

Theology and Philosophy: Inhabiting the Borderlands

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The theology included in holy teaching is different in kind from that theology that is part of philosophy.

—Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1., a. 1

For as soon as we allow two different callings to combine and run together, we can form no clear notion of the characteristic that distinguishes each by itself.

—Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* I.1.A

However legitimate or possible this other task may be, the task of dogmatics is set aside when it is pursued.

—Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1.1 §2

WITH THESE opening aphorisms—the apparent agreement of which masks still more fundamental disagreements—I may be suspected of stacking the deck, having surrounded an eminent philosopher with two eminent theologians, one on each side; but one of the latter is also an eminent philosopher, and the latter in any case do not see eye to eye on the relation between theology and philosophy. By considering the view of each, I hope to clarify my own view just a little and perhaps yours as well, whatever disagreements we shall discover between ourselves. I hope at all events that you will not have occasion to think (as Kant might) that I have leapt, “like Romulus’s brother, over the wall of

An earlier version of this essay was presented to the inaugural meeting of The Fortnightly Philosophy and Theology Seminar at McGill on 22 September 2011. The author is grateful for the responses of its auditors and readers.

ecclesiastical faith” by meddling in reason; or indeed that I have only “meddled” with reason.¹

If we mean to speak of the relation between theology and philosophy, however, we should begin with some highly provisional attempt at definition—highly provisional because nothing stacks the decks like definition! Philosophy, of course, is notoriously difficult to define, and its literal meaning does not suffice to distinguish it from theology. As a working definition I will offer this, cribbed in part from our Philosophy Department’s website: Philosophy is the pursuit of clarity about ourselves, our world, and our place in it, for the sake of the good life;² in its academic dimension it involves *inter alia* the study of logic, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics.

Of theology I will say: It is discourse about deity, and the creature in relation to deity, that is disciplined by metaphysics—this is so-called natural or philosophical theology, “in which divine things are considered not as the subject of the science but as principles of the subject,” as Thomas has it—and/or by scripture, liturgy and dogma—this is revealed theology, in which divine things are themselves the subject.³ In its academic dimen-

¹ Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 252.

² What is missing on that site (www.mcgill.ca/philosophy/undergraduate) is direct reference to the good life, without which philosophy cannot be taken literally as a love of wisdom. Kant, as Gilles Deleuze notes in *Kant’s Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 1, “defines philosophy as ‘the science of the relation of all knowledge to the essential ends of human reason,’ or as ‘the love which the reasonable being has for the supreme ends of human reason’ (CPR and *Opus postumum*, A839/B867)”; or, more fully, as “a science of the human being, of his representations, thoughts and actions,” that “should present all the components of the human being both as he is and as he should be—that is, in terms both of his natural functions and of his relations to morality and freedom” (Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties*, in Wood and di Giovanni, *Religion and Rational Theology*, 288).

³ Thomas distinguishes between knowledge of divine things “as their effects reveal them” and “as they reveal themselves.” Hence there are “two kinds of divine science, one, in which divine things are not considered as the subject of the science, but as principles of the subject, which philosophers pursue and which is known as metaphysics, and another, which considers divine things themselves as the subject of the science, and this is the theology which is handed down in Sacred Scripture” (*Super Boetium De Trinitate* 3, q. 5, a. 4, co. 4). Philosophical theology has as its main subject matter topics such as being, substance, potency, and act, but in treating these things appeals to the divine become necessary. (Leo Elders seems to go too far, then, by defining philosophical theology as “the systematic inquiry about God’s existence and being”; see *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* [Leiden:

sion revealed theology demands, in addition to philosophical and cultural studies, careful study of what is contained in the sources of revelation.

Both natural and revealed theology aim at establishing sound speech about God (what Plato calls οἱ τύποι περὶ θεολογίας),⁴ but the one works with what can be known of God by way of divine effects in creation, and the other devotes itself to the whole knowledge and counsel of God, as disclosed especially in God's redemptive self-manifestation.⁵ Which is to say, revealed theology also pursues clarity about ourselves, our world, and our place in it, and does so precisely for the sake of the good life; but it knows quite concretely, from its own sources, what natural theology, on some accounts, also has an inkling of, namely, that "humanity is directed towards God as to an end that surpasses the grasp of its reason," and that the good life lies in the direction of God, who is goodness itself.⁶ It knows this with a definiteness and a detail that natural theology lacks, and it speaks of God with a directness proper to itself.

I say "on some accounts," because of course this basically Thomist view is not everyone's view. Kant and Barth, for example, do not share it. Kant denies revealed theology both the independence and the superiority that Thomas ascribes to it, while at the same time severely restricting the natural theology that Thomas inherited from Greek and Christian sources. Barth not only restricts natural theology but also denies its validity. He emphasizes the grandeur of revealed theology but thinks that grandeur greatly imperiled by natural theology. "Of all disciplines," he says,

theology is the fairest, the one that moves the head and heart most fully, the one that comes closest to human reality, the one that gives the

Brill, 1990], 1.) In his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, Kant defines theology generically as "the system of our cognition of the highest being" (*Religion and Rational Theology*, 342), but also distinguishes between rational and revealed theology, while subdividing the former into *theologia transcendentalum, naturalem*, and *morem* (346).

⁴ *Republic* 379a.

⁵ Obviously it is only as revealed theology—theology that is happy to take direction from Scripture and tradition, to incorporate their claims into its arguments, and indeed to make their claims the focus of its arguments—that theology is a discipline distinct from philosophy rather than a mere subdivision of it. As Aidan Nichols observes, its special task is "the disciplined exploration of what is contained in revelation," an exploration that makes the highest demands on reason; for "the wonder, curiosity, and ever-deepening pursuit of truth implicit in the act of faith generate a variety of questions" that must be systematically addressed ("What Theology Is," www.christendom-awake.org/pages/anichols/theology.htm).

⁶ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 1 (trans. F. C. Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005], 32).

clearest perspective on the truth which every discipline seeks. It is a landscape like of those of Umbria and Tuscany with views which are distant and yet clear, a work of art which is as well-planned and as bizarre as the cathedrals of Cologne or Milan. . . . But of all disciplines theology is also the most difficult and the most dangerous, the one in which a man is most likely to end in despair, or—and this almost worse—in arrogance. Theology can float off into thin air or turn to stone, and worst of all it can become a caricature of itself.⁷

It is most likely to do so, according to Barth, where it follows the path of those who “think first of cause and effect, of the infinite and the finite, of eternity and time, of idea and phenomenon,” rather than of the self-determination of God for man in the person of Jesus Christ.⁸ Natural theology, if by that we mean right reason and true speech about God based on something other than God’s self-revelation in Christ, is beyond the capacity of fallen man and a repudiation of divine grace.

Thomas, for his part, was resident on both sides of the border between philosophy and theology, inhabiting the borderlands as one who sought consistency and coherence between their respective attempts to speak of God. If this distinguishes him from Barth and Kant, how much more from those who, at some distant extreme, shrink altogether either from philosophy, as Barth did not, or from theology, as Kant did not (or not quite)? The *pax Thomistica*, as we might call it, both respects the border and regards it as a friendly one. But let us look at Kant, then at Barth—for otherwise we cannot understand Barth—before returning to Thomas.

1. Kant’s Philosophical Imperialism

We ought really to look first at the Franciscans; that is, at Ockham and the nominalist philosophers who set out on the trail that eventually led round to Kant.⁹ But for brevity’s sake we go directly to Kant, the mature

⁷ Quoted in Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth*, trans. J. Bowden (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 244, from Barth’s 1934 Calvin lectures in Paris (Eng. trans. *God in Action*, 1936, 39f.).

⁸ *Church Dogmatics* 2.2, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 148. Barth is thinking first, but not exclusively, of the tendencies of Reformed Scholasticism, over against which he is offering a novel doctrine of election.

⁹ Like Ockham (see Gordon Leff, *William of Ockham* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975], 359), Kant also knows that God is inscrutable and that theology is no science. But unlike Ockham, it is anathema to Kant to take on authority truths either about God himself or about God’s relation to the world; all that is left to Kant is the philosophical constraint of theology that was already operative in Ockham, though for Kant theology arises only as an inference from

Kant at that—the Kant who waited out King Frederick William II before issuing *The Conflict of the Faculties*, in which he tried to put these disciplines in their proper places.

Kant, as you know, drew certain distinctions between the higher faculties (medicine, law, and theology in ascending order) and the lower (philosophy). The former, in which people train for professions, are statute- or canon-based, while the latter is truth-based. The former are regulated by the government with a view to generating effective public servants; the latter is free and self-regulating, insofar as it pursues truth for its own sake. The higher faculties must be scrutinized by the lower, then, as regards truth; but the lower is not scrutinized by the higher. With the help of the lower, the higher faculties can learn to interpret and deploy their respective canons to the maximum benefit of society by approximating more closely a rational view of their own subject matter. The professionals they train will in turn influence for the better the government that regulates them. Some day the government may even come to recognize that the lower faculty, by virtue of this role, is the higher, that its free and dispassionate counsel is most to be prized.¹⁰

On this scenario the biblical theologian (the one, that is, who deals with revealed theology or *theologia empirica*) must be contrasted sharply with the rational theologian (whose efforts are devoted to natural theology or *theologia rationalis*).¹¹ Likewise, “ecclesiastical faith,” which expounds Scripture dogmatically, must be contrasted with the “pure religious faith” that is the product of natural reason. The one, as we know already from *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, is the sum of “certain teachings regarded as divine revelations”; the other, “the sum of all our duties regarded as divine commands.”¹² The one may vary from community to community or from culture to culture; the other, precisely as “a purely rational affair,” is universal. Which is to say: there may be many churches or systems of worship, each more or less adequate in its way as a medium of the moral truth that underlies them all. But it is the typical mistake of the theology faculty, and

practical reason. (Cf. Michael Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008], 39ff. and 258–63, on Kant’s unsuccessful attempt to provide an answer to the nature/freedom problem posed by Ockham’s nominalism.)

¹⁰ Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, 261.

