and became a deist, and he differentiated between what he considered to be the moral teachings of Jesus and Christians' corruptions of those teachings"[56] that appear even in

[53]S. G. Hefelbower, *The Relation of John Locke to English Deism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918), 138–39.

[54]Tindal struggled to include a high Christology in his rational Christianity, but the most he could say of Jesus Christ was that he was "a noble Example" and "the person sent from God who published" the "external revelation" (special revelation) that perfectly accords with universal "internal revelation" knowable through reason (*Christianity*, 8).

[55]Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 177.

[56]Ibid., 174.

the Gospels themselves. Jefferson believed that the divinity of Jesus was an invention of Jesus' "zealous disciples, not Jesus."[57]

Most deists remained adherents of traditional Christian churches, especially the increasingly tolerant Church of England (in America, after independence, the Episcopal Church). Those who belonged to the old Puritan churches (such as Presbyterian and Congregationalist) often found themselves invited to leave; many of them founded a new form of organized Christianity based on natural religion. The first Unitarian churches were founded by free thinkers and deists in England and North America in the 1770s. Early Unitarianism became a haven for Christians influenced by Enlightenment rationalism; it denied the Trinity as too mysterious for belief and rejected the prevailing, standard version of Protestant orthodoxy—Calvinism—as belief in an arbitrary and therefore irrational God.

Conservative Christian thinkers push back against deism. Not all religious rationalists rushed to embrace deism; many sought to use Enlightenment reason to defend orthodox Christianity including the deity of Jesus Christ and miracles. The most famous conservative rationalist (or rationalistic conservative) of the time was Joseph Butler (1692–1752), bishop of Durham, England, and author of *The Analogy of Religion: Natural and Revealed* (1736)—a rational response to Toland's and Tindal's natural religion. Butler agreed wholeheartedly with Locke and his ideological followers that reason is sovereign even in religion, but he disagreed with them that Christian orthodoxy contains much that is irrational. Butler's purpose in *The Analogy of Religion* was "to examine the facts of mankind [i.e., universal human experience] and of nature as they really are and to attempt to show from them the probabilities of things beyond human experience."[58] For example, according to the bishop, human experience indicates (not proves) the need of redemption such as Christ purchased in his atonement; for Butler, the doctrine of vicarious atonement is no irrational myth or superfluous addition to the simple religion of reason. It is, rather, the revealed confirmation of a "vague hope of reason."[59]

Butler did not even attempt to use reason to prove orthodox Christianity

[57]Ibid.
[58]Mossner, *Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason*, 81.
[59]Ibid., 96.

true. Instead he settled for using reason to demonstrate that natural religion's objections to Christian doctrines are not conclusive and that orthodox Christianity is not irrational but consistent with practical reason. He also sought to show that the deists' natural religion contains much that is itself beyond what natural reason can prove such as the immortality of the soul and rewards and punishments after death. What is notable about Butler, however, is how he adopted the standpoint and ethos of Enlightenment thought to defend orthodox Christianity. He was a thoroughgoing empiricist in the mold of Locke and used natural reason to point beyond nature itself. And, like Toland, he eschewed mysteries beyond any comprehension. His difference from Toland was that he believed all tenets of orthodox Protestantism reasonable even if not provable from reason alone. And that is what he, using Enlightenment methods, attempted to demonstrate in his *Analogy*.

Another eighteenth-century rational apologist for orthodoxy was William Paley (1743–1805), English clergyman and gentleman philosopher, who wrote *Natural Theology, or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity* (1802) in defense of belief in the God of traditional Christianity. Most of his arguments had been used before to fend off the skepticism of the deists, but Paley became famous for packaging them in a particularly lucid way. By the time Paley wrote *Natural Theology* many deists were becoming skeptical not only about doctrines such as the Trinity but also about any certain knowledge of God at all. Deism was gradually leading toward agnosticism or even atheism. Paley's most famous argument for the existence of a personal, intelligent, creator God was the watchmaker analogy. Paley argued that the human eye, for example, contains evidence of intelligent design and could not have come about by chance. He compared the eye with a watch found on a path. Would anyone think the watch came into existence by accident? Of course not. Similarly the human eye and the entire universe of nature must be the products of an infinite intelligence such as the God of orthodox Christian theism. Paley went on to defend many of the doctrines of Christianity from attacks by deists and Enlightenment free thinkers.

Many eighteenth-century Christians, including clergy and theologians, heaped scorn on deism as apostasy, believing it was a fad that could not take root and grow into anything truly threatening to traditional Christian

faith. Pietism and revivalism posed alternatives to deism and natural religion with emotional experiences of God that bypassed reason. In sum, the eighteenth century became a cauldron of religious controversy and ferment because of the Enlightenment and scientific revolutions, because of early modernity and its acids.

Late in that century and early in the next several philosophers turned against both orthodox Christianity and natural religion. They, too, are part of the story of modernity's challenge to Christian theology. In truth it can be said that these late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century critical religious thinkers paved the way for the appearance of both atheism and liberal theology in the nineteenth century.

1.d. Critical Philosophers Limit Religion to Reason

The title of this section might indicate more of the same (i.e., deism, natural religion). However, late in the eighteenth century and early in the nineteenth century the story of modernity and religious thinkers' responses to it took a radical and unexpected turn that altered the course of Christian theology for at least the next two centuries. Throughout the eighteenth century, as religious thinkers grappled with the challenges of modernity to traditional Christianity, proof of God's existence through reason was rarely denied. Deists and defenders of orthodoxy agreed that there must be a First Cause of all things and that it must be God. Causation was one principle agreed on by free thinkers and traditionalists alike. It was also essential to the scientific revolution. The whole scientific method depended on natural causation. What we observe in nature must be caused by prior causes ruled by natural laws. Rational religion, whether liberal or conservative, also assumed God as the causative explanation for nature itself. Gradually, steadily, as a result of the Enlightenment and scientific revolutions, eighteenth-century scientists and religious thinkers came to depend on the concept of causation; using that concept opened up all possibilities for science and modern, enlightened religion. The deists' natural religion depended on causation, as did the traditionalists' defenses of orthodoxy using natural theology and analogy.

Everything was thrown into crisis, however, when the empiricism of Locke and his followers turned Enlightenment thinking against itself. If all

knowledge is based on sense experience and rational deduction from it, what becomes of this assumed reality of causation? Is it a rational concept? Can it be proven? Enter the radical skepticism of David Hume (1711–1776) that turned the reasonable science and philosophy of the eighteenth century on its head. However, it is not Hume so much as his German contemporary, Kant, who is important to the story of modern theology. Hume is important because reading him awakened Kant, as he confessed, from his "dogmatic slumbers"[60] and aroused him to rescue science and religion from radical skepticism. Kant's rescue, however, was purchased at great cost to traditional religion, including eighteenth-century natural religion/deism and traditional Christian theology insofar as it was based on natural theology (e.g., proofs of the existence of God). Finally, a third philosopher who engaged in thinking about Christianity, Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), attempted to rescue (as he saw his project) rational religion, including true Christianity, from what he saw as Kant's radically reductive account of religion and Christianity.

Again, it is worthwhile to stop and consider why this story of modern theology engages so heavily, especially at its beginning, with philosophy. In order to answer that, I have to point ahead. Modern Christian theology, that is, theology that engages with modernity, begins with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834)—by far the most influential theologian of the nineteenth century who still casts a long and, some would say, dark shadow over twentieth-century theology. Liberal theologians tend to consider Schleiermacher a reformer and hero; conservative theologians tend to regard him as a villain. All agree, however, that Schleiermacher was to Christian theology what Copernicus was to astronomy (and by extension to science itself) and what Descartes was to philosophy. For better or worse, Schleiermacher revolutionized theology by carrying out a Copernican revolution in thinking about God. What makes him, rather than the philosophy we have been discussing, the starting point of modern theology is that he was an ordained minister and theologian, not a philosopher per se. True, Butler and Paley and many others who attempted to respond to deism and the acids of modernity in the eighteenth century were clergymen, but they did not deviate significantly from traditional paths of theology; they tried to

[60]Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), 5.

use Enlightenment modes of thinking to support traditional, orthodox theology. Schleiermacher, by contrast, as a pastor, preacher and professional theologian, allowed Enlightenment thinking, up to a point, to shape his reconstructions of Christian doctrines. Without capitulating to modernity, Schleiermacher attempted to accommodate it within his systematic theology *The Christian Faith*.

One cannot understand Schleiermacher's theology, or the theologies of later modern theologians, without first understanding the basic impulses of critical philosophers of the Age of Reason including Hume, Kant and Hegel, the subjects of this section. Once again, it is important to remember that, for better or worse, philosophy has always been theology's main conversation partner. In no era could theologians ignore philosophy and get away with it insofar as they intended their theological reflections to be public and relevant to culture. (Many theologians throughout the centuries and today try to ignore philosophy, but in most cases it is not difficult to show how they were and are influenced by philosophy even as they attempt to eschew it.)

Hume uses reason to undermine science and religion. By all accounts Hume was personally a congenial fellow. He was raised in a typical Scottish home and given a typical eighteenth-century Scottish education in both school and church. Very early, however, and probably as young as sixteen, he began to entertain serious doubts about the extremely strict teachings of the Scottish Presbyterian church that permeated all of Scottish society. It was heavily influenced by Puritanism with a harsh brand of Calvinism promulgated by means of three-hour church services every Sunday including a one-hour sermon and a one-hour lecture on doctrine.[61] According to one historian, the church of Hume's childhood and youth

> depicted God as an implacable despot, swift to wrath. . . . It held by the doctrines of election and reprobation in all their severity. . . . Both in church and in home the most relentless discipline was maintained. . . . The observance of the Sabbath was enforced with penalties. All other sacred times and seasons [e.g., Christmas] were deliberately ignored.[62]

[61]Norman Kemp Smith, "Introduction," in David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 4.

[62]A. J. Campbell, *Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland 1707–1929: The Hastie Lectures in the University of Glasgow* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1930), 28.

Without doubt Hume's adult philosophy was, at least in part, a reaction against the religion of his youth. So was his adult personality, in contrast to his youth when he tried in vain to conform his mind and heart to his church's teachings and expectations. As a youth he was a shy loner absorbed in studies and obsessed with "confirming his moral character."[63] As an adult he was described as "extroverted, genial, somewhat pagan."[64] His favorite adult pastime, other than conducting research and writing, was playing cards with other gentlemen at The Poker Club of Edinburgh. Early he turned against Calvinism and religion in general—except for his own brand of religion, which was highly philosophical. It consisted mainly of belief in the existence of God (without proof) and the rational deconstruction of superstition. Hume scholar Norman Kemp Smith summarizes Hume's adult minimalist religion:

> Hume's attitude to true religion can . . . be summed up in the threefold thesis: (1) that it consists exclusively in *intellectual* assent to the "somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined" proposition, "God exists"; (2) that the "God" here affirmed is not God as ordinarily understood; and (3) as a corollary from (1) and (2), that religion ought not to have . . . any influence on human conduct—beyond . . . its intellectual effects, as rendering the mind immune to superstition and fanaticism.[65]

Hume studied to become a lawyer at the University of Edinburgh beginning at about age twelve, but he soon found his interests lay solely with philosophy and immersed himself in reading especially ancient Roman thinkers. There is no doubt, however, that he was fully acquainted with the Enlightenment and especially Locke's empirical philosophy, which he accepted and radicalized. Hume had no permanent career and was never given a professorship in spite of his noted intellectual achievements. He was widely considered an atheist. In his mature years he served in government positions in Paris and Edinburgh and tutored noble gentlemen in letters and arts. He was by all accounts an encyclopedist—a person of wide-ranging interest and knowledge who could write successfully on a variety of subjects. He spent fifteen years writing a multivolume *History of England* that won him fame if not fortune.

---

[63]Smith, "Introduction," 6.
[64]Ibid.
[65]Ibid., 24.

Throughout his adult life Hume was obsessed with two subjects—philosophical epistemology (theories of knowledge) and religion, bringing them into conversation in a way destructive to traditional religion both liberal (i.e., deist) and conservative (i.e., orthodox). Hume's most important books (for this study of modern theology) are *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (published posthumously in 1779). The latter was written in the form of a dialogue which makes it difficult to tell exactly what Hume's own views are supposed to be. However, most scholars believe his is the voice of Philo, the most skeptical of the three dialogue partners.

