THE HISTORY OF
WESTERN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

VOLUME 1: ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

VOLUME 2: MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

VOLUME 3: EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

VOLUME 4: NINETEENTH-CENTURY PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

VOLUME 5: TWENTIETH-CENTURY PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

THE HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Edited by Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis

VOLUME 3
EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* (1946; hereafter *History*) provides a model for *some* of the significant features of the present work. Like Russell's more general history, our history of Western philosophy of religion consists principally of chapters devoted to the works of individual thinkers, selected because of their "considerable importance". Of course, we do not claim to have provided coverage of all of those who have made important contributions to Western philosophy of religion. However, we think that anyone who has made a significant contribution to Western philosophy of religion has either seriously engaged with the works of philosophers who are featured in this work, or has produced work that has been a focus of serious engagement for philosophers who are featured in this work.

Like Russell, we have aimed for contributions that show how the philosophy of religion developed by a given thinker is related to that thinker's life, and that trace out connections between the views developed by a given philosopher and the views of their predecessors, contemporaries and successors. While our primary aim is to provide an account of the ideas, concepts, claims and arguments developed by each of the philosophers under consideration, we think – with Russell – that this aim is unlikely to be achieved in a work in which "each philosopher appears as in a vacuum".

Again like Russell, we have only selected philosophers or religious writers who belong to, or have exerted a significant impact on, the intellectual tradition of the West (i.e. western Europe and the Anglo-American world). We realize that this selection criterion alone excludes from our work a number of important thinkers and religious groups or traditions, such as: Asian philosophers of religion, particularly those representing such religions as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism; African philosophers of religion; and individuals, texts and traditions emanating from indigenous religions, such as those found in the native populations of Australia and the Pacific Islands. Clearly, the non-Western world has produced thinkers who have made important, and often overlooked, contributions

to the philosophy of religion. We have decided, however, not to include any entries on these thinkers, and our decision is based primarily on the (admittedly not incontestable) view that the Asian, African and indigenous philosophical and religious traditions have not had a great impact on the main historical narrative of the West. It would therefore have been difficult to integrate the various non-Western thinkers into the five-volume structure of the present work. The best way to redress this omission, in our view, is to produce a separate multi-volume work that would be dedicated to the history of non-Western philosophy of religion, a project that we invite others to take up.

Where we have departed most significantly from Russell is that our work has been written by a multitude of contributors, whereas Russell's work was the product of just one person. In the preface to his *History*, Russell claimed that:

> There is ... something lost when many authors co-operate. If there is any unity in the movement of history, if there is any intimate relation between what goes before and what comes later, it is necessary, for setting this forth, that earlier and later periods should be synthesized in a single mind. (1946: 5)

We think that Russell exaggerates the difficulties in, and underestimates the benefits of, having a multitude of expert contributors. On the one hand, someone who is an expert on the work of a given philosopher is bound to have expert knowledge of the relation between the work of that philosopher, what goes before and what comes after. On the other hand, and as Russell himself acknowledged, it is impossible for one person to have the expertise of a specialist across such a wide field. (Indeed, while Russell's *History* is admirable for its conception and scope, there is no doubt that it is far from a model for good historical scholarship.)

Of course, Russell's worry about a multiplicity of authors does recur at the editorial level: the editors of this work have no particular claim to expertise concerning any of the philosophers who are featured in the work. In order to alleviate this problem, we invited all of the contributors to read drafts of neighbouring contributions, acting on the assumption that someone who is an expert on a particular philosopher is likely to have reasonably good knowledge of contemporaries and near contemporaries of that philosopher. Moreover, each of the five volumes comes with an expert introduction, written by someone who is much better placed than we are to survey the time period covered in the given volume.