¹¹ “A biblical theologian is, properly speaking, one versed in the *Scriptures* with regard to *ecclesiastical faith*, which is based on statutes—that is, on laws proceeding from another person’s act of choice. A rational theologian, on the other hand, is one versed in *reason* with regard to religious faith, which is based on inner laws that can be developed from every human being’s own decrees” (ibid., 262; cf. 346).

¹² Ibid., 261.

of the biblical theologian, to suppose that the historical particularities to which it professes allegiance (or at least devotes scholarly attention) are somehow essential to pure religious faith. And it is philosophy's task to expose this error, as Kant himself sets out to do.¹³

Kant, in other words, reduces the study of revealed theology to a professional discipline in the service of public morality. He does not deny that it is scholarly; indeed, he allows that as an empirical study it is scholarly in a way that natural or rational theology (quite deliberately) is not.¹⁴ He does not deny either its utility or the loftiness of its aims. After all, it deals not merely with the body or the body politic (these belong to the faculties of medicine and law respectively) but with the citizen himself and his character, and may come even to a consideration of eternal life. But the biblical theologian must be made to understand that "the moral improvement of the human being is the sole condition of eternal life." Moreover, he must be made to understand that Scripture is at best an indirect guide to moral improvement and eternal life; indeed, that "the only way we can find eternal life in any scripture whatsoever is by putting it there."¹⁵ He must learn to discover the abiding rational kernel of morality (the true substance of religion) beneath the transitory historical husk (the accidents of tradition). He must recognize that faith invested in the historical particulars themselves, or in the dogmas that arise from those particulars, is irrational. Faith is a posture that reason may produce and adopt for itself, in recognition of the limits of human conformity to reason and of reason's own limits; but this remains faith in reason. It invests nothing in supposed historical manifestations of the supernatural.¹⁶

Now for Kant the opposition between the higher and lower faculties is dialectical, inasmuch as they share a "final end" in the public good.¹⁷ That opposition must therefore be adjudicated. But it is the lower faculty itself that will do the adjudicating, producing *concordia* from *discordia*, since it is the lower that is characterized by freedom and truth.

¹³ Biblical particularities—the historical and ritual elements of Judaism and Christianity—are the husks that must be stripped from the kernel of authentic religion: *Nunc istae reliquias nos exercent* (ibid., 263, quoting Cicero).

¹⁴ The faculty of philosophy has an empirical branch but here we are dealing with pure philosophy; more specifically, with the metaphysics of morals (ibid., 256).

¹⁵ Ibid., 263.

¹⁶ "But it is superstition to hold that historical belief is a duty and essential to salvation" (ibid., 285).

¹⁷ This final end, as regards theology, is the cultivation of "inner religion" (ibid., 264, though elsewhere he speaks, curiously, of "final aims"), which produces better deeds and better citizens (see n. at 281).

Where theology is concerned, a major conflict arises with philosophy over the public interpretation of Scripture; this above all must be adjudicated. Kant lays down firm ground-rules, “philosophical principles of scriptural exegesis for settling the conflict”: First, texts that “transcend all rational concepts . . . may be interpreted in the interests of practical reason,” while texts that contradict practical reason *must* be so interpreted. There is to be no appeal, then, to dogmas such as the resurrection, the incarnation, and the Trinity (which, “taken literally, has no practical relevance at all”); nor to the putative supernatural events on which dogma is based.¹⁸ Second, there is to be no denigration of doubt. “The only thing that matters in religion is *deeds*.”¹⁹ Third, there is to be no appeal to grace, if grace means the influence of an external cause in the performance of good deeds. Texts that seem to do so must be Pelagianized by the interpreter.²⁰ Fourth, if a “supernatural supplement” is sometimes required to quell the accusing conscience, the *possibility* of such may be allowed in the rational interpretation of Scripture, so long as no attempt is made to specify its character or to make definite our knowledge of it—we may allow for *fides qua*, as it were, but not for *fides quae*.²¹

The price of peace between biblical and rational theology, then, or between the faculties of theology and philosophy, is the capitulation of the former to this philosophical policing of its sacred texts; and for such attention, Kant insists, theology should feel grateful. Alternatively, the following compromise is proposed: “*If biblical theologians will stop using reason for their purposes, philosophical theologians will stop using the Bible to confirm their [own] propositions.*”²² A sharper rebuke is hard to imagine, and it leaves us certain that Kant’s exercise in accommodation is based on practical necessity rather than on interdisciplinary respect. Biblical theology, revealed theology, has

¹⁸ Ibid., 264f.

¹⁹ Ibid., 267.

²⁰ “Grace is none other than the nature of the human being insofar as he is determined to actions by a principle which is intrinsic to his own being, but supersensible—the thought of his duty” (ibid., 268; cf. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, First Section). Likewise, “Christianity is the Idea of Religion” (269), rather than something supernaturally revealed; it is to be governed not by biblical theology but by rational theology.

²¹ Texts or dogmas that tend towards a “supernatural supplement” (ibid., 268) must be consigned to discourse about the “vehicles of moral faith,” not to discourse about moral faith itself. “The teacher should warn [the people] not to ascribe holiness to dogma itself but to pass over, without delay, to the religious faith it has introduced” (267).

²² Ibid., 270; cf. 251.

no credibility except what philosophy can lend it for the sake of its service to morality. The only contribution biblical theology can make from its own resources is to provide vehicles of the imagination that can be commandeered to philosophically determined ends. Religion itself has become in Kant a philosophical concept, and Christianity “the Idea of religion.” Christianity in its historic manifestation, however, is a disposable object. As for Judaism, and the Judaizing sectarianism that still plagues Christianity, pure moral religion is its “euthanasia.”²³

What shall we say about all this? No doubt Kant encountered many a Euthyphro, whom he wished, like Socrates, to cure of pious impieties.²⁴ But it will not do, I think, to give an account strictly in terms of the parlous state of Protestant (and Catholic) theology at the time; that would require a different kind of critique altogether, and a different kind of cure. Nor will it do to reduce the whole business to a misunderstanding about Christian doctrine, though Kant permits himself a generous helping of such misunderstandings. Nor yet will it suffice to give an account that is primarily political or cultural. A glimpse of what is really happening here is available at the point where Kant apparently deploys the epistemology of the Meno dialogue (not the Euthyphro) against the biblical theologians:

For the concepts and principles required for eternal life cannot really be learned from anyone else: the teacher’s exposition is only the occasion for him to develop them out of his own reason. But the Scriptures contain more than what is in itself required for eternal life; part of their content is a matter of historical belief, and while this can indeed be useful to religious faith as its mere sensible vehicle (for certain people and certain eras), it is not an essential part of religious faith.²⁵

One does not reason from inspiration, he insists,²⁶ nor is history “entitled to pass itself off as divine revelation.” Only a moral interpretation of Scripture, a philosophical interpretation, “is really an *authentic* one—that

²³ “The great drama of religious change on earth, the restoration of all things,” will take place when there is “only one shepherd and one flock” (ibid., 276).

²⁴ Some of these will have been housed in theology faculties known to Kant, though at Königsberg he seems to have had friends and collaborators on that side (F.T. Rink, e.g.).

²⁵ “Now the faculty of biblical theologians,” he continues (ibid., 263), “insists on this historical content as divine revelation as strongly as if belief in it belonged to religion. The philosophical faculty, however, opposes the theology faculty regarding this confusion, and what divine revelation contains that is true of religion proper.”

²⁶ “One does not argue on the basis of an inspiration” (ibid., 265): Is this also an allusion to the Meno dialogue?

is, one given by the God within us,” who speaks to us only by way of our own moral reason.²⁷

This reminds us of the famous maxim of Lessing, indispensable to the Enlightenment, that “accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.”²⁸ In Kant, as in Lessing, there is a Meno revival, we might say, that opposes itself to everything that has intervened in the meanwhile; that is, to all the tiresome “relics” of Jewish or salvation-historical modes of thought that have corrupted the exercise of reason and the Idea or rational archetype of religion that is the true genius of Christianity. Kant is more concerned than Lessing to separate the epistemological from the onto- and cosmo-theological dimensions of Platonism, which indeed he rejects. He is not quite so committed, perhaps, as Lessing (or later, Hegel) to the substitution of universal history, the history of the race, for the particular histories of Israel and the Church.²⁹ But he is equally concerned to disestablish the latter. If there is to be theology at all, it cannot be allowed to root itself in that soil. Which is to say, it cannot be “revealed” theology in that sense, and it cannot be doctrinal. It cannot be taught, much less taught by authority. It is revealed only by and to reason. It is not *discovered* (as by Moses at the burning bush) but rather *uncovered*, because it is not accidental or particular but necessary and universal.

I said that Kant reduced the study of revealed theology to a professional discipline in the service of public morality; pace St. Thomas it was not truly a science in its own right.³⁰ But at stake, then, was not simply the relation between the human faculties of faith and reason, or between the university faculties of theology and philosophy—though Kant tried, with no small success, to reverse their positions and influence. What was at stake (though Kant was probably not thinking of this) was almost

²⁷ Ibid., 271. Hence he opines in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* that one may do with the sacred text as one pleases, so long as it is made to serve moral reason.

²⁸ *On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power*.

²⁹ Though, in his treatment of the law faculty, Kant shows that he has his own way of doing this, through a “philosophical prophecy” about “the whole scope of all the peoples on earth” in their “progress toward the better” (*Religion and Rational Theology*, 304).