Hume was a follower of the empiricism of Locke. Locke disagreed with Descartes about innate ideas; he denied them. For Locke and all Enlightenment empiricists, all knowing begins with sense experience. That is, all knowledge of the external world is a posteriori—derived from perceptions and impressions. There is no knowledge a priori (immediate, self-evident, not dependent on experience) except in matters analytical, that is, matters of definition. Descartes, the strict rationalist, believed true knowledge comes from deduction; the mind discovers a self-evident truth lying within itself such as "I am." From there it deduces other truths such as "God is." Sense experience cannot yield certainty; pure logical deduction can. Locke agreed but argued that there are no synthetic truths a priori—that is, truths about the external world outside the dictionary that are self-evident and certain. All synthetic knowledge (all knowledge not having to do only with definitions of terms) is a posteriori, based on experience, and therefore at best probable. Absolute certainty is impossible in this realm. It is possible only in the realm of analytic truths (definitions). However, this did not bother Locke or those pushing forward the scientific revolution based on Locke's empiricism. Absolute certainty may not be possible in matters of science, but the kind of probability Locke envisioned based on sense experience and logical deduction from it was believed to be very high, so high as to amount to certainty.

Hume agreed completely with Locke about all knowledge of the world beginning with sense experience. In his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* the Scottish thinker declared that "all our ideas . . . are copies

of our impressions."[66] By "impressions" Hume explained he meant "when we hear, or see, or feel."[67] Ideas are formed from reflection on impressions which are sensory perceptions. Hume went beyond Locke by radicalizing this empiricism and turning it against those Enlightenment thinkers like Locke, Newton and the deists who thought empiricism alone, without any admixture of a priori truths contributed by the mind, could arrive at the kind of knowing the Enlightenment was seeking—knowing with certainty (or even a very high degree of probability).

The problem Hume tackled, in a deconstructive way, was the gap between probability and certainty. The Enlightenment was all about discovering certain knowledge free from mere opinion, prejudice, bias or even faith. Such knowledge would be the key to unlocking the mysteries of the universe and, especially for the deists, to solving the problems of revealed religion that led inevitably to wars. One cornerstone in this Enlightenment foundation of knowing was causation. There Hume discovered a crack in the foundation. He wrote that "all reasoning concerning matter of fact seems to be founded on the relation of *Cause* to *Effect*."[68] Hardly anyone in eighteenth-century Europe would dispute that even if they considered God the chief cause of everything. Rational religion and science both depended on the idea of reasoning from cause to effect. The flaw Hume discovered is that causation (the relation between the supposed cause and its effect) is not itself an object of sense experience; it is at best a common assumption based on observation of regularities in the temporal connections between certain events. "From causes, which appear *similar*, we expect similar effects. This is the sum of all our experimental conclusions."[69] From this expectation we infer the reality of something called causation, but we never experience it. All we experience is that B always follows A. That A causes B is nothing more than an inference, a common belief. That B will always follow A we cannot say with certainty because we do not experience this force or thing called causation. In fact, Hume concluded, "we never can, by our utmost scrutiny, discover any thing but one event following another; without being

[66]David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 11.
[67]Ibid., 10.
[68]Ibid., 16.
[69]Ibid., 23.

able to comprehend any force or power, by which the cause operates, or any connexion between it and its supposed effect."[70]

Hume's discovery was a great blow to science and natural theology, both of which depend on the reality of causation. If causation is nothing but a common belief, how does it differ from superstition? Hume did not equate them. But he was raising a question about Enlightenment hubris; is certainty about the workings of the world, whether scientific or theological, possible? Or are we thrown back on belief?

In order to understand what Kant did, we need to remember and hold in mind this rather abstruse-sounding concept: Hume said that there can be no synthetic statements that are true a priori, and therefore certainty about the world outside the dictionary is always less than real certainty. But if certainty and knowledge are linked, as the Enlightenment wished and expected, then the whole modern project was in trouble. Hume went further. All knowing about the world outside the dictionary (i.e., synthetic truths) involves some element of belief. For science to do its business, it must believe in causation, which cannot be observed. But the Enlightenment, including the scientific revolution, was all about overcoming dependence on belief by establishing knowledge with certainty using reason.

What was Hume really up to? Did he enjoy being destructive with skeptical games? Not really. He thought it was a matter of principle to take things to their logical conclusions. For those, like him, committed to empiricism, facing its challenges had to be better than hiding from them. Hume was content to leave it that certainty is not possible in knowledge of the outer world, the world outside the dictionary. Science and religion would have to get along as best they could with probability and belief; it was for him a matter of muddling through. When asked how he handled these troubling matters personally Hume replied that he put them down and played cards with his friends.

What does all this have to do with religion? The answer should be obvious once one realizes how much eighteenth-century religion, both liberal and conservative, had come to depend on the reality of causation. Both natural religion (deism) and natural theology (conservative apologetics

[70]Ibid., 49.

using rational proofs of God's existence) assumed the reality of causation. The one thing they agreed on was that God is the ultimate cause of the world—its existence and design. Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* was like a bombshell falling on the search for a rational religion congenial with the spirit of the Enlightenment. And that meant on both liberals and conservatives because both depended heavily on proofs of the existence of God and the concept of God as cause of the world. Hume unleashed a calm, vicious attack on religion. In other words, in the *Dialogues* there is nothing of the anger and mean-spiritedness of, say, Voltaire. But neither is there a kind of ivory-tower raising of questions. Hume's assault was meant to devastate religion, except his own as it was summarized in three points above by Smith.

In *Dialogues* Hume (via the character Philo) uses his skepticism to attack and undermine the proofs of the existence of God involving causation. If there is no proof of any such thing, then any proof that depends entirely on it is invalid. At least that is what Hume attempts to demonstrate. Insufficient space here prevents a summary of all his arguments against natural theology, so here only one example will be given, and it should be adequate to show Hume's method of reasoning. The most popular argument for God's existence, and one almost everyone accepted as valid in the eighteenth century, was the argument from design (what is in the early twenty-first century called intelligent design theory). Paley's natural theology was a good example of it even though that was published after Hume's critique. The argument is, in brief, that the universe displays evidence of design in its intricacies and interconnections. Hume attempted to show that what design is observable falls short of proving an infinite, all-wise creator. Rather, he says, it could just as well point to a committee or a demented being given the disorder and decay in nature. Here is an example of Hume's criticism of the teleological argument:

> Look around this universe. What an immense profusion of beings, animated and organized, sensible and active! You admire this prodigious variety and fecundity. But inspect a little more narrowly these living existences, the only beings worth regarding. How hostile and destructive to each other! How insufficient all of them for their own happiness! How contemptible or odious to the spectator! 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.[71]

Many educated people believed that Hume had devastated the teleological argument for God and thereby seriously weakened natural theology and natural religion. At the close of the *Dialogues* the skeptic acknowledges that a religious person can still take refuge in faith in a special revelation for belief in God,[72] but he is confident he has done away with rational religion as it was believed in by both deists and defenders of orthodoxy.

Hume also attacked belief in miracles—something that had little effect on deism but sought to undermine belief in Christianity based on the historicity of Jesus' miracles. In a little section of *An Enquiry* titled "Of Miracles" (Section X) Hume argued that for every claim of a supernatural intervention there is always a better explanation than miracle. But his overall presupposition of the uniformity of nature ruled out miracles from the beginning: "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined."[73]

Many enlightened people of Europe read Hume's *Enquiry* and *Dialogues* and concluded that both natural religion and natural theology were dead. Those who believed in God and Christian doctrine on the basis of faith alone were unfazed. But across Europe and in much of America Christianity had come to be linked so closely with Enlightenment reason, either in a free-thinking, liberal form or in a rationalistic, orthodox form, that Hume's skepticism, well argued and defended, came as a shock.

Kant rescues science from Hume's skepticism. Kant was by all accounts an odd person. In many ways he fit the stereotype of the eccentric philosopher. He was born and raised in the Prussian city of Königsberg (now part of Russia) and never traveled more than about ten miles from it. He lived his entire eighty years in a single city. To say the least, he was not the cosmopolitan man of the world many people admire. By contemporary psychological standards he was almost certainly afflicted with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and pos-

[71]Ibid., 211.
[72]Ibid., 227–28.
[73]Ibid., 76.

sibly agoraphobia (fear of leaving home, especially for crowded places). He rarely left home except to give lectures at the University of Königsberg and go for one daily walk. He was raised in a pietist home and church, but as an adult he rarely attended church. His neighbors set their clocks by his daily walk as his manservant carried his top hat, coat and umbrella in case it rained. He always walked at precisely 3:30 p.m. According to one story, Kant broke off lecturing one day because he was distracted by a student sitting in front of him missing a button on his tunic. Kant ordered the student to go back to his room, sew the button on his coat, and return so he, Kant, could resume the lecture. Kant may have been eccentric and reclusive, but he was extremely well read, including books by foreigners such as Hume. By his own admission, reading Hume awakened Kant from his "dogmatic slumbers" and set his feet on a new path of philosophy that many have called critical idealism. Much of Kant's philosophical project was devoted to rescuing science and religion from Hume's skepticism. His method and conclusions, however, were anything but comforting to advocates of eighteenth-century rational religion—deists and defenders of natural theology.

Kant has been hailed as *the* Protestant philosopher of the modern age. His influence cannot be overemphasized. It was Kant, according to historical theologian Claude Welch, "who more than any other single thinker cast his shadow over theology in the nineteenth century"[74] and, one might add, over much of twentieth-century theology. He was the Enlightenment thinker par excellence, but he criticized traditional rationalism and empiricism (the two main branches of Enlightenment foundationalism) and sought to combine their strengths and avoid both their weaknesses in his own massive, complicated and subtle critical philosophy. Here only the most cursory explanation of Kant's philosophy can be offered and only that which is necessary for understanding modern theology.

Kant wrote numerous massive volumes, and most of them are still in print in the twenty-first century. But by far his most influential works, especially for theology, were *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793). Though an Enlightenment thinker, Kant believed Enlightenment philosophy had reached an impasse and that

[74]Claude Welch, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1: *1799–1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 45.

Hume had simply pointed it out. He agreed with Hume's position that a consistent empiricism resulted in skepticism even about the reality of causation and many other things science needs to do its work. He also agreed with Hume that natural theology, especially the traditional arguments for God's existence, falls far short of providing certain proof of God. Still, unlike Hume, he was not comfortable leaving philosophy, science or religion mired in doubt. What was needed, Kant believed, was a new epistemology that would raise them above chronic skepticism. Such a new epistemology would have to alter both rationalism and empiricism, combining the best of both while omitting their worst features.

We have already seen that what Hume did (among other things) was point out that there can be no such thing as synthetic truth a priori. In other words, outside the dictionary, so to speak, there can be no certainty. A priori truth is always only analytical—about definitions. For example, no one can doubt that a bachelor is an unmarried man. But that is not because someone has gone around the world observing every bachelor and concluding that, yes, they are all unmarried men. It is true a priori that all bachelors are unmarried men because that is the definition of "bachelor." The same is true about circles; they are all round because being round is part of the definition of "circle." A priori truth is truth about which one can be absolutely certain because it requires no investigation or experimentation or even sense observation. A posteriori truth is truth derived from and dependent on investigation or experimentation or at least observation. For example, that the earth revolves around the sun is true a posteriori; there is nothing in the definition of "earth" or "sun" or even "solar system" that requires it to be true. It is true because careful observation, beginning with Copernicus and reaching its climax in Galileo, proves it true. But Hume's point was that strict, consistent empiricism can never yield certainty; no matter how sure we think a conclusion based on observation is, we know it could turn out to be wrong in some aspect. So, certainty exists only in the analytic realm; a priori truth is limited to that. In the synthetic realm, beyond the dictionary and perhaps the math textbook, all truth is a posteriori and therefore fallible.

Hume laid down the glove, and Kant dared to pick it up. He dared to seek for and claim to have found synthetic truths a priori, thereby placing science

back on solid ground.[75] The cost to religion, at least natural, rational religion and theology, however, was great. Natural, rational religion and theology depended on metaphysics, that branch of philosophy that searches for the ultimate realities of things, powers, beings and forces behind appearances—things in themselves and not only in their appearances. God was believed to be the necessary ultimate cause of all other things, and God's existence, so natural theology and religion claimed, could be proven through observation of the world (e.g., its design). Kant agreed with Hume that this approach to religion had to die; it does not work. But why? Not precisely for the reasons Hume gave. Rather, Kant famously said, he had to sacrifice reason (in religion) in order to make room for faith. Whether that was sincere or not has been much debated; perhaps it was Kant's way of defending himself against charges of being a destroyer of religion. (People who think religion, true Christianity, *is* always ultimately a matter of faith and not reason regard Kant as an ally in spite of himself.) What did he mean?