Obviously enough, it is also the case that the present work does not have the kind of narrative unity that is possessed by Russell's work. Our work juxtaposes contributions from experts who make very different theoretical assumptions, and who belong to diverse philosophical schools and traditions. Again, it seems to us that this represents an advantage: there are many different contemporary approaches to philosophy of religion, and each of these approaches suggests a different view about the preceding history. Even if there is "unity in the movement

of history", it is clear that there is considerable disagreement about the precise nature of that unity.

Although our work is divided into five volumes – and despite the fact that we have given labels to each of these volumes – we attach no particular significance to the way in which philosophers are collected together by these volumes. The order of the chapters is determined by the dates of birth of the philosophers who are the principal subjects of those chapters. While it would not be a task for a single evening, we do think that it should be possible to read the five volumes as a single, continuous work.

* * *

Collectively, our primary debt is to the 109 people who agreed to join with us in writing the material that appears in this work. We are indebted also to Tristan Palmer, who oversaw the project on behalf of Acumen. Tristan initially searched for someone prepared to take on the task of editing a single-volume history of Western philosophy of religion, and was actively involved in the shaping of the final project. He also provided invaluable advice on the full range of editorial questions that arise in a project on this scale. Thanks, too, to the copy-editors and others at Acumen, especially Kate Williams, who played a role in the completion of this project, and to the anonymous reviewers who provided many helpful comments. We are grateful to Karen Gillen for proofreading and indexing all five volumes, and to the Helen McPherson Smith Trust, which provided financial support for this project. We also acknowledge our debt to Monash University, and to our colleagues in the School of Philosophy and Bioethics. Special thanks to Dirk Baltzly for his suggestions about potential contributors to the volume on ancient Western philosophy of religion and for his editorial help with the chapter on Pythagoras.

Apart from these collective debts, Graham Oppy acknowledges personal debts to friends and family, especially to Camille, Gilbert, Calvin and Alfie. Nick Trakakis is also grateful for the support of family and friends while working on this project, which he dedicates to his nephew and niece, Nicholas and Adrianna Trakakis: my prayer is that you will come to share the love of wisdom cultivated by the great figures in these volumes.

Graham Oppy
Nick Trakakis

CONTRIBUTORS

David Adams is Professor of French Enlightenment Studies at the University of Manchester. He has published widely on the French Enlightenment, and on Diderot in particular. In addition to numerous articles, his books include *Diderot* (1986), a study of the author's early works, and a critical edition in translation of Diderot's *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature* (1999). He is also the author of a standard work of reference on Diderot, the two-volume *Bibliographie des œuvres de Denis Diderot, 1739–1900* (2000).

Peter Anstey is Professor of Early Modern Philosophy at the University of Otago, New Zealand. He has published widely in the field of early modern philosophy and, in particular, on the thought of Robert Boyle and John Locke. The topics of God and nature, the nature of causation and laws of nature, and the influence of Reformed theology on early modern natural philosophy are important focuses of his research. His books include *The Philosophy of Robert Boyle* (2000) and *The Science of Nature in the Seventeenth Century* (edited with J. Schuster, 2005). He is an associate editor of the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.

David Bell is Senior Lecturer in German Studies at the University of Manchester. His monograph *Spinoza in Germany* (1984) addresses the history of the reception of Spinoza's thought and examines the crucial role played by Lessing and the *Spinozastreit*, alongside the key contributions by Herder and Goethe in this process. He has also written on Goethe's religious thought and his poetic cycle, the *West-östlicher Divan*.

Peter Byrne is Professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion at King's College London. He is the author of *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion* (1989) and seven other books in ethics and philosophy of religion, including *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism* (1995), *The Moral Interpretation of Religion* (1998) and *Kant*

on God (2007). He is also editor of *Religious Studies: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion.*

Bernardo J. Canteñs is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. His areas of specialization are late medieval philosophy (Suárez), American philosophy, metaphysics and Hispanic issues. Recent publications include "The Relationship Between God and Essences and the Notion of Eternal Truths According to Francisco Suárez" (*The Modern Schoolman*, 2000), "Ultimate Reality in the Metaphysics of Francisco Suárez" (*Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 2002) and "What Kind of Beings (*entia*) Are Beings of Reason and What Kind of Being (*esse*) Do They Have? Suárez on Beings of Reason" (*American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 2003).