³⁰ Kant takes Ockham’s part, as already indicated. Should Scotus be mentioned in this connection as well? By prioritizing will over intellect, does Scotus already reduce theology to *scientia practica*, making metaphysics the new queen? Or does he make theology a still higher science precisely because it is practical—that is, relational—having as its end the possession of God? But this does not concern us here, since no such thing crosses Kant’s mind.

everything contained or implied in the first question of the *Summa*. Providing a negative rather a positive answer to the very first article of that question—"whether, besides philosophy, any further doctrine is required"—Kant also opposed most of the remaining articles. And it is worth observing that, like Thomas, he linked his answer to the doctrine of grace, a doctrine he was at pains to deny, even if it meant denying Luther as well as Thomas.³¹

Not to put too fine a point on it, for Kant (though his own language is juridical rather than military) the borderlands were a battle zone, and in the battle of the borderlands Kant's aim was to conquer and occupy: no *amicabilis compositio* can be permitted.³² The mark of divinity for any purported revelation, he says, or "at least the *conditio sine qua non*, is its harmony with what reason pronounces worthy of God."³³ For Thomas, knowledge of God transcends reason's capacity to work things out for itself, and what reason can work out for itself, if only with great difficulty, is made plainer and more obvious by revelation; things uncertain (for example, did the world have a beginning or did it not?) are sometimes settled by revelation.³⁴ Whereas for Kant, substantive knowledge of God is not possible and the supposed science of revelation has no real content of its own at all, whether speculative or practical. The very idea of revelation is useful only in the form of a hortatory "as if": what reason demands of us in the moral sphere must be received *as if* it were a revelation from God, a command of God.³⁵

³¹ See again *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, which consciously reverses the Reformation scheme.

³² "This conflict cannot and should not be settled by an amicable accommodation" (*Religion and Rational Theology*, 260).

³³ "The kind of characteristics that experience provides can never show us that a revelation is divine; the mark of its divinity (at least the *conditio sine qua non*) is its harmony with what reason pronounces worthy of God" (*ibid.*, 270).

³⁴ "It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason" (*ST* I, q. 1, a. 1).

³⁵ "The *divinity* of its moral content adequately compensates reason for the *humanity* of its historical narrative which, like an old parchment that is illegible in places, has to be made intelligible by adjustments and conjectures consistent with the whole. And the divinity of its moral content justifies this statement: that the Bible deserves to be kept, put to moral use, and assigned to religion as its guide *just as if it is a divine revelation*" (*Religion and Rational Theology*, 284f.). It is worth remarking that this "as if" is the mirror image of Anselm's. Anselm, having discovered truth through revelation, attempts to display it for reason as if reason alone were discovering it. Kant, having discovered truth through reason, allows revelation to display it as if it were the property of revelation. But revelation cannot with authority say other or more than that; it is reason alone that speaks, as Benjamin Whichcote put it, "with the very voice of God." (Kant, by the way, is mistaken in

2. Barth's Theological Totalism

Friedrich Schleiermacher, who just a few years later was charged with finding a proper place for theology in the new University of Berlin, tried to get round all this by locating religion and theology in the sphere of *Gefühl*. Religion, he proposed, would be deemed neither knowing *nor* doing, but feeling; theology, an attempt to articulate the deep sense of awe and dependence arising from an intuition of the unity of all things. This was in some sense a feint or at least a half-measure, as Troeltsch later observed, since Schleiermacher refused to let go entirely of an historical redeemer and an historic redemption; christology was still to control theology. The likes of Ritschl and Harnack provided for subsequent generations something of a more Kantian character, by directing historical scholarship into biblical criticism and a skeptical examination of the development of dogma, while making theology over into a moralistic discipline in the service of social progress. But Karl Barth, who had drunk deeply from both these streams in his formative years, became disenchanted by the latter in particular when, at the outset of the Great War, he discovered how easily a theology reduced to ethics could fail its great ethical tests. A theology committed to soundings of *Gefühl* did not seem to him adequate either, even where Jesus was proposed (*per* Schleiermacher) as the instrument of measurement. So Barth set about reviving revealed theology.

The way he went about that invites, in its totalism, analogy with Kant. Not that Barth thought that theology could take charge of philosophy; far from it. But Barth had no place at all for natural theology, or no place that he recognized as such.³⁶ God, argued Barth, *is* Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness; that is, Father, Son and Spirit. What is known otherwise, under the rubric "God," is not in fact God, whether this putative knowledge arises from religion or from first philosophy. For Barth natural theology cannot co-exist alongside revealed theology, since the latter is all an affirmation of grace and the former all a denial. Natural theology is theology that wants to say in advance what God can or cannot be; to make God submit to what reason pronounces worthy of God. Revealed theology is *theologia relationis*, theology that reports what it has actually heard from

thinking that Anselm tried "to establish the necessity of a highest being through mere concepts" [ibid., 349]. Anselm tried only to show that reason's reach for God falls into incoherence if it tries to bracket out God's self-existence.)

³⁶ T. F. Torrance pointed out to Barth that there was room inside his theology for a form of natural theology, even if he rejected it as a *preambula fidei*; see the preface to Torrance's *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) and cf. "Natural Theology in the Thought of Karl Barth," in *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984).

God and so permits reason to be reasonable where God is concerned. The former is presumptuous, and in its presumption both artificial and misleading. The latter is obedient, and in its obedience enlightened and enlightening. Both, humanly speaking, are impossible enterprises, but the latter is (in Franz Overbeck's phrase) the impossible possibility.

A simple illustration of these competing totalisms: Kant thinks Paul's argument, "If Christ had not risen . . . neither would we rise again," invalid.³⁷ As for the premise that Christ himself rose, he proposes that moral considerations moved Paul to accept as true a tale otherwise "hard to credit"—the tale being made to serve moral purposes accidentally rather than essentially.³⁸ So even the question of the resurrection of Jesus is historically and theologically inconsequential; what can reasonably be said about the subject of resurrection is determined already by Kant's moral philosophy. Barth, on the other hand, takes the resurrection of Jesus to be a fact of the utmost consequence—ontologically, morally, and epistemologically too. The cross and resurrection of Jesus are a "bar" to every attempt of fallen man to penetrate the truth about either man or God; at the same time they are the "exit" or way of escape from man's dilemma. Just because of the resurrection, the truth about God and man that is concentrated in Jesus Christ is self-authenticating; it, or rather he, is capable of reaching back to embrace us even if we, from our own resources, are incapable of reaching out to find or embrace him.³⁹

Barth thus sides with Kierkegaard, who recognizes exactly what the Enlightenment thinkers are up to and what is at stake in their return to the Meno epistemology. In his thought experiment at the outset of the *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard makes the point that what confronts us in the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the possibility that

³⁷ Kant (*Religion and Rational Theology*, 264) does not actually bother himself with this enthymeme, which contains a valid argument that can be construed as follows:

- [Every gift of God to the people of God is a gift given first or pre-eminently to Jesus.]
- Resurrection is not a gift given first to Jesus.
- Therefore resurrection is not a gift of God to the people of God.

Paul of course rejects the minor premise and accepts the major—just the reverse of Kant's view.

³⁸ Cf. Lessing's *On the Proof of the Spirit and Power*, where it is suggested that the resurrection reports may at least be worthy of deliberation and doubt, but for the purposes of establishing sound metaphysics and morals they can be ignored with the same impunity as "the old pious legend that the hand which scatters the seed must wash in snail's blood seven times for each throw."

³⁹ Any demand for *independent* proof of the resurrection ignores the Risen One methodologically and systematically, which is perfectly futile and indeed perverse.

the Greek philosophical tradition, and the Enlightenment with it, is working inside the wrong circle, so to say; that it has presupposed the essential divinity and truthfulness of the soul and consequently produced an epistemology that does not actually correspond to the human condition. What is more, it has understood truth and divinity in ways that effectively negate the value of time, matter, and individuality. Therefore it cannot take seriously what someone like Paul wants to say about the resurrection, a concept to which it is closed *a priori* and absolutely. Even to have conceived of working in some other circle, such as Paul's, is an impossibility for it—but it must nonetheless reckon with this “impossible” possibility.

Kierkegaard in turn is siding with a tradition extending back to Justin Martyr, who in his *Dialogue with Trypho* had already made the same basic point; or rather, the old man he encountered by the sea, who converted him from Platonism to Christianity, had made it. But I digress. My own point is that the Christian tradition can only meet the kind of natural theology it encounters in Kant with an equally totalizing claim; there is no middle ground here. Barth himself looks to Anselm rather than to Justin or Kierkegaard to explain how he thinks theology, rational theology, is to be done. Their circle comprises *fides, intellegere, probare, delectatio*, in that order. Faith explores its own inner *ratio* through an intellectual and aesthetic appreciation of what is grasped by faith—for example, the resurrection or the Trinity—which issues in demonstration or proof of its surprising propriety and beauty (its *convenientia, decentia, pulchritudo*, etc.) and hence also in joy, delight, and praise (*eucharistia*).⁴⁰ Theology, in other words, cannot survive on the crumbs falling from Kant's table or from any other philosophical table. It has its own feast to enjoy, and in enjoying it may show philosophy something new, something philosophy did not know how to conceive for itself.

Think, for example, of Nicea's notoriously controversial *ὁμοούσιον*, the implications of which prised apart *οὐσία* and *ὑπόστασις* so as to give ontological weight to the idea of personhood. Or Chalcedon's equally controversial exception to the Aristotelian principle that there is no *φύσις ἀνυπόστατος*, blind adherence to which had produced the Nestorian and Eutychian heresies, but the overcoming of which produced not merely two-nature orthodoxy but (*inter alia*) an unprecedented world of Christian art. Think of Augustine's *de Trinitate*, which comes to mind from a long list of examples because its marvelous thirteenth book took the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and showed that, without it, human reason, human

⁴⁰ Barth, *Anselm: Fides quaerens intellectum* (London: SCM, 1960), 13ff.

morality, and the human drive for happiness are deprived of real hope for fulfillment, and must wither away in pointlessness and despair. Kant, of course, has his own worries about that, and his own rather hesitant and, historically speaking, ineffective solution—pounding ever harder on his “as if,” something we have long since ceased to do—but nowhere does he demonstrate any real grasp of the alternative presented to him by an Augustine, an Anselm, or an Aquinas, much less a Paul. In Kant we seldom encounter anything more than caricatures of these men or of their ideas, though here and there he expropriates something for his own purposes.