Kant set out to discover a priori synthetic truth. In order to find it, he suggested a necessary Copernican revolution in philosophy. Rationalism, following Descartes, said that real knowledge, which it equated with a priori truth, exists independent of the five senses in the realm of thoughts. Logical deduction from one's own existence, for example, could bring a person to knowledge of God, the immortal soul and the unity of external reality (the "universe"). Therefore innate ideas, self-evident truths, are the starting point for knowledge. Empiricism, however, following Locke, said that real knowledge always begins with sense experience. The mind is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, onto which knowledge is impressed, like the impression a key makes pressed into wax, by sense experience. Kant believed that both rationalism and empiricism, taken alone, lead to dead ends of philosophy, science and religion. Somehow they needed to be combined. Kant assumed that empiricism is better overall than strict Cartesian rationalism. Logic alone cannot produce scientific discovery. Empiricism was

[75]What follows, the account of the basics of Kant's epistemology, is my summary of the main points of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), which is notoriously difficult to summarize. And quotations from it are usually not helpful in such a brief summary. I will leave it to critics to decide if I have done justice to it in this context—a very brief survey and explication for the purpose of understanding Kant's influence on modern theology.

the very foundation of science. But how to fix its flaws so expertly discovered by Hume?

Kant suggested that instead of thinking of the human mind as a block of wax and knowledge as impressions formed on it by sensations, perceptions, why not think of the human mind as an active, productive machine that has gears and levers (metaphorically speaking) that take sense experiences and shape them into knowledge? In other words, the mind should be thought of not as an inert receiver but as something that receives *and* produces. It shapes and forms raw data of the five senses into knowledge using innate, cognitive functions that Kant called "forms of intuition" and "categories of understanding." The forms of intuition are space and time. The categories of understanding include causation—that all-important force Hume demonstrated cannot be observed and therefore cannot be known. To use a more modern illustration, one Kant would enjoy were he alive today, the mind is more like a computer program than a block of wax. It takes raw data and organizes that data into knowledge, just as a computer program, for example, takes a list of names entered randomly and puts them into alphabetical order.

What is the advantage of Kant's epistemology? It combines rationalism and empiricism and provides a detour around their limitations. Kant agreed with empiricists such as Locke and Hume that all knowing begins with sense experience, but he agreed with rationalists such as Descartes and his followers that knowledge is not limited to sense experience. If Kant was correct, and many people of the late eighteenth century and beyond thought he was, then synthetic truth a priori has been discovered. If Kant was right, we can always be certain that all knowledge will be organized in a certain way including causation. Every effect will have a cause *because* the human mind contributes causation to the process of taking raw data contributed by the sense and organizing it. It does not matter that causation is not observable; what matters is that it is part of the mind's machinery, so to speak. Or, to use a more modern metaphor, causation is part of the software of the mind. A synthetic truth a priori is: All objects known through pure reason exist within a network of causes and effects. This is synthetic because it is about the world of experience and not just definitions. It is true a priori because no experience is necessary to know it; it is self-evident because of the universal operation of "mind." For Kant, then, once one stops thinking of the mind as

passive in knowing and realizes it as active in the knowing process, Hume's skepticism is overcome. Now science can get back to work because one of its key categories, causation, is placed once again on *terra firma*.

One main question usually arises when people first encounter Kant's critical idealist epistemology. (It is called that because philosophical idealism emphasizes the role of the mind in knowing and because, unlike absolute idealism, it does not say that mind is all there is.) Doesn't this mean that we can have no knowledge of things-in-themselves but only of things-as-they-appear-to-us? Kant's answer is emphatically yes:

> All our intuition [knowledge] is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things which we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them as being, nor their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us, and . . . if the subject, or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, be removed, the whole constitution and all the relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish. As appearances, they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us.[76]

That is why metaphysics and natural theology must go; if Kant was right we can have absolutely no knowledge of things except as the mind shapes them, that is, if we are talking about pure reason—"scientific reason." Metaphysics was always thought to be in some sense scientific; natural theology was supposed to put religion, including Christianity, on a scientific footing alongside the natural sciences (if not above them). But if Kant was right, "scientific knowledge," knowledge of the world through sense experience and deduction from it, is limited to appearances. The *Ding-an-sich*, thing-in-itself, is beyond knowing. Kant thought science should not bother itself with this; science can get on with its business without worrying about whether what it studies exists in the noumenal realm (Kant's term for the realm of things-in-themselves) or the phenomenal realm (Kant's term for the realm of things-as-they-appear-to-us). Some scientists agree and some disagree, but Kant felt strongly that it should not matter. To think one is studying things-in-themselves is to engage in metaphysics and fall under Hume's skepticism.

[76]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 82.

The illustration about computer software might help explicate Kant's point here. Imagine a person whose only job is to observe and interpret data arriving on her computer through a network. The data always arrives organized alphabetically. (Perhaps it is, for example, a list of book titles and authors.) What is it to the person whether the data were entered into the computer network and its software in that form? Suppose the person asked her supervisor, "Is this data I'm receiving on my computer entered somewhere else, say on another computer on this network, in exactly this form?" The supervisor might say, "That's none of your business; it doesn't matter" (especially if he does not understand it himself). A person ignorant of computers and their capabilities would probably assume the data are being entered in that form somewhere by someone. But a person knowledgeable about computer software and its capabilities will suspect the data are not being entered in that form somewhere by someone and will assume some software in the network or on her computer is organizing it as it appears to her. But what difference does it make to her job? None. Think of Kant's "noumenal realm" as the person, computer and raw data on the other end of the network connecting to the employee receiving it in organized form. Think of Kant's "phenomenal realm" as what appears on the employee's computer screen. Think of Kant's "forms of intuition" and "categories of understanding" as the software that organizes the raw data between its entry (noumenal realm) and its reception (phenomenal realm). The point is that for the person receiving the data to be interpreted, it is true a priori that it will always be in (for example) alphabetical order. That is a synthetic truth a priori—something Hume thought impossible.

So, if Kant was right, science is rescued, but metaphysics, including natural theology and natural religion, is dead. That is because the person on the receiving end of the computer network cannot know anything about the raw data or its origin from where she sits. The data *as she receives and observes it* reveals nothing about its nature before she sees it. For all she knows, it might start as a meaningless jumble of bytes. Similarly, for Kant, there is no way to know anything about the raw data of our sense experiences, its origin, its nature before the mind receives and organizes it. But it would seem that by definition God belongs in the noumenal realm. What good is a God who is shaped by the mind? The same could be said of all the

objects of metaphysics (e.g., the soul, the universe as a whole). Thus, in order to rescue science, Kant had to destroy metaphysics and with it rational, natural theology and religion.

If Kant was right, there can be no knowledge of God in the strictest sense of knowledge. As a leading Kantian scholar says, "If the only objects of knowledge are objects which have been determined as such in accordance with certain principles of knowability, there can of course be no knowledge of God."[77]

Kant limits religion to practical reason. That is not, however, the end of the story of Kant and religion. Kant was, in his own way, a very religious person. He wanted to rescue religion from his own epistemology as much as he wanted to rescue science from Hume's. How to do that Kant explained in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793).[78] But what he wrote there depended much on another book—*Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). Kant divided reason into two realms: "pure reason," by which he meant reason as used by all the sciences, and "practical reason," by which he meant reason as it is used in the moral life. Kant used "transcendental reasoning" to demonstrate the necessity of the ideas of God, the soul and the universe as a whole (i.e., its unity). Here "transcendental" means imagining what must be the case from what is the case and positing its reality. According to Kant, religion arises from ethics, from humanity's experience of the "moral law within." He famously remarked, "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and persistently one's meditation deals with them: the starry sky above me and the moral law within me."[79] Kant believed there is a moral law within everyone and it is perfectly rational. It does not depend on revelation. He called it the "categorical imperative" and expressed it in two forms, the most famous of which is "Always treat other persons as ends in themselves and never as means to an end." For Kant this is the philosophical golden rule; every rational person

[77]F. E. England, *Kant's Conception of God* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 207. Although if Kant is right there can be no knowledge of God, there can be and *indeed must be* (Kant insisted on this also) the idea of God as a "transcendental concept." By that Kant meant a necessary idea. For Kant, however, the necessity of the idea of God says nothing about God's existence or nature.

[78]Again, as with Kant's account of critical idealism, what follows is a brief summary of the main points of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

[79]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 203.

intuitively realizes it is correct. However, he realized that abiding by it does not always bring happiness; in this life there is no automatic relationship between living morally and being happy. Therefore, there must be a place where moral living is rewarded with happiness. This everyone understands to be heaven, although Kant did not think of it in terms of traditional theology or even in biblical images. Based on the moral law within, Kant argued that practical reason requires that people believe in God and the immortality of the soul including rewards and punishments after death.

In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* the German philosopher contended that religion's proper function is to support ethics and morality. It is not about metaphysics as that is traditionally understood. Rather, "pure religious faith is concerned only with what constitutes the essence of reverence for God, namely, obedience, ensuing from the moral disposition, to all duties as His commands."[80] Even Christianity is limited to its ethical function, according to Kant; it is not at all about mysterious doctrines about God-in-himself such as Trinity or incarnation, although he never denied them. (Because he suspected Kant was implicitly denying these and other dogmas of the state church, the king of Prussia silenced Kant for a time, forbidding him to publish anything on religion. Eventually the imposed silence was lifted.)

Kant's view of Jesus Christ illustrates his view of Christianity as limited to practical reason—morality and ethics, especially duty to live according to the categorical imperative. For Kant, Jesus was simply "an example conforming to the archetype of a humanity pleasing to God."[81] Kant was clever at expressing his disbelief in things supernatural without explicitly denying them. For example, immediately after that definition of Christ, he wrote that "he [Jesus] is represented [in the Gospels] as returning to heaven, whence he came."[82] Notice that he did not say Jesus returned to heaven from whence he came; he only said Jesus is "represented as returning to heaven." On the basis of that alone he could not be accused of heresy, but anyone who understood the code imbedded in the phrase "represented as" realized Kant did not believe in the resurrection or ascension. Finally, the

[80]Kant, *Religion*, 96.
[81]Ibid., 119–20.
[82]Ibid., 120.

philosopher expressed Jesus' real significance: "He left behind him, by word of mouth, his last will (as in a testament); and, trusting in the power of the memory of his merit, teaching, and example, he was able to say that 'he (the ideal of humanity well-pleasing to God) would still be with his disciples, even to the end of the world.'"[83] In other words, Jesus' importance lies in his example and teachings, not in his incarnation or atoning death as in traditional, orthodox theology. Kant's Christology did not go much beyond that of the deists. And he saw religion's primary significance and purpose much as they saw it—as a support for ethics.

Enumerating and explaining all the tentacles of Kant's philosophy that extended out into modern theology, influencing it as no other philosophy, would consume hundreds of pages. Here a few must suffice.

First, Kant's dualisms between the noumenal and phenomenal and between pure reason and practical reason and his restriction of religion to the latter and especially to ethics provided the primary path of escape from conflict between science and religion for much of future theology. In other words, if religion, including Christianity, is not dependent on metaphysics or any belief about the outer world of nature and is limited to morality or duty, then it can hardly be affected by any new discovery of science. If Kant was right, science and religion are about entirely different matters. Later liberal theology picked up on this and often distinguished between "matters of fact" and "matters of value" (or "faith"), putting a wall between them so that theology, restricted to the latter, is about what ought to be rather than what is. Science is about the facts of the world, not about right and wrong or (as much later liberal theologians will insist theology is solely about) the kingdom of God. In a degraded way, the old saying that theology is about "how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go" was Kant's point entirely, although it is doubtful that he was interested in any plan of salvation other than doing one's moral duty. This dualism between facts and faith has become so prevalent in modern Christian thought that many people take it for granted, but it was Kant's invention even if some Christian mystics anticipated it.

Second, and closely related to the first point, many later theologians saw Kant as an ally in their inflation of revelation as the sole source of knowledge

[83]Ibid.

of God. Many conservative and neo-orthodox modern theologians thought Christianity is based entirely on special revelation and faith and not on reason or natural theology. That was hardly the consensus of most Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century, but it arose as something of a Protestant consensus in the early twentieth century with Karl Barth (1886–1968) and his dialectical theology colleagues and followers. Bernard Reardon, a noted scholar of nineteenth-century religious thought, expressed Kant's significance for these more conservative theologians concisely: "Scientific reason might be absolute in its own realm, but its authority did not extend to revelation, which dealt only with the supersensible and addressed man at the 'higher' level of his moral personality."[84]

Kant gave modernity a new twist without abandoning its basic impulses. Barth expresses it well in his essay on Kant: "What is the significance of this man and of his work? . . . Our answer must simply be that it was in this man and in his work that the eighteenth century saw, understood and affirmed its own limitations."[85] In other words, Kant uncovered the limitations of rationalism without rejecting reason. No longer could the "heavenly philosophers of the eighteenth century"[86] blithely go on believing in the omnicompetence of pure reason. Reason could not reach to a world behind appearances, to things-in-themselves. Newton had defined science as "thinking God's thoughts after him." Kant drove a stake in the heart of that way of thinking about human reason. Yet, Kant did not turn against reason; he redefined it and delineated its limitations. As for religion, he took it out of the realm of the natural (or supernatural) and placed it firmly in the realm of the ethical. Because of reason's limitations religion cannot use reason to establish itself as fact in the same way science establishes, for example, the existence of a new planet in the solar system.