Benjamin Carter is an Honorary Fellow of the Department of Theology attached to the Network for Religion in Public Life, University of Exeter. He has published on Cudworth, the Cambridge Platonists and early modern philosophy and theology, and has written a monograph on Cudworth's Trinitarian theology for the Peeters series *Studies in Philosophical Theology*. Between 2003 and 2008 he taught history and philosophy at the University of Bristol. He is currently an Ordinand in the Church of England.

Jack D. Davidson is currently Visiting Assistant Professor at Rice University, Houston. He has written on Leibniz's conception of freedom and punishment in two early texts, how the biblical doctrine that humans are imitators of God influenced his account of freedom, Leibniz's commentary on Locke's conception of freedom, Leibniz's adjudication of the middle knowledge controversy, and his view that the source of moral wrongdoing is the intellect and not the will.

Theodor Dieter studied philosophy and Protestant theology in Heidelberg and Tübingen, writing his dissertation on "The Philosophical Theses of Luther's 'Heidelberg Disputation'" and his habilitation on "The Young Luther and Aristotle" (published together as *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles*, 2001). He taught systematic theology in Tübingen for many years, was appointed Research Professor at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg in 1994, and has served as Director of this Institute since 1998. His main areas of research are Luther's theology, Roman Catholic theology, ecumenical theology, the relations between philosophy and theology, and social ethics.

Mary G. Dietz is a member of the Faculty of Political Science and Gender Studies at Northwestern University and currently editor of *Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy.* Her areas of research in political theory include democratic theory, feminist theory and the history of Western political thought, with emphasis on Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Arendt. Among other works

on Machiavelli, Dietz has authored "Trapping the Prince: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception" (*American Political Science Review*, 1986) and "Working in Half-Truth: Habermas, Machiavelli, and the Milieu Proper to Politics" (in her *Turning Operations*, 2002).

Paul Draper is Professor of Philosophy at Purdue University. He has devoted much of his career to developing and defending various Humean arguments from evil against theism. He has also written several articles on the design argument, including "Hume's Reproduction Parody of the Design Argument" and "Cosmic Fine-Tuning and Terrestrial Suffering: Parallel Problems for Naturalism and Theism". A former President of the Society for Philosophy of Religion, he is editor of *Philo: A Journal of Philosophy*, co-editor of the second edition of *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* and editor of *God or Blind Nature? Philosophers Debate the Evidence.*

Marc Foglia studied at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, later publishing his PhD as *The Formation of Judgment in Montaigne* (2007). He taught for five years as an assistant professor in the history of philosophy and political philosophy at Paris-I Sorbonne. He contributed the article on Montaigne for the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and he presently works as a speechwriter and political advisor for the French government.

Eckart Förster is Professor of Philosophy, German, and the Humanities at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, and Honorary Professor of Philosophy at the Humboldt Universität Berlin. He is the author of *Kant's Final Synthesis* (2000), and editor of *Kant's Opus Postumum* (1993) and *Kant's Transcendental Deductions* (1989).

Roomet Jakapi is a Senior Researcher in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Tartu, Estonia. He is the author of many articles on George Berkeley's religious philosophy. He has published in the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, *The Modern Schoolman* and *Berkeley Studies.* He has translated Berkeley's *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* into Estonian and is the editor of the journal *Studia Philosophica Estonica.* His current research concentrates on various theological problems in early modern metaphysics.

Sang Hyun Lee is Kyung-Chik Han Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, and is the author of *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (1988), the editor of the *Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (2005), and a member of the editorial board of the Yale edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, as well as the editor of volume 21 of that edition.