But what of Barth? Barth too is problematic, in that he seems to have no room for natural theology even where the latter does not mean to be totalizing. Barth finds the doctrine of God in Kant “quite intolerable,” since Kant fails to respect the Thomist maxim, *Deus non est in genere*, and so does not learn from God how to be reasonable but vainly tries to teach God how to be reasonable.⁴¹ Yet Barth balks at that other Thomist maxim, *gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit*, from which Aquinas draws the conclusion that “natural reason should minister to faith as the natural inclination of the will ministers to charity.”⁴² In Barth’s mind, Kant and neo-Protestantism generally are no more than extensions of the Catholic error embodied in this *non tollit sed perficit*. Natural theology, even in the Christian tradition, is for those who think they already know what “God” and “man” are before encountering them concretely in Jesus Christ, where they are mutually interpreted and interpretable. Natural theology is for those who are certain, therefore, to impose on Jesus a false interpretation that prevents, rather than facilitates, any real knowledge of either God or man. It is for those who refuse to see in the Crucified One the death of their own miserable attempts to approach God.⁴³

⁴¹ *Church Dogmatics* (CD), 2.1 310f.

⁴² ST I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2; cf. *Super Boetium* 1, q. 2, a. 3, co. 1: “I answer that it must be said that gifts of grace are added to those of nature in such a way that they do not destroy the latter, but rather perfect them [*dona gratiarum hoc modo naturae adduntur quod eam non tollunt, sed magis perficiunt*]; wherefore also the light of faith, which is gratuitously infused into our minds, does not destroy the natural light of cognition, which is in us by nature. For although the natural light of the human mind is insufficient to reveal those truths revealed by faith, yet it is impossible that those things which God has manifested to us by faith should be contrary to those which are evident to us by natural knowledge. In this case one would necessarily be false: and since both kinds of truth are from God, God would be the author of error, a thing which is impossible. Rather, since in imperfect things there is found some imitation of the perfect, though the image is deficient, in those things known by natural reason there are certain similitudes of the truths revealed by faith.”

⁴³ A message well represented, thought Barth, by the “prodigious index finger” of John the Baptist pointing to Christ in Grünewald’s Isenheim altarpiece.

For Barth natural theology is a sin of the intellect that must, so to say, be nailed to the tree. We need to be clear, however, about what he means by natural theology. Natural theology not only posits knowledge of God by way of a general revelation given with creation and accessible to unaided reason (as Paul says: “ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made”), it also employs this knowledge in a perverse attempt to control the knowledge that is possible through special revelation. It makes general revelation into a prolegomenon for special revelation, in such a way as to establish in advance the conditions under which the latter can be received and understood. In doing so it seeks a path from anthropology to christology, and from a prior knowledge of God the creator to a posterior knowledge of God the redeemer—a path that no longer lies open to reason, if ever it did. In other words, it ignores the fall.⁴⁴ Indeed, it ignores the fact (as Barth has it) that the covenant of redemption is the inner basis for the covenant of creation. It reverses the ontological and epistemological relation between the two. “There is a way from christology to anthropology, but there is no way from anthropology to christology.”⁴⁵

Natural theology therefore posits the *analogia entis*—an analogy of being between God and man rooted in the act of creation—as its own condition of possibility, when the only genuine analogy is an *analogia gratiae* rooted in the act of redemption. Even if it does so retrospectively, in the light of revelation, it nonetheless supposes that what revelation shows it is simply the truth about what already exists: man’s capacity for God, a capacity that has survived the fall and manifested itself in countless expressions of human reason and culture, which grace now affirms, supports, and perfects. But for Barth this amounts to a denial of grace:

Grace which has from the start to share its power with a force of nature is no longer grace, i.e., it cannot be recognised as what the grace of God

⁴⁴ Barth denies that “the turntable between philosophy and theology” is the man who can be analyzed “in the light of a divine revelation from creation.” Natural theology wrongly thinks that this man, or rather this analysis, can serve “as the *introitus* to the inner circle of a true theology grounded in a *revelatio specialis*.” Such an enterprise, however, is only possible “in the realm of Roman Catholicism, since this presupposes that God’s manifestation in our creatureliness, the creation of man which is also the revelation of God, is in some place and in some sense . . . directly discernible by us.” Whereas the truth of the matter is that “this direct discernment of the original relation of God to man . . . has been taken from us by the fall” (CD 1.1 130).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 131.

is in the consideration and conception of that divine act, as what it is in Jesus Christ. And therefore revelation which has from the very outset a partner in the reason of the creature, and which cannot be revelation without its co-operation, is no longer revelation. At any rate, it is not the revelation which takes place in the act in which God opens Himself to man in pure goodness; in which He does not find an existing partner in man, but creates a partner; in which even the fact that God is known and knowable is the work of His freedom.⁴⁶

Barth thus “leaves no room for any knowledge of God apart from the knowledge of humanity’s reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷ Outside of that all is idolatry, whether open or subtle idolatry.

As severe as this sounds, it does not amount to a complete rejection of philosophy or of any positive relation between philosophy and theology, only of philosophical pretensions to independent knowledge of God or of the real truth about man, who must indeed be understood by analogy with God—the *analogia gratiae*. Taking up the gauntlet thrown down by Kant over the proper method of reading Scripture, Barth allows that no one reads Scripture without philosophical spectacles of one prescription or another. “We cannot basically contest the use of philosophy in scriptural exegesis,” he says; “where the question of legitimacy arises is in regard to the How of this use.”⁴⁸ Indeed, the use of philosophy “is not only unavoidable as such, but legitimate, just as it was not only unavoidable but legitimate when, just as he was, in his poverty and rags, the prodigal son arose and went to his father.”⁴⁹ But this means that “there is no essential reason for preferring one of these schemes to another.”⁵⁰ In principle, any philosophy can be put to work, so to say, by the Word of God. “It can be elucidated and then elucidate.” Kant’s challenge is met, then, not by a stubborn insistence on theology rather than philosophy as the dominant partner, but by the relativization of both:

⁴⁶ CD 2.2 531.

⁴⁷ Keith Johnson, “Reconsidering Barth’s Rejection of Pryzwara’s *Analogia Entis*,” *Modern Theology* 26.4 (2010): 645. Admittedly, my account here to some extent conflates the earlier and the more considered perspectives of Barth.

⁴⁸ CD 1.2 729f. “It is no more true of anyone that he does not mingle the Gospel with some philosophy, than that here and now he is free from all sin except through faith.” Note that Barth shares with Kant the view that the only border worth talking about is the interpretation of Scripture.

⁴⁹ “My mode of thought may not be of any use in and by itself, but by the grace of the Word of God why should it not be able to become useful in His service?” (ibid., 731).

⁵⁰ Ibid., 729.

It is not really a question of replacing philosophy by a dictatorial, absolute and exclusive theology, and again discrediting philosophy as an *ancilla theologiae*. . . . In face of its object, theology itself can only wish to be *ancilla*. That is why it cannot assign any other role to philosophy. Scripture alone can be the *domina*. Hence there is no real cause for disputes about prestige.⁵¹

Theology retains a certain primacy, however, for “in the philosopher-theologian it is not the philosopher but the theologian who will have to be criticized” in any encounter with the Word of God. This statement is made in good faith, apparently, unlike Kant’s tongue-in-cheek proposal of a truce that would deprive theology of any right to appeal to reason. It nevertheless raises the question whether Barth’s seemingly open border between theology and philosophy is really one sealed against philosophy, or sealed at least against any philosophy not content, so to say, with a tourist visa. “If we do not commit ourselves unreservedly and finally to any specific philosophy, we will not need totally or finally to fear any philosophy.”⁵²

3. The *Pax Thomistica*

If we take Kant and Barth as champions for philosophy and theology respectively, the disciplinary lines seem to be drawn as battle-lines. But

⁵¹ Ibid., 734. With this cf. Kant’s ironic concession: “We can also grant the theology faculty’s proud claim that the philosophy faculty is its handmaid (though the question remains, whether the servant *carries her lady’s torch before or her train behind*), provided it is not driven away or silenced” (*Religion and Rational Theology*, 255).

⁵² CD 1.2 735. We might illustrate Barth’s approach from his positive use of Karl Jaspers. The two men were colleagues at Basel from 1948, and lectured in close proximity. “Lecture room 2—the biggest which we have here—is the scene of his public activity,” wrote Barth, “while mine is in the more modest Room 1, immediately and literally at his feet. There are plenty of gifted young men going up and down the steps linking the two rooms, like angels up and down Jacob’s ladder” (quoted by Busch, *Karl Barth*, 351). We are not surprised, then, that in §44.2 of the *Dogmatics*, “Phenomena of the Human,” Barth allows “that in the existentialist philosophy of today we find in operation a new and serious philosophical concern with the religious question” (CD 3.2 113, quoting Martin Werner, though he might as easily have quoted his own brother, Heinrich Barth). He even allows that in Jaspers—for whom, “in philosophizing, a faith lacking all revelation reaches expression” (Jaspers, *Philosophie* 1, v)—“recognisable traces of the proximity of the Christian Church” are to be found, and that these “are more relevant and important than those which with a little good will we can also find in the philosophy of Fichte or Hegel.” Yet this stubborn difference remains: If such a philosophy “has seen a phenomenon of the human” it cannot be said “that it has shown us real man”! But in engaging the question of “real man,” Barth is at his best when he takes on Nietzsche (see CD 3.2 231ff.).

Kant and Barth are both, in their way, biblicists; that is, they are Protestant. And those fellow Protestants who stand between them, rather than on one side or the other, are exposed to some pretty deadly cross-fire. Barth is right, I think, that their position is untenable, not least because they attempt *as* Protestants something that is viable only on Catholic principles.⁵³ But we have yet to consider Catholic principles, other than from Barth's point of view.