Hegel returns reason to religion. One hard lesson students of intellectual history, and perhaps especially philosophy and theology, quickly learn is

[84]Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Kant as Philosophical Theologian* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1988), 179.
[85]Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 252.
[86]Intellectual historian Carl L. Becker argued that the eighteenth century was not a secular age and that its leading philosophers believed in and practiced a "heavenly philosophy" in which reason, as opposed to revelation and faith, could establish the truth of God and God's will for humanity: *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

that an absolute is never absolute. Kant killed metaphysics and limited reason to the realm of appearances; Kant restricted religion to ethics. Yes, he did that for himself and those who followed his philosophy. No, he did not put an end to all attempts to use reason to reach absolute and ultimate reality. A notable dissenter to Kant's philosophy was born in the middle of Kant's lifetime and grew up to react strongly against Kant's limitation of reason to appearances and religion to ethics. Hegel was born into a middle-class family in Stuttgart, Germany. His father was an official in the Duke of Würrtemberg's government who wanted his son to become a minister. The son dutifully studied theology at the Protestant seminary of the University of Tübingen but switched to the study of philosophy. He associated with a group of philosophers that came to be called idealists in that they considered ultimate reality to be thought or consciousness rather than matter. For them, the material world is an extension of the mental world with God being the Mind (capitalized because it was generally equated with deity) from which everything else is derived. One of Hegel's closest friends and colleagues at the University of Jena, where he began his teaching career, was the philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854)—an advocate of absolute idealism, which saw Mind as the sole reality of which everything else, including matter, is an emanation.

Hegel did not accept absolute idealism; his philosophy would better be called something like dialectical idealism, with "dialectical" denoting the underlying unity of opposites. Hegel came to think that absolute idealism, such as Schelling's worldview, ended up portraying reality as "a dark night in which all cows are black"—in other words, an identity without real distinctions. Hegel knew well that reality is both unity and diversity, but he could not stomach Kant's dualisms. If dualism is final, Hegel thought, then all hope of knowing reality is dead. Hegel was not ready, as Kant was, to give up on metaphysics or rational religion. However, he knew well that Kant had killed traditional metaphysics that depended on ideas like causation to prove the existence of God. Just as Kant saw Hume as a problem to overcome, so Hegel saw Kant as a challenge to be met. And he attempted to meet Kant's challenge by turning traditional philosophy and religion around or on its head.

The Kantian problem Hegel confronted was the limitations of pure reason to the phenomenal realm and of religion to the realm of practical

reason or ethics. To Hegel this was too great a sacrifice. He wanted to return philosophy to rational knowledge of ultimate reality and religion to rational knowledge of God. "Rational knowledge is an essential element in the Christian religion itself."[87] The only way to do this, however, was to overcome the dualisms of thought and being and of subject and object assumed or created by Kant. Hegel knew there was no going back to what was before Kant; he had no interest in deism or its form of natural religion. That, too, was bedeviled by dualisms that made real knowledge of ultimate reality impossible. In his magnum opus, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), the speculative philosopher suggested that all things in philosophy could be made right again, that is, truly scientific, if it overcomes the dualisms of thought and being and of subject and object and instead thinks of consciousness itself as ultimate reality. In other words, the whole problem of Hume and Kant, according to Hegel, was their assumption that the order of knowing, or thought, and the order of being, or reality, are two different orders. So long as thought and being are divorced, Hegel believed, there will be no knowledge of ultimate reality or God. As Kant realized, the only "knowing," in that case, is "practical knowing," that is, positing the existence of God (and the soul) because God is a necessary idea to account for morality. But, Hegel the idealist asked, what if thought and being are not different orders, divorced from each other, but belong together so that thought itself reveals the nature of reality including God? Then consciousness is not finite and striving to grasp a reality other than itself (God or matter or whatever) that it ultimately cannot know. Instead, consciousness, mind, spirit, is infinite but dynamic—as is being, or God.

Consciousness itself, then, reveals ultimate reality just by its own structure because they are united, not separated. This great unity of all reality, consciousness and being united in a dynamic process, is not merely finite but is what Hegel called the "true infinite" that includes the finite in itself,[88] overcoming the difference between the finite and the infinite in a process of reflection through which "Absolute Spirit" (Hegel's concept of God as the Mind or Spirit) comes to self-awareness. There are, then, not two, separate

[87]G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. E. B. Spiers and J. Burdon Sanderson, 3 vols. (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), 1:17.
[88]Ibid., 1:184–85.

realms of the noumenal and phenomenal, and human intelligence and consciousness is not limited because it is an aspect of Absolute Spirit. History, the upward march of cultures in time, is the process of Absolute Spirit coming to self-awareness through the evolving of human consciousness.[89]

Hegel posited the identity of the process of human thought, at its best and most logical, with the history of God or Absolute Spirit. "For Hegel . . . the structure of truly rational human thinking *does* bear witness to the structure of reality; not, however, because the structures of thought and of reality are similar but because they are, ultimately, one and the same."[90] Human thought and the cultures it creates evolve in a pattern of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.[91] An idea (or culture) is put forward which inevitably gives rise to its seeming opposite or antithesis. Thought, consciousness, strives to "sublate" thesis and antithesis by taking them up into a higher unity that leaves behind their contrary, conflicting elements. The higher unity is synthesis—the union of opposites that transcends them. The synthesis then becomes a new thesis confronted eventually by its antithesis, and the process continues. This is how consciousness works—not only human consciousness but also history itself, which is the career, as it were, of Absolute Spirit, Hegel's term for God. Through this dialectical process God comes to self-awareness in dependence on the world. This is called panentheism—an influential idea of God and the world in modern theology after Hegel. It emphasizes God's immanence more than God's transcendence. God and the world are always interdependent with God being the greater partner. Hegel expressed it best in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*: "Without a world God is not God,"[92] or, more precisely put, "the divine Spirit's knowledge of itself [happens] through the mediation of finite spirit."[93] Thus, humanity's coming to know God is God's coming to know himself.[94]

[89]Ibid., 1:206. The brief summary of Hegel's philosophy here is based on *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. These are extremely complex philosophical treatises, and so any brief summary necessarily omits many points and steps of the argument.
[90]Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 79.
[91]No claim is made here that Hegel used the language or scheme of "thesis, antithesis, synthesis." This is a conventional way of describing Hegel's view of reality.
[92]Quoted in Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God*, 272.
[93]Quoted in ibid., 134.
[94]Hegel, *Lectures*, 1:206.

How does humanity come to know God and God come to know himself? Through reflection on history as the activity of Spirit. Hegel believed strongly in a kind of upward progression of history and culture toward greater and greater degrees of unity, the whole process of which is revelation of God.[95] History itself cannot be understood without understanding it as the history of God or Absolute Spirit. For our purposes, to understand how Hegel's concept of God influenced modern theology after him, the key idea is panentheism—that God and the world, God and humanity are not foreigners or aliens to each other; they belong intrinsically and inseparably together in the process of mutual activity called the history of ideas. Thus, God is not "someone out there," "wholly other," the opposite of everything finite and limited, but the consciousness of the world coming to awareness of the unity of finite and infinite. One Hegel scholar says, "It does not seem adequate to interpret this [viz., Hegel's idea of God coming to self-realization through humanity's discovery of God in thought] as meaning no more than that God has 'created' the human spirit with a *capacity* to know the divine; it would seem more accurate to say that Hegel looks upon the human spirit as . . . an *offshoot* of the divine."[96]

What is the point of all this speculative thinking? Just this: only by supposing reality to be this way is knowledge of ultimate reality possible, and philosophy and religion, Hegel believed, are worthless without this pursuit. Hegel was saying, "Instead of looking at reality 'this way' (viz., through the lens of dualisms of subject and object, finite and infinite, noumenal and phenomenal) try looking at it 'this other way' (viz., through the lens of all reality as a dynamic process and activity of one great consciousness) and see if it doesn't afford a better approach to knowing the things both philosophy and religion really want to know." Suddenly, seeing reality "as this" instead of "as that" makes it possible once again to try to know ultimate reality, God, with hope of succeeding. According to Hegel, so long as finite and infinite, world and spirit, humanity and God are regarded as opposites over against each other they can never really know each other. Then religion, for example, has to be reduced to something less than itself such as morality (Kant).

[95]Ibid., 3:149.

[96]Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God*, 134. Lauer later says that, for Hegel, finite spirit is a "moment" of absolute Spirit with "moment" meaning aspect or stage (not temporal moment) (147).

Hegel's philosophy is a great system into which there is no entry point. One has to begin inside it and look outward to see how it illumines reality and religion. It presupposes that the real is the rational and the rational is the real with both "real" and "rational" redefined. In other words, it starts from the presupposition that human reason, working at its best, is one with ultimate reality—God. Thinking about thought itself reveals God. God is the process of thought itself. But here "thought" does not mean "stream of consciousness," mind-wandering daydreaming. Here "thought" means philosophy's and culture's upward path through conflict between ideas and cultures toward unity.

According to one possibly apocryphal story, two philosophers went together to hear Hegel lecture on his view of reality as Absolute Spirit. As they left, one said to the other one, "That was magnificent! What a great mind! His philosophy is amazing in its complexity and rationality." The other philosopher responded, "But, you realize, of course, he thinks reality is actually like that." The first one replied, "Oh, well, then he must be crazy." Hegel's philosophy is truly one of the most subtle and complicated and difficult to grasp of all time. Here I have been able only to touch on some of its points relevant for modern theology. So, what are the consequences and results of Hegel's great vision of reality as Absolute Spirit/God dynamically moving toward self-awareness through human consciousness and culture?

First, Hegel did not take religion as literal description of reality. For him, religion, including Christianity, is but a set of symbols, representations of philosophical truths. Philosophy at its best (his) is religion conceptualized; religion at its best (Christianity for him) is philosophy symbolized. So, for example, for Hegel the Trinity is a symbolic representation of the dynamic process of Absolute Spirit coming to self-realization through its other, the world. There are three "moments" (stages, aspects) of the process that correspond to the symbols of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[97] For Hegel, the incarnation is a symbolic representation of Absolute Spirit entering into the finite, of the ultimate unity of finite and infinite. For Hegel, the atoning death of Christ is a symbolic representation of the "suffering" of the infinite, of Absolute Spirit, as it experiences the agony of finitude. Hegel called this

[97]Hegel, *Lectures*, 3:12–13.

the "speculative Good Friday." For some, certainly not all, later modern theologians this opens up vast possibilities of reconciling religion, even Christianity, with modern thought. Religion is but symbolic representations of philosophical truths. This idea appears again, in altered form, in some twentieth-century existentialist theology in which the resurrection of Jesus, for example, is explained as a symbolic way of expressing the restitution of faith in the hearts of the disciples after Jesus' death.

Second, even for many who did not claim to understand all of Hegel's philosophy, his idea of God immanent within the world process seemed congenial to the nineteenth-century ways of thinking about evolution. And it seemed to overcome some of the traditional, objectionable images of God as so transcendent as to be untouched by human misery. God's immanence in history and in the world and even in humanity became a theme of much liberal theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Process theology, for example, though immediately dependent on another philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), is greatly influenced by Hegel's panentheism in which the world and God belong inseparably together in interdependence. To many liberal Christian thinkers this helps solve the mystery of evil in God's world. God is not the transcendent, all-powerful controller of history; God is the immanent Spirit evolving upward together with humanity coming to self-awareness through suffering just like people.

Third, and finally, Hegel's philosophy of religion offered another way out of the conflicts between science and religion. Religion is not about the same subjects as science. Nor is it, as with Kant, merely about ethics. Religion is about honoring God by helping God come to self-realization by promoting the unity of humanity. The kingdom of God could be thought of as the unity of humanity which would also be the unity of God and the world. That has nothing to do with the physical world of laws of nature; it has everything to do with social reform and cultural creativity. The ideal society, without conflicts, would be the end of history and thus the kingdom of God in which opposites would coincide, synthesis would be achieved and the suffering of God would end in God's full self-realization in humanity. Perhaps to soothe the ruffled feathers of Prussia's king, who was sometimes dismayed by Hegel's philosophy, the philosopher speculated that Prussia was the end of history, the perfect social order, the culmination of the

process of Absolute Spirit. Few agreed with him about that, but the idea of an end of history in the sense of human culture achieving its divine purpose and God coming to self-realization in that, caught on among many nineteenth-century theologians who dreamed of the kingdom of God as a perfect social order on earth. This fueled liberal optimism that only died away as a result of the twentieth century's world wars.

Hume, Kant and Hegel change and reenergize modernity. It would be wrong to think that Hume's skepticism, Kant's limitations of reason or Hegel's speculative philosophy reversed the tide of modernity sweeping through Europe and eventually over America. Hume challenged the exuberant optimism about reason and its potential to usher in a kind of utopia through science and natural religion that dominated elite European circles in the second half of the eighteenth century. But he was a thoroughly modern man in terms of skepticism toward magic, superstition and religion. He was one of the first completely secularized public intellectuals, and he was idolized by a large cadre of young modernists disillusioned with tradition and religion.

Kant challenged Hume's skepticism without in any way reversing his secularism. To be sure, Kant had his own faith, but it was largely a rational, philosophical faith drained of any hint of the pietism in which he was raised. And he was skeptical in his own way. No more than Hume did he want to support magic, superstition or traditional dogmas. Kant was also a thoroughly modern person whose essay "What Is Enlightenment?" came to be regarded as the manifesto par excellence of the Enlightenment ethos of independent, free thought. Also, Kant did more than anyone else to separate science and religion so that they could not conflict.

Hegel challenged Kant's limiting of reason, rejection of rational knowledge of God and reduction of religion to ethics. But no more than Kant did Hegel want a return to premodern religion or philosophy. He, too, was a thoroughly modern person in that he trusted in reason alone to deliver truth about God and the nature of reality. Unlike Hume and Kant, he was not an empiricist; he stood in the tradition of Descartes in terms of rationalism. He also believed in innate ideas and that the existence of God is built into the nature of logic itself. Nothing illustrates his modernity better than his motto that "the real is the rational and the rational is the real." For him, the human

mind, unaided by supernatural, special revelation, is capable of grasping and understanding everything important about God and God's relationship with the world because it is a part of God's own consciousness and being.

All three of these thinkers affirmed the anthropocentrism of the Enlightenment. All believed that knowledge of God, insofar as it is possible at all, is dependent on knowledge of humanity. The human, not God, stands at the center of the proud edifice of knowledge. What could possibly be more modern?

However, something as proud as Enlightenment, modern faith in reason could not go long without itself being challenged. Of course there were loud condemnations of it as apostasy from the orthodox conservatives of Protestant theology. But they were not alone in criticizing Enlightenment rationalism, naturalism and anthropocentrism. Some extremely intellectual thinkers quickly pointed out its flaws. The next section will examine a disparate trinity of Christian thinkers who, without reverting to premodernity, launched their own individual assaults on modernity's triumphalism. Each in his own way attempted to reintroduce revelation and faith to philosophy. They are also crucial for understanding modern theology because much of modern theology consists of reactions against the pride, the optimism, the humanism and secularism of Enlightenment-inspired modernity.

1.e. Realists, Romanticists and Existentialists Respond

Everyone has heard of the fictional "world's only consulting detective" Sherlock Holmes, the creation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who has been immortalized in numerous short stories, novels, movies and television series. He has been played by more actors than any other character. Almost a century after Conan Doyle put down his pen for the last time, the character Holmes still appeals to readers. Numerous spin-offs have been written, striving to match the genius of the detective's creator in spinning a yarn about his exploits in defeating crime in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century England. Hollywood continues to produce movies based on the character. A series of novels is being published by various mystery writers all competing best to continue the saga of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

Why mention Sherlock Holmes in a book about modern theology? There is precious little theology in any of the stories. The answer is, "Elementary!"

(Holmes frequently said that to the often nonplussed Watson.) Holmes represents the ideal modern man, the paradigm of an Enlightenment person. He was unemotional, objective, rational and committed to reaching conclusions only by evidence and logical deduction. He said nothing against religion but displayed no interest in it. He refused to take miracles or the supernatural seriously even when a crime seemed to have been perpetrated by a vampire or ghost. Above all, he had a steadfast and unwavering faith in observation and deduction. After finally discovering the truth about a crime, when he had seemed to be wrong about a piece of evidence, the detective declared to Watson, "I should have had more faith [in my methods]. . . . I ought to know by this time that when a fact appears to be opposed to a long train of deductions, it invariably proves to be capable of bearing some other interpretation."[98]

A person as detached, rational and dedicated to observation as Holmes may never have existed, but it would be surprising if Conan Doyle was not intentionally trying to portray the perfect model of an Enlightenment man of science and reason—the model modern man.[99] (Ironically, Conan Doyle himself was the opposite of Holmes. The author, though a medical doctor and therefore well acquainted with modern science, believed in communication with the dead and "garden fairies.") One can imagine Holmes sitting in his brother's Diogenes Club smoking a pipe and congenially conversing with Locke or Hume or even Kant. One way to understand the abstract concept of modernity is to think of a character like Holmes, who seemed to be the perfect embodiment of modernity's ideals for all people.

Pushing back against Enlightenment rationalism and skepticism. However, not everyone in Europe, Great Britain or America valued this ideal. Without rejecting the Enlightenment entirely or calling for a return to medieval times, many astute thinkers, both Christian and secular, pointed out weaknesses in this portrait of the perfect person of reason. Others responded critically to Hume's skepticism and Kant's and Hegel's idealisms. In brief, modernity, as it has been described here so far, did not

[98] Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet," in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1930), 49.

[99] If all a person knows about the character Holmes comes from the movies about him starring Robert Downey Jr., he or she will know little about the original character to which Downey's bears little resemblance.

meet with unqualified or universal applause even among the educated elites of Europe, Britain and America. Especially the movement called romanticism reacted against the ideal of pure, objective rationalism devoid of emotion. A type of philosophy called Scottish common sense realism responded especially to Hume's skepticism. The Danish writer Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), the father of existentialism, harshly criticized Hegel's rational religion of Absolute Spirit and advocated a return to faith as the basis for authentic Christianity.[100]

Once again it will be helpful to point out what was at stake in all this philosophical conversation and controversy. What was at stake was the very concept of knowledge. What does it mean to know something? The Enlightenment, including the scientific revolution, redefined knowledge. Before Descartes and Locke, at least for the most part, knowing included believing, trusting in revelation and tradition. For people of a particularly rational bent it also meant reasoning within the context of faith. Anselm's motto, "I believe in order to understand," was the norm. Begin with faith in revelation (e.g., the Bible) and tradition (e.g., the church's teachings) and then use God-given reason, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, to interpret life and the world in that light. The ancient philosophy of Aristotle had been baptized by the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, and its principles of metaphysics were widely considered beyond doubt or question. The knowing person was the person of faith—not necessarily blind faith but faith working together with reason within the framework of tradition.

The Enlightenment challenged all that. Science was discovering that Aristotle had been wrong about many things. As a result of the Galileo affair, many educated people, movers and shakers of culture and society and even church, began to doubt tradition. Luther and the other Protestant Reformers had successfully challenged the authority of the Catholic Church and even of the empire. Perhaps the foundations of the great medieval synthesis of church and society were cracked. Modernity began with this crisis of trust in time-honored tradition. Gradually, as a result of the new science

[100]The extent to which Kierkegaard was reacting to Hegel himself is unclear and debated. Some scholars argue he was reacting only to Danish Hegelians. However, Kierkegaard spent a good deal of time in Berlin and was no doubt familiar with Hegel's own writings even if he does not mention Hegel specifically.

and philosophy, knowledge came to be thought of differently. Now it began with doubting and questioning tradition. Now it depended on evidence and logic working outside and independently of the authorities of church and empire. Now it meant, as per Kant, thinking critically for oneself, using objective reason to establish facts and distinguish them from fancy. Gradually knowledge came to be limited to what reason can discover and prove. All else was increasingly being considered opinion if not superstition. The trophy knowledge was being taken away from metaphysics and theology and handed over to science and critical philosophy. Hume questioned whether even they could provide knowledge, and Kant argued that we can have no knowledge of the world outside the mind.

But not everyone was happy with this new arrangement. As this section will show, Thomas Reid (1710–1796) protested Hume's skepticism and appealed to common sense to reestablish knowledge. His philosophy of common sense realism caught on among conservative Protestant Christians who were shocked by Hume's skepticism and Kant's reduction of religion to ethics and morality. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), a British romanticist, appealed to intuitive knowledge especially in the sphere of spirituality and religion. He protested the Enlightenment's inflation of reason to the exclusion of feelings and especially Kant's limitation of religion to doing one's moral duty. Schleiermacher and Horace Bushnell (1802–1876) were influenced by romanticists like Coleridge. Kierkegaard scoffed at Hegel's rational system of reality as abstract and cold and completely foreign to Christianity, which he saw as requiring risk, obedience and sacrifice. Knowledge for the Danish thinker was linked to commitment, especially in religion. For him, the Enlightenment thinkers all favored the "spectator" posture toward knowledge; for him that is the antithesis of spiritual knowing. Kierkegaard's influence on theology would have to wait until the early twentieth century, when he was discovered by the so-called dialectical or neo-orthodox theologians such as Barth and Emil Brunner (1889–1966).[101]

Scottish common sense realism challenges Hume's skepticism. When scholars talk about the Scottish Enlightenment they may be referring to Hume or his contemporary philosophical nemesis Thomas Reid. They were

[101]The label "neo-orthodox" is controversial as applied to Barth, as will be explained in 5.a., Karl Barth Drops a Bombshell on the Theologians' Playground.

both philosophers profoundly interested in the new sciences, enamored with Newton and his laws of nature, and empiricists with regard to knowing. And they were both Scottish. There the similarities end. Whereas Hume is still celebrated as one of the greatest minds in the history of philosophy, Reid has become one of its most neglected figures.[102] During his lifetime and for about a century afterwards, however, Reid's philosophy was widely studied and discussed—especially in America, where his influence has been strongest.[103] Reid's reputation was built on contradicting Hume's skepticism about knowledge of the external world and its workings. Like Hume, Reid had a strong faith in reason, but he did not think skepticism was necessary or good.

Reid was born into a Scottish family of clergymen and scholars. His father was a minister of the Kirk—the Scottish state church (Presbyterian). His mother's maiden name was Gregory; her family was "the most important intellectual dynasty that Scotland had produced."[104] Several of his uncles and cousins were famous Scottish scholars. It was natural, then, for Thomas to study theology, become an ordained minister of the Kirk and teach philosophy and theology first at King's College, Aberdeen, and then at Glasgow University. According to one of his pupils who became his biographer, Reid was not the most flowery speaker, but

> such . . . was the simplicity and perspicuity of his style, such the gravity and authority of his character, and such the general interest of his young hearers in the doctrines which he taught, that . . . he was heard uniformly with the most silent and respectful attention [which was not always the case in university lecture halls then].[105]

Reid was a committed Christian who agreed with the doctrines of the Scottish church but sometimes criticized the fanaticism with which some clergymen promoted it from their pulpits. (The reader may remember this played a role in Hume's departure from the faith.) Nevertheless, "the Kirk's

[102]Colin Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought*, vol. 1: *From the Ancient World to the Age of Enlightenment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 259.
[103]Benjamin W. Redekop, "Reid's Influence in Britain, Germany, France and America," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 327–29.
[104]Alexander Broadie, "Reid in Context," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37.
[105]Quoted in ibid., 35.

belief system and its institutions informed his soul, and therefore informed his philosophy also."[106]

Like Kant, Reid's thinking was stimulated by reading Hume, and he found his fellow Scotsman's skepticism wholly unnecessary and pernicious to both science and religion. Therefore he set out to demonstrate Hume's radical empiricism and skepticism wrong and wrong-headed. This he attempted in a trilogy of philosophical treatises: *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) and *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788). The label "common sense realism" can be misleading, for Reid's epistemology is not merely a restatement of common sense in the usual meaning. Today many people mean by it "what most people believe to be true most of the time" (or something like that). Reid's meaning is somewhat different and much more subtle. The underlying problem Reid was taking on was the meaning of knowledge. What do we mean when we say we know? What kinds of objects and ideas properly fall into the category "knowledge"? Reid believed much of the Enlightenment from Descartes to Hume had restricted that category too much so that, in the end, almost nothing could count as knowledge. That is ironic because the whole Enlightenment project was about determining true knowledge and separating it from mere belief.

Before delving into the basics of Reid's philosophy and its significance for this story of modern theology it will be helpful to define "realism." Reid's philosophy is usually labeled common sense realism, but that can be confusing because "realism" has different meanings in different contexts even in philosophy. Here, in Reid's philosophy, "realism" is opposed to "idealism," which he believed leads inevitably to skepticism. Idealism (see 1.d.) is the popular idea during the Enlightenment that mind and thought are more real than physical objects perceived by the mind. It also is the idea that what the mind knows is not objects themselves but ideas in the mind. Reid referred to idealism tied to empiricism as "the common theory of ideas" and sought to undermine it.[107] He saw the fundamental, underlying problem of modern

[106]Ibid., 32.

[107]John Greco, "Reid's Reply to the Skeptic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 134–35.

foundationalism, beginning with Descartes, as the wholly unnecessary belief that knowledge is really only of one's own mind and its contents. Of course, the reason many Enlightenment thinkers adopted the common theory of ideas was for the sake of certainty. Presumably we can be certain of things in our own minds but never of external reality. Reid sought to demonstrate how this notion of knowledge led straight into Hume's skepticism, and he thought Kant's critical idealism was not much better.