In keeping with those principles, Vatican I declared it an error, a morally culpable error, to deny that "by the light of natural reason" the existence of the one true God can be known with certitude.⁵⁴ Of natural theology Catholicism demands little more than this acknowledgment, but it does demand at least this. In practice of course—since it insists on "the mutual assistance of faith and reason," which "can never be at variance with one another"⁵⁵—it expects much more and makes frequent appeal to philosophical lines of thought. It simply insists that divine faith exceeds the deliverances of unaided reason without thereby being or becoming unreasonable, and that it is right and proper to believe things on account of the authority of God who reveals them, allowing what is so believed to inform reason in its rightful pursuits.⁵⁶

So, for example, if I may add to my earlier list, the Church did not hesitate at Lateran IV to insist upon *creatio ex nihilo*, which theological doctrine (in excess of philosophy) helped to lay the foundations of modern science. Or, on the other hand, to reject Abbot Joachim's exaggerated view of spiritual perfection by observing (in philosophical fashion) that "between the Creator and the creature so great a likeness cannot be noted without the necessity of noting a greater dissimilarity between them."⁵⁷

This kind of thinking—the kind that has both philosophical and theological components, whether or not it is positing an *analogia entis*—was

⁵³ For Barth there is "no third alternative between that exploitation of the *analogia entis* which is legitimate only on the basis of Roman Catholicism, between the greatness and misery of a so-called natural knowledge of God in the sense of the *Vaticanum*, and a Protestant theology which draws from its own source, which stands on its own feet, and which is finally liberated from this secular misery" (CD 1.1 xiii).

⁵⁴ Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (30th ed., 1954), §1806 (*The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. R. Deferrari [Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2002]).

⁵⁵ Denzinger, §§1797–99. We should be careful here of a certain equivocation between *fides qua* and *fides quae*. Faith and reason as human functions *should* not be at odds, but may be; the true deliverances of reason and of revelation *cannot* be at odds, even if they seem to be.

⁵⁶ See Denzinger, §§1810–20.

⁵⁷ Denzinger, §431.

the kind that Thomas, aided by the recovery of Aristotle, brought to an astonishing level of sophistication, steering as it were between the Scylla and Charybdis that threatened to either side. As William Turner observes in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*:

John Scotus Eriugena, in the ninth century, by his doctrine that all truth is theophany, or showing forth of God, [had] tried to elevate philosophy to the rank of theology, and identify the two in a species of theosophy. Abelard, in the twelfth century, tried to bring theology down to the level of philosophy, and identify both in a rationalistic system. The greatest of the Scholastics in the thirteenth century, especially St. Thomas Aquinas, solved the problem . . . by showing that the two are distinct sciences, and yet that they agree.⁵⁸

Today the same threats still exist: on the one side in the form of Hegelianism, or perhaps even in the form of Continental philosophy's vaunted theological turn, which elevates phenomenology into a sort of *ordo salutis*; and on the other side in the form of those who make revealed theology rest entirely on natural theology, thus justifying Barth's worry that the *analogia entis* is "the invention of Antichrist."⁵⁹ (The latter often suppose

⁵⁸ Turner continues: "They are distinct . . . because, while philosophy relies on reason alone, theology uses the truths derived from revelation, and also because there are some truths, the mysteries of Faith, which lie completely outside the domain of philosophy and belong to theology. They agree, and must agree, because God is the author of all truth, and it is impossible to think that he would teach in the natural order anything that contradicts what he teaches in the supernatural order" ("Scholasticism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13 [New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912]; www.newadvent.org). F. C. Copleston remarks that for Thomas "the distinction between philosophy and theology is a distinction between different ways of arriving at and viewing truths rather than primarily a distinction between propositions considered with respect to their content" (*Aquinas* [London: Penguin, 1955, 56]). The same could be said of Anselm, I think, though Barth does not consider that.

⁵⁹ CD 1.1 xiii. Barth sees in Gottlieb Söhngen's use of the *analogia entis* "an important deviation" (CD 2.1 81f.). Söhngen insists that noetically *esse sequitur operari*, even if ontically *operari sequitur esse*, and that the *analogia entis* must therefore be subsumed within the *analogia fidei*. All of this Barth adopts. But is Söhngen the exception Barth thinks he is? And is it true "that there is not a single word in the *Vaticanum* to suggest that the God referred to is engaged in a work and activity with man"? That it entirely overlooks the unity of the divine action whereby the creator is also the savior, and so posits another God besides the one whom Paul called "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"? According to Barth "the intolerable and unpardonable thing in Roman Catholic theology" is that "there is this splitting up of the concept of God, and hand in hand with it the abstraction from the real work and activity of God in favour of a general being

themselves in harmony with Aquinas, but are not; their approach may be Cartesian or it may be Hobbesian, but it is not Thomist.) A third threat is Barthianism itself, which does not concern itself as far as it should with whether theology and philosophy *ought* to agree. But from Leo XIII to Benedict XVI a concerted attempt has been made, with considerable

of God which He has in common with us and all being" (CD 2.1 84). But the *Syllabus* of Pius IX (see e.g. Denzinger, §§1704, 1710, 1714, and 1757) denies that the independence of philosophy should be construed in such a fashion. Moreover, Vatican I, which in its chapter on God the creator already commits itself to *creatio ex nihilo* (ibid., §1783), rules out the splitting up which Barth thinks he finds there: "Since man is wholly dependent on God as his Creator and Lord, and since created reason is completely subject to uncreated truth, we are bound by faith to give full obedience of intellect and will to God who reveals" (§1789). In other words, its "twofold order of knowledge," in which "we know in one way by natural reason, in another by divine faith" (§1795), holds together—distinguishing without separating—the work of faith and of reason, and the knowledge of God sought by both. Is it not rather Barth who splits up the knowledge of God by failing to allow that such knowledge as every rational creature has of the divine *operari*, precisely by virtue of being a rational creature, discloses something of the divine *esse*? Barth's protest against those who wish to foreclose on the knowledge of God—by deciding in advance of revelation, or apart from faith, the limits of what can or should be said of the divine *esse*—is entirely legitimate, but against this the *Vaticanum* protests with equal vigor. (Unlike Barth, it does not misconstrue Thomas, who knows no God who is one but not three, nor any reason that does not lead, if it is right reason, in the direction of the Trinity.)

Catholics, of course, are still capable of making the mistake against which this protest is made, if they are not careful to render talk of preambles and presuppositions in a nuanced way. "Faith," says Thomas, "presupposes natural knowledge even as grace presupposes nature" (*ST* I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1). Quite so, and Romanus Cessario elaborates with what seems like a fair question: "If human nature is unintelligible in its own right, what possible sense can be given to the doctrine of the incarnation of the Word? If being is unintelligible, then the revelation of God—who is perfect being—will be perfectly unintelligible" (in *Reasons and the Reason of Faith*, ed. P. Griffiths and R. Hütter [London: Continuum, 2005], 330; quoted by D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009], 72). But we must ask in response how far, and to whom, being is intelligible in its own right, if "in its own right" means within the constraints of philosophy and natural theology. Likewise with human being in particular. Without conceding either that there is no such thing as human nature or that human nature is philosophically inaccessible, we ought to insist that it is only imperfectly accessible and that man has ultimately to learn from God who and what man is, if he really wants to know. This means learning who and what man is *from the incarnate One himself*, in the Spirit and the Church, rather than from a mere overlay of theological concepts on philosophical ones. It means, therefore, conversion and salvation (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 19; Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, §2ff.).

On the other hand, Catholics are also capable of making the Barthian mistake, as Stephen A. Long observes in *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the*

success, to revive the *pax Thomistica*, in which philosophy *qua* philosophy and theology *qua* theology reason together, each respectful of the other. The theological foundation for this—and it can only have a theological foundation, if theology exceeds philosophy—is located especially in the doctrine of bodily resurrection, the very doctrine that Barth thought denied it. For it is that doctrine, more than any other, which insists upon the continuity of grace and nature and demands the *non tollit sed perficit*.

The *pax Thomistica*, rightly understood, does not entail any concession to philosophy respecting some privileged access to the being of God apart from God's works. Neither does it divide God, as Barth supposes, when it acknowledges access to God through the work of creation without prior reference to the work of redemption—when it acknowledges “a general and confused” knowledge of God that belongs to man as such.⁶⁰ It does do that, of course. It holds to a natural knowledge of God because it holds that man, even fallen man, is defined as man by his vocation to happiness, which is but another name for God.⁶¹ It holds to the notion that creation itself is a form of grace, that man's nature is graced. Which is to say, it does indeed understand grace “doubly,” as Barth charges. Or rather it understands grace triply: *gratia creans* (the gift of being, and of being ordered to God, and of being helped by God)⁶² is

Doctrine of Grace (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010). Long, however, in an otherwise convincing critique of de Lubac, Balthasar, et al., does not attend adequately to the primacy of the second Adam, in whom it is shown that human nature is precisely for communion with God and cannot be grasped properly in any lesser connection (see Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5.16.2, and Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 18, a. 1, ad 5 and 6; cf. *ST I*, q. 62, a. 2). Great care must be taken with the claim “that God might without injustice have created man *in puris naturalibus*” (Long, 269 n.8), which is not the right way to protect the distinction between nature and grace (or *gratia creans* and *gratia elevans*), since it hypothesizes a “man” altogether unrelated to Jesus Christ and hence lacking any image-bearing capacity (cf. *Adversus Haereses* 5.36.3). Whether such a man might have existed is not knowable; certainly he does not exist.

⁶⁰ *ST I*, q. 2, a. 1, ad. 1.

⁶¹ “For man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him” (*ST I*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1; cf. I–II, q. 3, a. 1).

⁶² The term *gratia creans* may not be deployed by Thomas, but the concept is. That concept goes back at least to the fifth-century dispute over Pelagianism, in which St Fulgentius distinguished between saving grace in Jesus Christ and the grace given man in and with his creation (cf. Harnack, *History of Dogma* 5.256); but in fact it belongs to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* as we find it already in Irenaeus. The term itself is used by Bernard (*Aliae Sententiae*, no. 28; PL183, 0754A), who offers a fourfold scheme: “*Gratia quadripartita est: gratia creans, gratia redimens sive miserans, gratia donans, gratia remunerans. Prima: Omnia per ipsum facta sunt. Secunda: Verbum caro factum est. Tertia: Plenum gratiae. Quarta: Et veritatis* (Joan. I, 14).”

exceeded by *gratia elevans* (making humans capable of deification, of participation in the internal economy of God), which in view of the fall requires also *gratia sanans* (the healing or redemptive grace that reopens the path to deification).⁶³ These three, though distinct, are all acts of the one true God with corresponding modes of the knowledge of God. The God who is known by man naturally is the same God who is known salvifically and perfectly, though he is not known with the same clarity or in just the same way. That he is known only by virtue of *gratia creans*, and under the debilitating conditions of the fall, means that he remains to some extent “the unknown God” (Acts 17). It does not mean that he is not known at all or in any way whatsoever. For man would not be man at all if he did not know God at all.