According to Reid,

> Hume's position was destructive not only of Christian faith, but also of science and of common prudence. Underlying Hume's skepticism was the apparently reasonable and enlightened claim that we are "to admit [as knowledge] nothing but what can be proved by reasoning." Reid's immediate response was to retort, that if this be so, "then we must be sceptics [sic] indeed, and believe nothing at all." However, he wryly observed that Hume himself could not keep to this principle either in his daily life or in his philosophy. Nor, for that matter, can any skeptic. Over and over again, Reid pointed out that men could not live by skepticism alone. "If a man pretends to be a skeptic with regard to the information of the sense, and yet prudently keeps out of harm's way as other men do, he must excuse my suspicion."[108]

Again, Reid's underlying motive in contradicting Hume's skepticism was, like Kant's, to rescue science and religion, but he thought Kant's alternative to Hume's skepticism was almost as dangerous and destructive as it. Reid wanted knowledge to include much more than the radical empiricism or rationalism stemming from the Enlightenment would allow. His realism, then, refers to his belief that the human mind can know objects outside the mind *and* that it can know them at least relatively reliably—as they really are.

Reid calls philosophy back to common sense. Reid's first step was to call philosophy back to common sense. "Philosophy has no other root but the principles of Common Sense; it grows out of them and draws its nourishment from them: severed from this root, its honours wither, its sap is dried up, it dies and rots."[109] He thought too many Enlightenment thinkers were divorced from and

[108]Brown, *Christianity in Western Thought*, 1:263.

[109]Quoted in Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.

even disdainful of things like ordinary language and how it functions. He also thought too many were driven by an almost irrational fear of being wrong which drove them to search for absolute certainty, limit knowledge to that and then despair when they discovered there is little about which anyone can be absolutely certain. Kant's search for synthetic truths a priori did not drive Reid; he assumed that synthetic knowledge (e.g., of the laws of nature and how they work) is always a posteriori and therefore at best true to a high degree of probability. And that is all science and natural religion need. Reid, therefore, argued that "the philosopher has no option but to join with the rest of humanity in conducting his thinking within the confines of common sense."[110]

But what did Reid mean by "common sense"? To repeat, he did not mean what many, perhaps most, people mean by it. He did not mean, for example, taking a poll and finding out what most people believe. Common sense in Reid's philosophy is not folk belief. Rather, by common sense the Scottish philosopher meant certain principles every sane human being shares with every other sane human being. The principles are necessary assumptions that lie at the foundation of all thought and practice. According to Reid, we are to trust these unless overwhelming evidence proves them unreliable. Most of the time, however, they are reliable, which is why sometimes scholars refer to Reid's philosophy as "reliabilism" instead of "common sense realism."[111] Reid believed and argued that "philosophical thought, like all thought and practice, rests at bottom not on grounding [i.e., undoubtable ideas] but on trust."[112] This flies in the face of Descartes's "methodological doubt" that launched the philosophical Enlightenment and in the face of Hume's obvious distrust of experience. This is another sense in which Reid's philosophy is realistic—he is willing to settle for something less than absolute certainty because he realizes such is normally not available outside the dictionary and perhaps mathematics.

Reid defined common sense, as he meant it in his philosophy, as "that degree of judgment which is common to men with whom we can converse and transact business."[113] Reid elaborates:

---

[110]Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 77.

[111]Philip de Bary, *Thomas Reid and Scepticism: His Reliabilist Response* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[112]Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense," 78.

[113]Quoted in ibid., 81.

> If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them; these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd.[114]

These are principles even the skeptic cannot escape. He may think he doubts them and even say he doubts them, but his behavior indicates otherwise.[115] Reid believed it is possible to extract these basic principles of common sense from everyday language and practice of sane people. People who deny them or live against them are always considered insane. We must trust that these principles are right and true and that we can base knowledge on them.

What are these basic principles of common sense according to Reid? One is that "there is life and intelligence in our fellow men with whom we converse."[116] If that seems somewhat abstract, think of it this way: Suppose someone asked you to prove other minds exist. You cannot, but everyone acts as if minds other than their own exist. Belief in other minds than one's own is basic. Since it cannot be proven, skeptics such as Hume should doubt it. But they do not. People rightly operate on the assumption that other minds exist. Anyone who seriously doubted it and lived as if other minds do not exist would be put in some kind of treatment facility. Another first principle of common sense is that "we have some degree of power over our actions, and the determinations of our will."[117] In other words, according to Reid, free will is a "natural conviction necessary for moral responsibility."[118] (Reid was not intending to take a side in the age-old Christian theological dispute over predestination.) Reid argued that if Hume were on a jury his skepticism about free will would disappear as he held the defendant guilty.

Reid's first principles of common sense are too many to mention or discuss here. Suffice it to say that he believed in and cogently argued for the philosophical relevance of certain basic assumptions embedded in all normal human behavior; these can and should serve as guidance mecha-

[114]Quoted in ibid., 85.
[115]Ibid., 87.
[116]Ibid., 79.
[117]Ibid.
[118]Cuneo and van Woudenberg, "Introduction," 13.

nisms for science and religion. For example, Reid believed bad Enlightenment epistemology that ignored common sense was a great threat to theism and that theism is important for individual life and the social order. Perhaps one reason Reid has lost favor in much modern philosophy is that he was a Christian philosopher; "he never wavered from his theism or Christian belief, and a temperate, sincere faith pervades his writings and his biography."[119] Much of Reid's philosophy was aimed at shoring up natural theology and the rationality of belief in God and in God's revelation. He believed that "once one gets one's theory of knowledge and evidence right, there is no remaining threat to religious belief or natural religion" and "there is as much reason to believe that there is a supreme being, as that there are minds besides our own."[120]

Reid's philosophy answered Hume's skepticism and Kant's restriction of knowledge to the realm of appearances by arguing that it is philosophically right to trust our sense—up to a point. One of his basic principles of common sense is that "those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be."[121] Thus, causality, though not itself actually perceived, can rightly be deduced from sense experience. That it cannot be known with absolute certainty as Hume meant is irrelevant. Everyone, including Hume, behaves as if it is true. Trying to deny it leads to absurdity. This is important because Reid wanted to breathe new life into the traditional arguments for the existence of God. He believed in the logical validity of the cosmological argument (the argument from finite things to an infinite First Cause) and the teleological argument (from evidence of design in creation to an intelligent Creator). These arguments work only because we can and should trust our experience and because a high degree of probability is sufficient proof beyond a reasonable doubt. The demand for indubitable proof leads nowhere.

There is much more to Reid's philosophy than can be expounded here. He believed in and defended miracles philosophically. He used Newton's laws of nature to argue for "providential naturalism"—that nature itself is the work of

[119]Dale Tuggy, "Reid's Philosophy of Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 289.
[120]Ibid., 290, 295.
[121]Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense," 79.

God. Reid was what many would call a religious rationalist or a rationalist Christian. His epistemology is a version of foundationalism. He believed, with Locke, that the truth of revelation and its interpretation must be determined and guided by reason.[122] For many conservative Christians (and others) Reid's philosophy provided a sophisticated alternative to Enlightenment-driven rationalism that leads to skepticism. Some would draw a more or less straight line from Descartes to Hume and Kant. Reid had the courage, they believe, to use appeal to common sense to rescue both science and religion from the debilitating effects of Enlightenment rationalism's restriction of knowledge to what can be proven beyond any doubt—an impossibly high standard for ordinary human beings. Later we will see that Reid's common sense realism was taken up and used to defend orthodox Protestantism against the acids of modernity by the conservative theologians of the Princeton School of theology in the mid- to late-nineteenth century (e.g., Charles Hodge).

What about science and its perceived threat to traditional Christian doctrine? Reid did not feel that orthodox Christianity was threatened by the scientific revolution; it was threatened only by wrong interpretations of science. For example, he believed with Paley that many scientific discoveries were supportive of belief in God. The more science discovered, he thought, the more evidence of intelligent design was found. But what about Newton's laws of nature? Didn't Newton prove, perhaps in spite of himself, that there is no room for God to act in the natural realm? Reid offered an ingenious theory that, for many traditional Christian theists, solves this problem. For him, Newton's natural laws do not lock God out of nature. Rather, "the physical laws of nature are the rules according to which the Deity commonly acts in his natural government of the world. . . . God is the cause of them."[123] Because God is their author and they are his creations and tools, there is no reason why God cannot suspend them or use them differently when necessary for his providential purposes. In other words, according to Reid, a miracle is not a divine violation of the laws of nature; it is God's unusual activity within or around his own regularities of action.

Coleridge emphasizes experience in religion. Coleridge is one of those odd people of Christian history who is difficult to categorize, but many

[122]Brown, *Christianity in Western Thought*, 1:265.
[123]Quoted in Cuneo and van Woudenberg, "Introduction," 15–16.

place him with the movement in early nineteenth-century Europe called romanticism. Before expounding Coleridge's philosophy and theology it will be helpful to explain the romantic movement of which he was a part. In brief, romanticism was an Enlightenment-based reaction to the over-rationalizing tendencies of the Enlightenment. In other words, the romantics were poets (such as Johann Goethe) and musicians (such as Ludwig Beethoven) and philosophers (such as Johann Hamann) who were firmly planted in modernity but dissatisfied with certain aspects of modernism. Some were religious and even Christian, and some were more pagan in their worldview. But all agreed that the eighteenth century that had contributed so much to European and American civilization failed to take seriously enough the emotional, affective side of human persons and the spiritual, dynamic and spontaneous side of nature. They were reacting against the idea of nature as a machine and the ideal human person as an emotionless, thinking subject. One way to describe the movement is that "the Romantics inverted the Enlightenment hierarchy and put the creative above the rational."[124] That is to say, they would have been revolted by the Sherlock Holmes character insofar as he was treated as the model of a modern man. The romantics did not want to return to a premodern philosophy, religion or way of life; they wanted to balance the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason with an equal emphasis on the affective, the intuitive, the mystical and the artistic.[125] One thing they all agreed about was that knowledge must not be limited to what can be proven rationally.

There was a decidedly spiritual side to the romantic movement; romanticists may not have all been Christians, but they had a "feeling for and longing for the infinite."[126] They believed in a kind of universal sixth sense or faculty not known to the rationalists and empiricists of the eighteenth century. Rationalism and empiricism are fine when conducting scientific experiments in the laboratory, but they fail miserably when trying to understand oneself and one's place in the universe. True meaning cannot be discovered by mechanical reason alone. Furthermore, nature should not be

[124]Steve Wilkens and Alan G. Padgett, *Christianity and Western Thought*, vol. 2: *Faith and Reason in the Nineteenth Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 26.
[125]Ibid., 24.
[126]Ibid.

viewed as a machine composed of inert matter. The whole drift of the Enlightenment and scientific revolution had been in that direction—materialism. The romantics believed "there is something mysterious about nature . . . that simply cannot be explained by recourse to materialism."[127] For religious romanticists, "the whole of creation throbs with the very life of God; provided one develops the capacity to perceive it."[128]

Coleridge was a full participant in the English romantic movement, which was composed mostly of poets like himself. Their poetry has sometimes been described as "metaphysical poetry" because of its themes of nature as alive and its emphasis on beauty as a pointer to something divine within all of nature. "Theirs was an attempt to build from the raw material of human experience and identify points of contact with the divine."[129] That raw material included the cosmic awe one feels when observing and contemplating a rainbow or sunset and the sense of right and wrong in conscience. Coleridge specifically mentions three such "mysteries" (which he also called "ultimate facts" of human experience) that point toward the infinite and divine above or within nature: conscience, responsible will and evil.[130] The English romantics such as Coleridge valued apprehension over comprehension. However, it would be wrong to think of them as irrationalists; they simply wanted an expanded and more dynamic idea of reason.

One Coleridge scholar says he "epitomized" English romanticism.[131] But the same scholar, echoing many others, says that he is "one of the most enigmatic and fascinating figures in the history of Christian thought."[132] A few facts about Coleridge's life and career will show why. Like so many other great Christian thinkers, he was born into a minister's home; his father was a priest of the Church of England, and Samuel's upbringing and education were not unusual for that station in life. However, his father, with whom he was particularly close, died when the boy was only eight, and he was then sent to what was essentially an orphanage. He graduated from Jesus College, Cambridge University, where he came under the influence of many of the

[127]Robin Stockitt, *Imagination and the Playfulness of God* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 12.
[128]Ibid., 19.
[129]Ibid., 8–9.
[130]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971), 156.
[131]Stockitt, *Imagination and the Playfulness of God*, 8.
[132]Ibid., ix.

leading philosophers of his time including Kant, but he was especially attracted to the romantic writers such as poet William Wordsworth. By his own account young Samuel was sickly and bookish. Throughout his life he tended to be absorbed in the life of the mind with a somewhat mystical bent. He grew up to be a poet supported by wealthy patrons and is best known for romantic poems such as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798)—an epic poem still widely read and studied in English courses.

Coleridge struggled. As a young adult he became disillusioned with orthodox Christianity and became Unitarian for ten years. Then he returned to the Church of England and trinitarian orthodoxy. For a time he planned to create and lead a utopian community in America, but that plan fell through and left Coleridge somewhat depressed. Some contemporary scholars believe he suffered what is now called bipolar disorder. He was ill much of the time and became addicted to opium, then used as a pain medicine. He went through long periods of inactivity when he lived with friends; these were followed by periods of intense writing. His greatest work is his classic *Aids to Reflection* (1825)—a collection of aphorisms about philosophy, spirituality and Christian theology. He exercised profound influence on many later theologians including especially Bushnell (see 4.b.).

Once Coleridge returned to orthodox Christianity he passionately defended it in writings such as *Aids to Reflection*, but he did not defend it in the same way as conservative Enlightenment thinkers such as Butler and Paley (see 1.c.). In fact, Coleridge's foil for much of his exposition of true Christianity was Paley the natural theologian. He considered Paley's defense of theism not much different from deism in that both placed their trust in sensory evidence and logic. For Coleridge that sucks the life out of Christianity. He was speaking of Paley's conservative theism as much as deism when he wrote that "the utter rejection of all present and living communion with the universal spirit impoverishes deism itself, and renders it as cheerless as atheism."[133] For him, the truth of Christianity lies not in evidences or apologetics but in the need of it and its ability to satisfy that need. In other words, Coleridge based spiritual truth on spiritual experience which he called "the light within me."[134] By "the light within" he did not

[133]Ibid., 117.
[134]Ibid., 160.

mean some special sense that only Christians have; he meant a universal, intuitive sense of the divine. To those who denied having such a thing he wrote, "If any man assert that he cannot find it, I am bound to disbelieve him. I cannot do otherwise without unsettling the very foundations of my own moral nature."[135] For him, the ultimate proof of the truth of Christianity is that it takes up that sense and fulfills it. The analogy of a lock and its key points to what he meant. Christianity, the gospel, is the key that unlocks and opens up the intuitive sense of the divine in every person; it fits it better than any other system. Against all natural religion and natural theology and rational apologetics he wrote "the light within me, that is, my reason and conscience, does assure me, that the ancient and Apostolic faith . . . is solid and true."[136] (By "my reason" here Coleridge meant something like Kant's practical reason—the inner conviction of the moral law as a signal of God's transcendence and presence.)

Ultimately, for Coleridge, the whole Enlightenment, from Descartes to Hegel (who was mostly yet to come) was a huge mistake insofar as it limited truth and knowledge to what reason as defined by foundationalism can know. For him, this is especially true for Christianity, which is the absolute religion, the fulfillment of the human heart's desires. The Enlightenment treated Christianity as a theory, as speculation. That kills it. Coleridge insists that true Christianity is "not a philosophy of life, but a life and a living process."[137] In other words, knowing its truth comes in trying it on. Trying it on requires childlike humility. One of his aphorisms is, "There is small chance of truth at the goal where there is not child-like humility at the starting-point."[138] For him, as for much of Christian tradition before Descartes, spiritual understanding follows believing: "Belief is the seed, received into the will, of which the understanding or knowledge is the flower, and the thing believed is the fruit."[139]

Coleridge's defense of the truth of Christianity is that, according to him, no one has ever sincerely and earnestly tried it and failed to find true satisfaction and fulfillment in it. To the person who asks, "How is this [Christianity] to be proved?" he answers:

[135]Ibid., 154.
[136]Ibid., 160.
[137]Ibid., 201.
[138]Ibid., 193.
[139]Ibid., 195.

> It has been eighteen hundred years in existence: and has one individual left a record, like the following? "I tried it; and it did not answer. I made the experiment faithfully according to the directions; and the result has been a conviction of my own credulity [gullibility]." . . . I fear that the unbelief . . . has its source elsewhere than in the uncorrupted judgment; that not the strong free mind, but the enslaved will, is the true original infidel in this instance.[140]

And

> The proper and natural effect, and . . . the certain and sensible accompaniment of peace (or reconcilement) with God is our own inward peace, a calm and quiet temper of mind. And where there is a consciousness of earnestly desiring and of having sincerely striven after the former, the latter may be considered as a sense of its presence.[141]

Coleridge's romanticism appears in his willingness to appeal to intuition and experience for knowledge of truth. It also appears in his insistence that this appeal is not irrational or against reason. "Coleridge is adamant that Christianity is rational but that current definitions of rationality are so severely restrictive that they neglect the most important aspects of our life."[142] For him reason must include intuition and imagination—God-given faculties that people ignore or suppress to their own great loss.

How is Coleridge's romanticism a response to modernity? That should by now be quite obvious. Partly because of him and Christian romanticists like him, modernity had to make room for spiritual experience. Not everyone agrees; many philosophers have continued to affirm materialism and foundationalism with its attendant skepticism about spiritual knowledge. However, romanticism forced the door of the Enlightenment open so that at least spiritual experience could not be ignored or brushed aside as sheer fanaticism. Coleridge was no fanatic. One thing is interesting and possibly instructive about Coleridge's philosophy and theology. If it is true, science and religion cannot conflict. One great advantage of a romanticized Christianity would lie therein. Of course, there may be a cost to that. Coleridge argued that spiritual truth and knowledge do not conflict with scientific or speculative reason; they simply "do not run on the same line . . . neither do

[140]Ibid., 202.
[141]Ibid., 117.
[142]Wilkens and Padgett, *Christianity and Western Thought*, 2:49.

they cut or cross" each other. Put another way in *Aids to Reflection*: "the mysteries in question [Christian doctrines such as the Trinity] are not in the direction of the understanding or the (speculative) reason. They do not move on the same line or plane with them, and therefore cannot contradict them."[143] He means that they cannot contradict each other because they are about entirely different matters. Again, we are back to Christianity being not about how the heavens go but how to go to heaven. Or maybe not quite. Coleridge did not cordon off Christianity so that it has nothing to do with other knowledge; instead he saw spiritual truth as lying deeper than the matters of science and philosophy and transcending them. Perhaps a way of expressing Coleridge's view is to say that, in spiritual matters, science and philosophy raise questions that only revelation, apprehended by faith (including intuition and imagination), can answer satisfactorily. According to one scholar of nineteenth-century theology commenting on Coleridge's achievement: "What most distinguished his own account of the venture of faith . . . was his effort to explicate the rationality of it, to show that this venture is neither against nor beyond nor apart from reason, but is reason's own highest moment."[144]

Earlier, reference was made to a possible cost of Coleridge's division between scientific, speculative reason and spiritual reason including intuition. The cost might be what one twentieth-century theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg (b. 1928), called the "ghettoizing of theology," a term he used frequently throughout his writings. By that is meant any special pleading for religious truth claims where they are not subjected to the same rigorous canons of reasonableness as other disciplines. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries repeated attempts have been made to expel theology from European universities because of this perceived ghettoizing of it. Perhaps Coleridge would argue that so long as universities include departments of the arts they should also include departments of theology. Theology and art are more alike than theology and, say, physics. But that is a far cry from the medieval ideal of theology as the queen of the sciences.

Kierkegaard challenges religious rationalism. He has been called "the melancholy Dane" and the founder of existentialism, but Kierkegaard was a

[143]Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 203.
[144]Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 1:126.

Danish Christian prophet whose message was heard but not heeded during his lifetime. Only much later, in the twentieth century, would Kierkegaard's challenge to modernity and especially Christendom come into its own as it was taken up into the theologies of (among others) Barth, Brunner and Reinhold Niebuhr—three of the main figures of so-called neo-orthodoxy or dialectical theology. Barth, perhaps the most influential theologian of the twentieth century, famously confessed, "If I have any system, it consists in this, that always as far as possible I keep in mind what Kierkegaard spoke of as the infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity . . . God is in heaven, you are on earth."[145] Kierkegaard was hardly heard, let alone heeded, outside his native Denmark until then.

Kierkegaard called himself a "powerless poet,"[146] but he also clearly saw himself as a prophet and martyr. He was not a martyr in the sense of being physically killed for his beliefs, but he subjected himself to a kind of martyrdom in life by abandoning the civil norms of Danish society and launching increasingly bitter attacks on it and its state church. The main target of his biting sarcasm and incisive criticism was Hegel and all his followers. In the process, however, he launched a literary crusade against all of modernity insofar as it related to religion and especially Christianity. His martyrdom was ridicule heaped on him by polite society.

Kierkegaard's strange life might best be grasped by a few brief stories beginning with his death and ending with his childhood. He died a recluse in Copenhagen, where he lived most of his life, at the relatively young age of forty-two. His final years had been consumed by written attacks on the Lutheran state church and its leaders. He had alienated most of his family and friends over seemingly minor disagreements. However, such was his reputation as a literary giant and critic of the powerful elites of church and society that more than a thousand people attended his funeral, which was, to say the least, controversial. Writing from the point of view of the Danish bishop, a Hegelian whom Kierkegaard loved to skewer, his biographer reports that

[145]Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskins, 6th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 10.

[146]Louis Dupré, *Kierkegaard as Theologian: The Dialectic of Christian Existence* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 210.

> inside the coffin—reportedly quite a small one—that was being driven out to the family burial plot [from the church in downtown Copenhagen] that November day lay the corpse of a person who over the years had become so impossible that now, after his death, it was really not possible to put him anywhere. For where in the world could one get rid of a dead man who had carried on a one-man theological revolution during the final years of his life, calling the pastors cannibals, monkeys, nincompoops, and other crazy epithets? What sense did it make to give such a person a Christian burial in consecrated ground? That this same person also left behind a body of writing whose breadth, originality, and significance was unparalleled in his times did not, of course, make the situation any less painful.[147]

Perhaps it would help make understandable the bishop's ambivalence about allowing Kierkegaard to be buried in the consecrated cemetery if one reads one of the melancholy Dane's last descriptions of the bishop and his church:

> In the magnificent cathedral the Honorable and Right Reverend Geheime-General-Ober-Hof-Prädikant, the elect favorite of the fashionable world, appears before the elect company and preaches *with emotion* upon the text he himself has elected: "God hath elected the base things of the world and the things that are despised"—and nobody laughs.[148]

Needless to say, the bishop did not attend Kierkegaard's funeral. At the graveside service, with still the thousand mourners attending, the deceased's brother tried to give a solemn eulogy but was pushed aside by his nephew, who ranted about Danish society's mistreatment of his uncle. This was considered the height of uncivil behavior at the time, and the nephew was fined for it. Kierkegaard's epitaph was not exactly what he had prescribed when he knew he was dying: "Here Lies That Individual."

Kierkegaard was indeed an individual; he refused to be put into any category and that was true of his personal as well as his literary life.[149] His preferred identity was as "a witness to the truth." He believed that he saw

[147]Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), xvii-xviii.

[148]Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack upon "Christendom,"* trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 181. This is not, of course, the actual title of any church leader in Denmark; Kierkegaard was engaging in irony. An idiomatic translation might be "the Honorable Right Reverend High and Mighty Preacher."

[149]The biographical points here are taken from Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*.

what others did not see, and he felt called to use his writing skills to point it out to them—sometimes under a pseudonym, sometimes under his own name. He was a prolific writer and spent most of his time as an adult producing books and essays. Many of them were critiques of modern, middle-class, European culture; others were careful examinations of the structures of human existence. Many dealt with theological themes. Kierkegaard is usually classified as a philosopher, but he was just as much a theologian. The one overriding concern of all his works was "the individual before God." He believed that "normal society," including the state church, had lost the truth of Christianity and of authentic existence which, he never tired of saying, meant standing out from the crowd and responsibly deciding what to become regardless of the customs and habits of that society.

Earlier, reference was made to Kierkegaard's martyr complex. Sometimes he seemed to provoke controversy, even inviting attacks on himself, his reputation and even his sanity. *The Corsair* was a leading Danish literary journal for which Kierkegaard sometimes wrote articles. He and its editors had a falling out in late 1845 and early 1846; the editors dared to criticize him, and he struck back angrily. The volley of editorials and essays became personal. At one point Kierkegaard wrote to the journal, "may I request that I be abused. It is just too terrible to experience the insult of being immortalized by *The Corsair*."[150] The editors took him up on his request and launched a vicious series of attacks on Kierkegaard including insulting caricatures of him on his daily strolls around Copenhagen. Soon bands of little boys began following him around town calling him names and imitating his somewhat awkward gait. People gawked at him and gossiped about him in the streets. Eventually Kierkegaard retired to his apartment and rarely went out.