So what is the specific contribution of philosophy to such a partnership, a partnership in which knowledge of God is acknowledged to be a, or rather the, *desideratum*? In a well-known passage from *Super Boetium* Thomas provides his answer. That is, he sets out his conviction that “in sacred doctrine we are able to make a threefold use of philosophy”:

First, to demonstrate those truths that are preambles of faith and that have a necessary place in the science of faith. Such are the truths about God that can be proved by natural reason—that God exists, that God is one; such truths about God or about His creatures, subject to philosophical proof, faith presupposes.

⁶³ Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 2: “Man’s nature may be looked at in two ways: first, in its integrity, as it was in our first parent before sin; secondly, as it is corrupted in us after the sin of our first parent. Now in both states human nature needs the help of God as First Mover, to do or wish any good whatsoever. . . . But in the state of integrity, as regards the sufficiency of the operative power, man by his natural endowments could wish and do the good proportionate to his nature, such as the good of acquired virtue; but not surpassing good, as the good of infused virtue. But in the state of corrupt nature, man falls short of what he could do by his nature, so that he is unable to fulfil it by his own natural powers. Yet because human nature is not altogether corrupted by sin, so as to be shorn of every natural good, even in the state of corrupted nature it can, by virtue of its natural endowments, work some particular good, as to build dwellings, plant vineyards, and the like; yet it cannot do all the good natural to it, so as to fall short in nothing; just as a sick man can of himself make some movements, yet he cannot be perfectly moved with the movements of one in health, unless by the help of medicine he be cured. And thus in the state of perfect nature man needs a gratuitous strength superadded to natural strength for one reason, *viz.* in order to do and wish supernatural good; but for two reasons, in the state of corrupt nature, *viz.* in order to be healed, and furthermore in order to carry out works of supernatural virtue, which are meritorious. Beyond this, in both states man needs the Divine help, that he may be moved to act well.”

Second, to give a clearer notion, by certain similitudes, of the truths of faith, as Augustine in his book, *De Trinitate*, employed many comparisons taken from the teachings of the philosophers to aid understanding of the Trinity.

Third, to resist those who speak against the faith, either by showing that their statements are false, or by showing that they are not necessarily true.

To which he adds, to the comfort of Barthians:

Nevertheless, in the use of philosophy in sacred Scripture, there can be a twofold error: In one way, by using doctrines contrary to faith, which are not truths of philosophy, but rather error, or abuse of philosophy, as Origen did. In another way, by using them in such manner as to include under the measure of philosophy truths of faith, as if one should be willing to believe nothing except what could be held by philosophical reasoning; when, on the contrary, philosophy should be subject to the measure of faith, according to the saying of the Apostle (2 Cor. 10:5), “bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ.”⁶⁴

To ask and answer this question the other way round—what use is philosophy able to make of revealed theology?—is the task of the Thomist, or at least the cooperative, philosopher.⁶⁵ The theologian may want to make some suggestions about particulars, however, just as the philosopher will within the present framing. As for Barthians, they may perhaps refuse to be comforted, having noted the apologetic bent of the first and third uses especially, and being wary of purported similitudes and *vestigia*. But Thomas’s “nevertheless” surely puts paid to any notion that the *preambula fidei* are what Barth fancies them to be—*viz.*, creaturely constraints on the freedom of God to be who he is and to reveal himself as such—just as it puts paid to Kant’s claim that one does not argue from inspiration. For holy teaching, says Thomas, “makes use also of the authority of philosophers in those questions in which they [are] able to know the truth by natural reason,” albeit “only as inessential and probable arguments.”⁶⁶

On Thomas’s view, then, as Servais Pinckaers observes, “theology does not destroy but perfects philosophy.”⁶⁷ Likewise, faith does not destroy

⁶⁴ *Super Boetium* 1, q. 2 a. 3 co. 3. In the biblical text “understanding” is νόημα.

⁶⁵ How far or in what sense the philosopher needs to be “Thomist” in order to cooperate is an interesting question. Even to be interested in the partnership is already Thomist, of course.

⁶⁶ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

⁶⁷ “Far from being separate, much less in competition, these sciences work together through what we could call a vital integration of philosophy and theology. At the

but perfects reason. It enables reason to over-achieve, we might say, while also enabling the will to outrun the intellect in loving God, hence in finding the good life about which theology and philosophy both must speak.⁶⁸ And this is just what is required if (as Augustine says) reason itself is not to “end in despair.”⁶⁹

4. A Thomist Excursus on Barth

We may pause briefly to consider Barth more closely from a Catholic point of view. For in his admirable zeal not to concede to man any control over God or the knowledge of God, Barth is obviously much nearer to

prompting of the theologian, the philosopher comes to reflect on the fundamental questions about the purpose and meaning of life, about good and evil, about happiness and suffering, about death and the afterlife, and he no longer thinks that only he can offer a complete answer to these problems. The theologian, for his part, needs the philosopher in order to learn how to use his reason with rigor and insight as he investigates the human dimensions of action and to provide him with the necessary categories and language for a sound explanation of the riches of the Gospel and the Christian experience. This sort of association between philosophy and theology is based on St Thomas' maxim: *Gratia non tollit, sed perficit naturam*, which could be rephrased: theology does not destroy, but perfects philosophy. In our opinion, however, the principle should not be understood in the sense that philosophy, as a work of reason, must first be constructed while saying to oneself that in any case it will be confirmed by grace, but rather in the opposite sense: we must have the boldness to believe in the Word of God and to abandon ourselves to grace, in the assurance that, far from destroying whatever is true, good and reasonable in philosophy, grace will teach us how to make it our own, to develop it and to perfect it, while revealing to us a broader and more profound wisdom than any human thought, the wisdom given by the Holy Spirit who unites us with the person of Christ and his Cross by teaching us to “live in Christ” (“The Place of Philosophy in Moral Theology,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 16, 1999, 15).

⁶⁸ “Together, in fact, they answer a question which arises from man's spiritual nature: what is the true good or genuine happiness? Enlightened by Revelation, the theologian perceives that this spontaneous desire can be fulfilled only by the vision of God because of the openness of the human intellect and will to the infinite. Hence the famous argument about the natural desire to see God, which is the mainspring of St Thomas' reasoning on this subject. Regarding this vocation, philosophy is both necessary and inadequate. It can neither attain nor even consider such a totally gratuitous and truly supernatural happiness. But although the theologian knows of the call to happiness in God by faith, he still cannot show the paths leading to it without the work of reason, without a philosophical reflection on acts and virtues” (ibid., 14).

⁶⁹ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 13; cf. Benedict XVI, who insists that faith is capable of protecting reason “from every temptation to mistrust its own capacities” (“On Aquinas, Philosophy and Theology,” General Audience, 16 June 2010, *Zenit*).

Thomas than to Kant, who denies such knowledge.⁷⁰ Yet Barth evades the question of what fallen man can and should know. His refusal to see grace “doubly” as *gratia creans* and *gratia sanans*, with *gratia elevans* as the final cause of both, backs him into a corner. Either nature is a sphere outside of grace and therefore independent of it—whether in Catholic or Protestant form, this view is entirely untenable and can barely attain even to Kant—or nature is altogether absorbed by grace in supralapsarian fashion. While Barth whole-heartedly rejects the former error, he cannot escape the latter. Thus even his ecclesiology becomes prey to occasionalism, which helps to account for his readiness to oppose tradition.⁷¹

But did Barth really need to adopt the stance the *Vaticanum* anathematizes? The conciliar fathers, by declining to absolve fallen man of responsibility to acknowledge the existence of the one true God, did not thereby posit a God other than the one Paul identified as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Just the opposite. By holding fallen man accountable for such truth about God as can be perceived even “in the things that have been made,” it maintained the unity of that man with the man whom Christ came to save. And no objection should be made here to their appeal to the natural light of reason, for it is not reason that is fallen but the man who reasons. In announcing the good news that he *may* reason rightly, it is also announced that he *is* reasoning wrongly when he denies the one true God, even when he is reasoning not from the gospel but in advance of it.

⁷⁰ Eugene Rogers argues in *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1995) for the basic compatibility of the two, furthering the trajectory of Hans Urs von Balthasar in *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 3d ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 3d ed., 1992). The latter observes, however, that “Barth never leaves the standpoint of pure theology and never sketches out a philosophy as such or a metaphysics that could bridge the divide between theology and philosophy” (36). Barth was concerned “with deflecting the constant threat of philosophy’s encroachments into the field of theology. If he rallied behind Thomism, it was only on two specific points: (1) that there is an authentic creaturely freedom, but that (2) it remains subordinate to the all-determining freedom of God. But he immediately renounced these statements when they purported to be philosophical, for then they threatened to trap theology in a narrow pen. Why? Because then they became anticipatory determinations about things that only the revelation of grace can establish and determine” (130f.).

⁷¹ The root of the problem lies in Barth’s conflation of ontology and soteriology, as I have argued elsewhere, not in what Ingolf Dalferth (*Theology and Philosophy* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988], chap. 10) calls his “method of interiorisation” and “interpretive meta-discourse,” admiration for which I share, the qualification implied by the present essay notwithstanding.