Kierkegaard never married. As a young man he proposed to the love of his life, a young woman named Regine Olsen. There is no question that he loved her; his journals reveal it plainly. However, he broke off the engagement without explanation, which, in mid-nineteenth-century polite society, was considered a terrible breach of civility. Scholars have speculated a great deal about the reasons for it. Some have suggested that Kier-

[150]Quoted in ibid., 399.

kegaard believed there was a curse on his family because, as a youth, his father had cursed God. (His father grew up to become a very devout pietist Christian.) More likely the philosopher came to the conclusion that marriage to him would ruin Regine because he knew well his personality problems. Also, he probably thought she would not care to engage with him in conversations about philosophy and theology, the only two subjects that really interested him. His journals reveal that he loved her from a distance for the rest of his life. Later, she married and lived a long and happy life.

Like many creative geniuses, Kierkegaard had a troubled family life. His parents were not poor, but there was something wrong at home. "Sickness and death burdened the spirits of the household in which there were few diversions in any event. Toys were seen as superfluous, and Søren Aabye [his middle name] had to make do with his mother's yarn spindle as his only toy."[151] Some of his siblings died, including one brother who died before he was born and after whom he was named. His father was a dour merchant who suffered a guilt complex that drove him to the edge of religious fanaticism. Søren's journals never fully reveal the great disappointment that caused a falling out with his father during his adult years, but the father-son relationship was complicated, to say the least. The adult Søren remembered how, as a child, his father rarely let him out of the house but marched up and down and across the large living room with him pretending they were going for hikes in the country. Most scholars agree that Kierkegaard's childhood had much to do with his melancholy outlook and his religious and philosophical pessimism.

Kierkegaard's literary output was voluminous, so only a few of his major books will be mentioned here and only those that bear on philosophy and Christianity: *Either/Or* (1843), *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), *Sickness Unto Death* (1849), *Stages on Life's Way* (1845) and *Training in Christianity* (1850). Some of his last essays have been collected and published as *Attack upon "Christendom."* The philosopher wrote on so many subjects it is impossible to expound all of them even briefly, so here the concentration will be on his ideas that bear on modernity and Christianity.

[151]Ibid., 9.

The prevailing winds of philosophy in Kierkegaard's time, especially on the European continent, were in favor of Hegel's rationalist philosophy and approach to Christianity. Kierkegaard set his face against it because he considered it a complete betrayal of true Christianity. But his criticism strikes at much more than just Hegel; it strikes at the heart of all rational approaches to Christianity. Hegel, but not only he, emphasized a continuity between God and humanity, between faith and reason. And he emphasized an objective, rational approach to knowing ultimate reality including God. Kierkegaard's first contradiction to Hegel and the whole Enlightenment is to claim that "truth is subjectivity." This is the main point iterated and reiterated throughout *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, perhaps Kierkegaard's most systematic statement of his philosophy. That "truth is subjectivity" has been widely misunderstood. By it he did not mean relativism—that all truth is merely true in relation to the individual. When Kierkegaard declared that truth is subjectivity, he did not mean that truth is merely subjective. Rather, as anyone who reads the *Postscript* will see, he meant the most important truth of life, truth about one's own self and God, about ultimate reality, is always only known subjectively—by personal appropriation in decision, risk and commitment. It cannot be known rationally in the way one knows about a planet or a law of physics. There, in the realms of the physical sciences, objective rationality reigns, but in the most important matters of life subjective faith is necessary for knowledge.

Kierkegaard's point is best expressed whenever he talks about how one becomes a Christian. Against both orthodoxy and modernism he eschewed a rational approach to becoming a Christian. Instead,

> Subjectively, what it is to become a Christian is defined thus: The decision lies in the subject. The appropriation is the paradoxical inwardness which is specifically different from all other inwardness. The thing of being a Christian is not determined by the *what* of Christianity but by the *how* of the Christian. This *how* can only correspond with one thing, the absolute paradox. . . . Faith is the objective uncertainty along with the repulsion of the absurd held fast in the passion of inwardness.[152]

[152]Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the "Philosophical Fragments,"* in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946), 255.

In this one statement Kierkegaard flies in the face of the entire trend of the Enlightenment as it bears on religion. Spiritual truth, truth about ultimate reality, truth about God and oneself, can be known only as paradox, through inward appropriation by means of decision, in the heat of passion. There is no impersonal, objective, rational path to knowledge of God and the things of God including the purpose and meaning of one's own life.

Another famous (or infamous) quote of Kierkegaard often misunderstood is that becoming a Christian requires a "leap of faith." By that he meant (contrary to what many have thought) that

> without risk there is no faith. . . . If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so that in the objective uncertainty I am out "upon the seventy thousand fathoms of water," and yet believe.[153]

The leap of faith, then, is not an irrational, blind jump into something dark and unknowable. It is the risk one takes with one's life when one decides passionately to entrust oneself entirely and without reserve to God whom no one can possess as an object. Kierkegaard was by no means changing the *what* of Christian belief; he held basically orthodox Christian doctrines to be true. The issue for him is the *how* of belief and the *in what* one believes. Orthodoxy had made doctrines the objective of faith; a person is a Christian by believing certain doctrines. Enlightenment natural religion and Kant and Hegel had made the path to right belief, whatever exactly that was, rational objectivity: in other words, no risk or passionate inwardness but only cool detached rationality. Kierkegaard's main point is that in matters of the physical sciences knowledge may be indifferent to the object being studied, but in matters of spiritual life one can never be indifferent and grasp truth. Spiritual knowledge requires commitment and commitment requires risk and decision. The true God cannot be known at the end of a syllogism or by believing doctrines, however true they may be.

Why cannot the true God be known at the end of a syllogism? Kierkegaard posits two reasons. First, because people are always "actively in error," and, second, because God is "wholly other" than creatures and thus

[153]Ibid., 215.

can be known only as paradox. Much of Kierkegaard's literary output is consumed with scrutiny of human sinfulness as self-deception. He was obsessed with original sin but not with it as a doctrine about a prehistorical fall in a mythical garden. For him, original sin is the human condition of bondage to illusion, anxiety and despair. Sin, he declared, is a condition brought on ourselves; it is not inherited. But we all bring it on ourselves. There can be no explanation for it; it just is. "Man," he averred, "forges the chains of his bondage with the strength of his freedom."[154] In an incisive analysis of human existence Kierkegaard argued that original sin, fallenness, is the misuse of freedom to try to go beyond finitude. In other words, it is the attempt to become God for ourselves. Clearly he saw this at work in Hegel's philosophical system that confuses God with humanity. Fallen people cannot work their way out of the chains of bondage they have forged for themselves; only grace can do that, and only the leap of faith, the passionate decision to trust in God alone to overcome anxiety and despair, reaches it. This can happen only to "one individual at a time."[155] It is an individual, personal decision where the sinner is confronted by God and decides to trust him. It always involves a crisis and humiliation; it is never the reluctant conclusion of an argument.

The other reason God cannot be known at the end of a syllogism is because God is both wholly other than humans (except in the incarnation) and always subject, never object.[156] Kierkegaard was repulsed by Hegel's concept of God as Absolute Spirit, the "true infinite" that includes the finite. For him this turned God into an idol. As Pascal said before Kierkegaard, "The God of the philosophers is not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!" Kierkegaard agreed wholeheartedly, and that because philosophical theology, such as Hegel's or deism, makes God over in humanity's image rather than allowing God to be God over against sinful humanity. God is both more transcendent and personal than philosophical theology can ever know. Faith in God is a relationship, not mere knowledge, and it is an embrace of paradox, not the rational discovery of a system or synthesis of opposites.

[154]Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946), 160–61.
[155]Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 207.
[156]Ibid., 211.

For Kierkegaard, the ultimate truth of Christianity cuts across all rational knowledge; it is a paradox that cannot be resolved. Remember that Hegel believed reason can resolve all antitheses in the greater whole of a grand synthesis (ultimately his own system). This he called "the dialectic" (thesis-antithesis-synthesis). Against this Kierkegaard opposed his own dialectic in which opposites cannot be united in synthesis. "When the eternal truth is related to an existing individual, it becomes a paradox."[157] His favorite example is the incarnation. The truth and reality that faith grasps in its leap of faith is absurd to reason. It is that "the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born."[158] The paradox of the incarnation, however, is not just a fact to be learned and held in the mind. It is not just a doctrine to be believed. It is the ultimate fact that determines the believer's existence; it is the whole foundation of the believer's relationship with God.

Kierkegaard's life project was to understand Christianity—what it meant to be a Christian in Christendom.[159] He came to the conclusion that much that passes under the label "Christian" is not authentic. "When Christianity is made so attractive that pretty nearly everyone accepts it as a matter of course, then one can be sure it is not true Christianity that is being presented—not the Christianity of Him who made the taking up of one's cross the condition of discipleship."[160] He believed that the thrust of modernity had become to make Christianity tame and harmless, to bring it under people's possession and control. For him,

> Modern man has lost this notion [of true faith]. He sees everything historically and en masse. Christianity for him is an age-old philosophy of life which over the centuries has proved itself sufficiently that one need not commit himself personally to it. Thus Christianity loses its transcendent value; it does not shock any longer. . . . Everyone must rediscover himself as an individual alone before God. Christianity cannot be handed down in a tradition; every man who comes into this world must be shocked anew, and, in this shock, advance to faith or fall into despair.[161]

---

[157]Ibid., 219.
[158]Ibid., 220.
[159]Robert Bretall, "Introduction," in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946), xx.
[160]Ibid., xxiii.
[161]Dupré, *Kierkegaard as Theologian*, 36–37.

Clearly, from all that has been said (and it is so little compared with what Kierkegaard wrote on the subject), Kierkegaard's philosophy of life and view of Christianity conflicted with modernity's. And yet, he was not a premodern man. He did not advocate believing on authority, even the authority of the Bible (to say nothing of the authority of any church). Nor was he a mystic; he had no use for a universal "light within" or union with God through contemplation. His modernity showed in how he put the human individual, the human subject, at the center of his philosophy. For him, in "true Christianity [the individual] is first related to God and only secondarily to the community."[162] In the true church, the church militant, there are only individuals.[163] The true Christian is the "knight of faith," who, like Abraham, risks all to obey God's call even when doing so goes against everything tradition and the community believes and says. This kind if individualism is rarely found outside of modernity.

What was Kierkegaard's solution to the war between science and religion that developed during early modernity and goes on still in the twenty-first century? If Kierkegaard is right, the war is unnecessary. Science deals objectively with the objective world. It is about rational investigation of nature and its laws. True religion, Christianity, is about a relationship that is wholly subjective, inward, paradoxical and unknowable to science or philosophy *as* philosophy. The only problem for Kierkegaard (or any Kierkegaardian) is when science and philosophy overstep their boundaries and attempt to dabble in that relationship (e.g., saying it is an illusion because it cannot be proven). Kierkegaard picks up true religion, Christianity, and holds it above the fray of philosophy and science. They cannot touch it. And as for certainty, Kierkegaard has no use for it. True Christianity is about "objective uncertainty" which is faith, a miracle that happens only by decision, risk and passionate commitment. "The truth is precisely a venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite."[164]

Three Christian thinkers responded to modernity from within it. What has appeared in this section is that not all modern Christian thinkers bowed to modernity or accommodated to its acids. Reid and Scottish common

[162]Ibid., 198.
[163]Ibid., 197.
[164]Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 214.

sense realism debated the Enlightenment's tendency to ignore or scoff at common sense experience. For Reid, knowledge includes much more than what can be proved by reason or sensory evidence, but Christianity is nevertheless closely related to, if not dependent on, rational arguments. It is still theoretically possible for objective reasoning, science in the broadest sense, to falsify Christianity; they do not exist in separate, watertight compartments. Nevertheless, once common sense, as Reid defined it, is allowed back into philosophy Christianity can be established as objectively true to a very high degree of probability.

Coleridge and romanticism reacted to modernity by rejecting rationalism in spiritual matters; reason must be expanded and made more flexible to account for all of human experience including the artistic and the spiritual. Theology is more like an art than a science in the modern sense. It begins with the inner light and uses broadened and deepened reasoning to understand what is already believed by faith. Science and theology cannot conflict any more than science and art can conflict.

Kierkegaard and existentialism responded to modernity by severing all ties between objective reason and faith so that, to the former, what the latter knows is absurd. What faith knows, however, is not at all like what science knows. The sciences study things; faith enters into a new world through a new relationship. When rational philosophy attempts to study God it only always creates an idol. True Christianity is from above and unknowable by things and methods from below. So, science and true religion, Christianity, cannot conflict; they exist in separate, watertight compartments.

Throughout modern theology, beginning with Schleiermacher, the subject of the next chapter, the crisis modernity brings to traditional Christianity and these broad philosophical responses, including deism, Kant and Hegel, will influence the ways in which Christian theologians respond to, react against or attempt to come to terms with and accommodate to modernity.