Barth of course was worried that any reasoning in advance of the gospel endangers the gospel by establishing conditions under which the gospel itself must be judged—a procedure epitomized in Kant's claim that talk of resurrection is simply morally useful fiction. It does not allow God to be God but requires him to be only such a God as man can conceive or construct for himself; in short, an idol. But Barth was mistaken. It does not follow from the fact that man can pervert knowledge of the one true God into idolatry that he has not got that knowledge in the first place. Nor does it follow that because God is triune, and known to be triune through his saving acts, that he cannot be known in his unity through his creative acts—albeit in a limited and no doubt dangerous way—by appeal to the *analogia entis*. That it is only under the conditions of the fall that such a dangerous way is attempted does not mean that the attempt itself is a perverse act. Quite the contrary. It is a perverse act when fallen man, not yet in full possession of the gospel of his triune Redeemer, or possessed by it, refuses even to acknowledge the existence and unity of God.

Again, it does not follow from the fact that God through word and sacrament produces an *analogia entis* based on *gratia sanans* that he has not produced—and maintained in spite of the fall—a lesser *analogia* based on *gratia creans*. It does not follow that to enquire after the lesser *analogia* is to posit an unreal distinction between the one God and the triune God. It does not follow from the fact that fallen man is sometimes inclined to do just that, with a view to avoiding the gospel, that the theologian is catering to this inclination by participating in a discussion of the lesser *analogia* (though of course he might be). And it is certainly not true that the lesser *analogia* is either lost or rendered inaccessible because of the fall; for God sends rain, literally and metaphorically, on both the just and the unjust.

This is the point at which Barth is most deeply entangled in the heresy of Luther, which is merely a permutation of the heresy of Ockham. Ockham thought that reason and revelation were fundamentally disparate sources of human knowledge, and proposed to reconcile them by taking the latter as raw data received on authority from the Church but interpreted or rendered meaningful (so far as they were capable of meaning) by philosophical reason.⁷² Luther, for his part, rightly sought the mean-

⁷² Ockham is unlike Kant in allowing that theology has real content, even if that content is the delivery of faith rather than of reason. He is unlike Barth because he does not allow for a mode of knowing in theology that is at once trustful, experiential, intellective, and scientific. He is unlike Thomas, in that he isolates theology from philosophy and allows them to be, *de facto* if not *de jure*, in competition. (On his relation to Thomas, cf. Alfred Freddoso, "Ockham on Faith and

ing of revealed truths within themselves, but wrongly disparaged *both* the authority of the Church *and* the authority of reason. If the disparaging of the authority of the Church made possible Kant's radical extension and revision of Ockham's program, the disparaging of both (that is, of reason also) made possible Barth's adventure in theological totalism, which does not know how to grant philosophy its place, except as something which need not be feared because no final commitment is owed it. This may be an improvement on Luther—Barth after all was a Calvinist—but it is only a modest improvement.

We may however agree with Barth that God's embrace of human beings, so as to elevate them beyond their natural creaturely capacities, equipping them for communion with himself and for authentic personhood, is something that philosophical theology cannot know on its own, nor yet make its own, without passing over into the care of revealed theology. *Gratia elevans*, which in view of the fall proceeds by way of *gratia sanans* to the fulfillment of the divine purposes already operative in *gratia creans*, is accessible to human reason only as the latter is aided by revelation and by the faith it evokes.⁷³ Barth gets it about right—even if he does not get Thomas quite right—in the following passage, which is worth quoting at length:

God takes up the cause of the creature, the reality distinct from Himself, in such a way that He accepts it as a reality and intervenes for it in recognition, not in suspension, of its reality. For it as such, He is

Reason," chap. 5 in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999]).

⁷³ Not that Barth would put it this way. Balthasar quotes the early Barth to similar effect, however, noting that theology "holds the position 'toward which the true philosopher will necessarily point (his pointer is the culminating pinnacle of his own work, when he has reached the end of his legitimate reflections; this termination then points to the place occupied by theology) . . . even if as a philosopher he does not draw on theology for his own work'" (Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 149; quoting *Zwischen den Zeiten* [1927]: 206). The later Barth, too, allows "that philosophy can legitimately pose the question of God as well as of the authentic created nature of the world and the problem of becoming that this entails"—that "this question 'at the very least lies at that unsettling periphery and borderline of its picture of the world'" (Balthasar; quoting *CD* 3.1 341). Of course he also insists that any philosophical world view "distinguished by a clear and genuine genealogy must necessarily cease to be a mere world-view. At the decisive juncture it must necessarily become identical with the Christian doctrine of creation." That is, it must "become theological at this point, and base itself on the datum of divine revelation"; while the doctrine of creation, for its part, "cannot itself become a world-view," nor "base itself on any world-view," nor "guarantee any world-view" (*CD* 3.1 343f.). We will return to this dialectic in a moment.

severe with Himself. He suffers for it. He sacrifices His only Son for it. He does it for the creature as such—which means that God’s mercy does not act in such a way as to overpower and blot out its object. God does not take the place of the creature in such a way as to annihilate it. That He takes its plight to His own heart does not mean that He robs it of its independent life, making the latter a mere potentiality or recollection in His own life. The encounter of His eternal love with the creature existing in space and time does not imply the utter dissolution of its space and time and therefore of its existence as such. The fact that God in His mercy intervenes for it must be understood in the full sense of the two words “for” and “it” in such a way, therefore, that this divine intervention for the creature does not exclude but includes its independent life—whatever the encounter with God may entail for that life—so that the atoning will of God maintains His will and act as the Creator: “What our God has created He will also uphold, and sooner or later control by His grace.” He will control it—but not in such a way that grace means the catastrophic destruction of nature. It means radical judgment upon nature. It means its radical transformation and renewal. But it does not mean its violent end. In this sense we must admit the truth of that maxim of Thomas Aquinas which is so often put to dangerous use and in the first instance was no doubt dangerously meant: *gratia non tollit (non destruit) sed (praesupponit et) perficit naturam*.⁷⁴

We ought not to concede, however, that it was dangerously meant in the first instance. If the *Summa* both allows and expects of pre- and even anti-Christian man a certain inalienable knowledge of God and of the natural order, it does not ever allow to such knowledge the final or controlling word on either. The *Summa*’s tripartite structure—*prima*: God, *secunda*: Man, *tertia*: the God-man—draws this general and confused knowledge, which philosophy already helps in small part to clarify, into the specific, lucid, and saving knowledge that is mediated by Christ and organized with philosophical as well as theological rigor. “The light of faith, which is gratuitously infused into our minds, does not destroy the natural light of cognition, which is in us by nature”; but it does indeed refract that light through the prism of revelation.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ CD 2.1 411.

⁷⁵ Balthasar tries very hard to read Barth in this Thomist light, notwithstanding the fact that “Barth’s starting point is entirely different from that of Thomism” (*The Theology of Karl Barth*, 131). Working with the theological anthropology of CD 3.2, he argues that “philosophy in this context is to theology as the abstract is to the concrete and [as] possibility is to reality” (151). “Theological anthropology can and may abstract as long as it comes from the concrete and returns to it” (155). “So long as it is really the abstraction of this concretion, the possibility of this reality, it is legitimate and has its own truth” (151).

5. *Philosophia Christiana*?

For Barth, philosophy has the basic questions asked and answered by theology as “its disturbing margin and border.”⁷⁶ Philosophy cannot cross that border without becoming theology, for what lies on the other side is not its own. But theology, apparently, can cross the border into the realm of philosophy—in much the same manner “as the Israelites did or should have done on their entry into Canaan: They had to invade Canaan, not as a foreign country which did not belong to them, but as the land of their fathers.”⁷⁷ For Thomas, on the other hand, this militaristic image is foreign. He envisions rather a cooperative and peaceful cohabitation along a respected border. But if we may ask Barth whether he thinks philosophy is really failed theology—and theology the philosophy that ought to have been, or at least its substitute⁷⁸—we may also ask Thomas a similar question: Is the peace he envisions really a peace maintained by independent disciplines, between which there is in fact a border, or has the need for a border all but disappeared? Does the *pax* or *pactum* between theology and philosophy mean that philosophy itself is somehow Christian? If so, is it still philosophy?

This brings us full circle to the question as to what philosophy is. We said that it is the pursuit of clarity about ourselves, our world, and our place in it, for the sake of the good life. It is important to say “for the sake of the good life,” lest philosophy (with its broad reach) be indistinguishable from the more abstract dimensions of other disciplines that inhabit the lower faculty. But if it is for the sake of the good life that philosophy does its work, seeking to discover from the universe, from human society, from the human mind itself, what is good or what makes for good, and where it cannot see good nevertheless to pursue the good of clarity—if

⁷⁶ CD 3.1 341.

⁷⁷ CD 2.2 522. The port of entry here is ethics. How to square this with the rejection at CD 1.2.731 of “a dictatorial, absolute and exclusive theology” is not immediately clear.

⁷⁸ Barth (CD 1.1 3ff.) indicates that there might in principle be *philosophia christiana*, though in practice it has never existed. Theology is a kind of substitute for it, or a necessary protest against the lack of it. Theology, as an academic enterprise distinct from the Church’s doxological action, comes into existence not because it has its own proper object of study—“all sciences might ultimately be theology,” by taking up “the criticism and correction of talk about God according to the criterion of the Church’s own principle”—but rather because this job has to be done, and is not being done elsewhere. Theology “cannot think of itself as a link in an ordered cosmos, but only as a stop-gap in a disordered cosmos” (10). A Thomist *responsio* might begin by asking whether this is really adequate to what Barth attempts in the *Dogmatics*, on which see further Balthasar.

philosophy, or the ideal of philosophy, is a patient search for truth and understanding out of an abiding love of the good—then it cannot do without some intuited or inherited sense of the good, however provisional and open to revision. It is all fine and well to say that the love of wisdom (*philosophia*) is the love of the good, or of the way to the good (for it is wisdom that helps us on our way), and even to say that this is the way of happiness, which all men want. But if philosophy is not to be vain and empty, or utterly confused and incapable of helping us along the way, it must already know something of the good. How else can it hope to discern or disclose the good, and to speak of man “both as he is and as he should be”?⁷⁹

Philosophy, viewed thus, cannot but have natural theology and natural law (or first philosophy and moral philosophy) as its proper horizons, for unless it is prepared to press its enquiry about the good and about its knowledge of the good through to first principles, its attempt to discern good and evil will be haphazard at best. Moreover, philosophy viewed thus will be open, not closed, to the kind of claim that arises from beyond those horizons in the form of revealed theology, even if it is not competent to judge everything that revealed theology has to say. Why? Because, especially at the level of first principles, it will be aware (if it is not Eunomian) of the fact that it does not know concretely but only abstractly; that its knowledge of the good, taken by itself, is deficient. Its approach to the good and to God, and so to man himself, requires to be augmented and corrected by a knowledge that is more adequate to God. As Thomas says:

In the system of philosophy, which considers creatures in themselves and from them leads on to the knowledge of God, the first study is of creatures and the last of God; but in the system of faith, which studies creatures only in their relation to God, the study is first of God and afterwards of creatures; and this is a more perfect view, and more like to the knowledge of God, who, knowing Himself, thence discerns other beings.⁸⁰

Much effort has been expended in modernity to argue otherwise, of course, often in the name of clarity, though perhaps more obviously out of resistance to Thomas’s conclusion that philosophy “should be subject to the measure of faith.” (We saw this in Kant, who denies that the “more perfect view” is possible.) But any attempt to isolate philosophy from theology is self-defeating. Far from assuring that philosophy retains its own vocation

⁷⁹ Kant (see note 2 above).

⁸⁰ *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.4. The final clause (*qui seipsum cognoscens alia intuetur*) and the construct as a whole may be accused of “onto-theology,” but only if what Thomas the theologian actually has to say about God is ignored.

and liberty as an act of reasoning from and about the world, it forces philosophy to transgress its vocation and to lose its liberty by becoming a sort of *faux* theology. Philosophy then tries to discover, not only in the universe and in human society, but ultimately in the mind or will itself, something that is not actually there: the Good that is the source of goodness; or, at all events, something that is good in itself without qualification.⁸¹

This latter kind of philosophy leads sooner or later to despair, despair even of reason. For it cannot find what it is looking for, and it can never lead to that which all men want. In refusing to learn of God from God, it cannot know the mind or heart of man either. In declining to hear of man's redemption, it cannot reckon with his fall, which is fatal to the whole enterprise of philosophy. For the fall skews the proper relation between is and ought, and our perception of that relation; it corrupts our sense of what is true and right. Plato, for want of the requisite revelation, may be mistaken in his construal of the κόσμος νοητός and the afterlife of the soul, but he is correct in saying that "a man must take with him into the world below an adamantine faith in truth and right."⁸² And whence arises this faith, if it is not merely blind, and therefore doubtful, but rather adamantine? It arises in response to what is known to be trustworthy. It arises in response to what has shown itself trustworthy. It arises, on the Christian account, in response to the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ, who is indeed ready to make us able "to learn and discern between good and evil."⁸³ One burden of revealed theology is to explain how it arises and how it is maintained, and thus to perfect philosophy by bringing it—precisely as human reason that begins with man and the world—into communion with divine reason, the reason that was with God in the beginning and for our sake came into the world.⁸⁴

Now this perfection is not a sublation. Revealed theology does not substitute for philosophy, nor philosophy for revealed theology. But no

⁸¹ When Kant says that "there is no possibility of thinking of anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be regarded as good without qualification, except a good will" (*Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, First Section), he is trying to avoid what he calls "misology"—hatred or distrust of reason. There is not room here to show why he does not succeed, but only to remark that reason is better served by saying with Jesus that "there is none good but God" (Mk 10:18). And to add that, if this were understood, the subsequent attempts by Fichte and Hegel et al. to put the human knower and willer where Thomas has the divine would be seen for what they really are: the impossible inflation of philosophy and the reason for its eventual collapse through despair of the good.

⁸² Plato, *Republic* 10, 619a (Jowett).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 618c.

⁸⁴ See John 1:1–18.

philosophy, whatever it communes with, can evade its responsibility to take certain decisions about the Good and the good life, for philosophy that denies itself any attempt to rise to a clearer knowledge of the good ceases to be philosophy.⁸⁵ And as these decisions are taken, it will necessarily take on the character that corresponds to them. If with Thomas, in contrast to Aristotle or Averroes, for example, the world is understood not only as having God as its cause but as having *this* God—the Holy Trinity—as its cause, philosophy’s act of reasoning, both in its selection of problems to which to attend and in its way of attending to them, will change. Even the meaning of “cause” will change, as will the meaning of being, unity, truth, freedom, goodness, etc., under the impact of the *analogia gratiae* that reforms and perfects the *analogia entis*. Logic will not change, but epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics will change because new light will be cast upon them. To receive and reflect that light is what it means to be subject to the measure of faith.

So in that sense it is quite right to speak of Christian philosophy, even of Augustinian or Thomist philosophy, just as it is right to speak of Greek or Enlightenment philosophy, even of Aristotelian, Kantian, or Heideggerian philosophy—to say nothing of Hindu or Buddhist philosophy. There is no philosophy *povera et nuda*. Yet to speak of Christian philosophy does not elide the distinction between philosophy and theology; neither is deprived of its own vocation, tasks, and liberties. It does not even decide in advance between philosophies. “In itself the term is valid,” says John Paul II, “but it should not be misunderstood: it in no way intends to suggest that there is an official philosophy of the Church, since the faith as such is not a philosophy. The term seeks rather to indicate a Christian way of philosophizing, a philosophical speculation conceived in dynamic union with faith.”⁸⁶ Which means a way of philosophizing that in reasoning from the world benefits from the light shed on the world by

⁸⁵ The attempt may be restricted or distorted by certain anti-metaphysical commitments, as in Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* or, more dramatically, in Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*. It may even be almost entirely implicit, rather than explicit, in a given enterprise. But every exercise of reason is directed by and to some perceived good, and philosophical reason—though it is not by itself sufficient for it—has no more definitive or indispensable task than to learn the discernment of good and evil.

⁸⁶ It should be noted that John Paul deploys “faith” here both in the sense of *fides qua* and of *fides quae*. Otherwise put, Christian philosophy has a subjective aspect, “in the sense that faith purifies reason,” and an objective aspect, in that revelation “clearly proposes certain truths which might never have been discovered by reason unaided.” These together “broaden reason’s scope for action” (*Fides et Ratio* §76; cf. §103).

special revelation; not a way of philosophizing that welcomes the unnatural and diseased hybrid (rejected by Thomas and Barth) that so often passes for theology today.

As soon as we speak of Christian philosophy, however, it becomes evident that what we are calling the *pax Thomistica* does not extend to every particular philosophy in the same way or to the same degree. How could it? The theologian will have both philosophical and theological reasons for preferring one to another, and will in any case have to insist on certain principles that make some partnerships impractical if not impossible; likewise the philosopher, who will not regard theology with indifference.⁸⁷ Yet the offer of peace can be extended from the side of theology to any philosophical endeavor insofar as it does not contradict, materially or methodologically, what (pace Descartes) is not for the Church actually in doubt; that is, what is known about man and the world through the knowledge of divine things, divinely revealed. And why should that offer not be welcomed, on the other side, by anyone who is not completely certain that it must be left to philosophy to determine the limits of human knowledge? Why indeed should it not be welcomed even by those who are certain? Whatever the illusions or misunderstandings of theology, whatever the vincible or invincible ignorance with which it may be charged, there is no denying that philosophy has frequently been in its debt and might become so again.

This peace is not merely a negative peace, a sort of toleration, but a positive and cooperative peace from which new possibilities emerge for both theology and philosophy. Witness again the subject of personhood, which (as I said) first emerged for theology and philosophy from discussion of the triune identity. Philosophy, in its various Græco-Roman forms, contributed terms or concepts such as οὐσία, ὑπόστασις and πρόσωπον. Christian theology contributed an understanding of Father, Son, and Spirit, drawn from the economy of revelation, that required a new configuration of these terms and concepts—uniting ὑπόστασις more closely to πρόσωπον, so that being and personhood might be mutually defining in an ontology of communion. And this in turn was used both for theological purposes (in ecclesiology, say) and for philosophical purposes (in thinking about language and psychology, rights and freedoms, and other anthropological issues that extend beyond the Church). The subject of being itself was transformed when it was understood that

⁸⁷ Regrettably, the task of showing how Barth and Aquinas agree and differ on the question of what theology is, and on what *philosophia christiana* is or might be—which ought to be pursued further just here—must instead be left to another occasion.

the being of God is irreducibly a being in communion.⁸⁸ For we do not learn from the study of being very much, perhaps, about what it means to be God; but from the study of God we learn a great deal about what it means to be. Or we may do so, by way of a christologically informed *analogia entis* that carries us beyond the apophatic and lends to the *via eminentiae* its rightful content.⁸⁹

If we do so, we inhabit the borderlands where philosophy and theology are not isolated or even competing disciplines, but semi-autonomous members of an intellectual commonwealth. Since that commonwealth exists in service to “the supremely cooperative, supremely ordered association of those who enjoy God and one another in God,”⁹⁰ the high knowledge it pursues requires “angels ascending and descending”—men and women doing the work of philosophy as of theology, but united (to one degree or another) in faith as in reason. And if few there be who, like Thomas, move with equal facility in both directions without becoming confused or disoriented, that only makes more evident the necessity and benefit of working together. N V

⁸⁸ It could hardly be otherwise, since the Incarnation requires not only that ontology make room for real relations in God (Ockham, *Sent.* 1.26.1; cf. Spade, *Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, 104f., 343ff.) but also that it make room for real relations in creation (on which see especially John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* [New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985]).

⁸⁹ I have remarked elsewhere on this rightful—that is, christological—content which makes possible true knowledge of God and of man (cf. “Apophatic Theology,” in vol. 1 of *Religion Past and Present* [Leiden: Brill, 2006]; *Ascension and Ecclesia* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999], 133–39; *Ascension Theology* [London: T&T Clark, 2011], 144ff.). It suffices here to quote *Fides et Ratio* §92: “The Truth, which is Christ, imposes itself as an all-embracing authority which holds out to theology and philosophy alike the prospect of support, stimulation and increase (cf. *Eph* 4:15).”

⁹⁰ Augustine, *City of God* 19.13.