Sharon Lloyd is Professor of Philosophy, Law and Political Science at the University of Southern California. She is the author of *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes's Leviathan* (1992) and *Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (2009). Formerly review editor of *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, she is editor of the *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* "*Special Issue on Recent Work on the Moral and Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*". Her blog, *Hobbes Today*, provides a forum for discussion of applications of Hobbes' moral and political philosophy to issues of contemporary concern.

Ryan Nichols is Professor of Philosophy at California State University Fullerton. He is the author of *Thomas Reid's Theory of Perception* (2007). His published papers include "Natural Philosophy and Its Limits in the Scottish Enlightenment" (*The Monist*, 2007), "Reid's Inheritance from Locke, and How He Overcomes It" (*Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 2003) and "Reid on Fictional Objects and the Way of Ideas" (*The Philosophical Quarterly*, 2002). He has guest edited a special issue of the *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* on Reid and serves on its board of editors.

Victor Nuovo is Charles A. Dana Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, Middlebury College and Senior Research Fellow, Harris Manchester College, Oxford. He is the editor of *John Locke* (2002) and *John Locke* (2009); and the author of *John Locke, The Philosopher as Christian Virtuoso* (forthcoming).

Michael A. Rosenthal is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Washington in Seattle. Some of his numerous articles include "Why Spinoza Chose the Hebrews: The Exemplary Function of Prophecy in the *Theological-Political Treatise*" (*History of Political Thought*, 1997), "Spinoza's Dogmas of Universal Faith and the Problem of Religion" (*Philosophy and Theology*, 2001) and "Spinoza's Republican Argument for Tolerance" (*Journal of Political Philosophy*, 2003). He is currently co-editing a volume of essays on the *Theological-Political Treatise*, and completing a monograph on the role of religion in Spinoza's political philosophy.

Gary Steiner is John Howard Harris Professor of Philosophy at Bucknell University, Lewisburg. He is the author of *Descartes as a Moral Thinker* (2004), *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents* (2005) and *Animals and the Moral Community* (2008).

Michael Sudduth is a lecturer in the philosophy department at San Francisco State University, where he also serves as the director of the department's Religion programme. His main area of philosophical interest is philosophy of religion, where he has focused on religious epistemology and natural theology. He has published numerous articles in philosophy of religion, including articles in *Faith and Philosophy*, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* and *Religious Studies*. His first book *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology* is forthcoming in 2009.

William David Wetsel is the author of *L'Écriture et le reste* (1981) and *Pascal and Disbelief* (1994), and co-editor of *Pascal, New Trends in Port-Royal Studies* (2002). He was President of the North American Society for Seventeenth-Century French Literature in 2001–2.

Roger White is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He specializes in epistemology and the philosophy of science. His work has focused on epistemological issues concerning probability and explanation in science. He has written on issues concerning the argument from design, particularly in connection with cosmology ("Fine-tuning and Multiple Universes" [*Noûs*, 2000]), and during 2006–2008 he contributed to an academic workshop on science and religion funded by the Mellon Foundation.

David Williams is Emeritus Professor of French at the University of Sheffield. He is a French Enlightenment specialist with particular interests in Voltaire and Condorcet. He is an ex-president of the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, a member of the editorial board of the *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, a vice-president of the editorial board of the new Oxford edition of Voltaire's *Complete Works*, and a research associate at the Voltaire Foundation. He has a major editorial role in the *Complete Works* project, and his most recent critical editions (2008) of Voltairean essays and treatises relating to religion include *Du Fanatisme* and *Sur le théisme*.

Ilya Winham is a doctoral student working on Machiavelli in the Department of Political Science at the University of Minnesota.

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JOHN CALVIN

Michael Sudduth

The French Genevan reformer John Calvin (1509–64) holds an important place in the development of the theology of the Protestant Reformation. Building on insights articulated by other reformers such as Philipp Melanchthon, Martin Bucer and Huldrych Zwingli, Calvin is perhaps best known for his careful and penetrating biblical exegesis and the production of a compendium of Christian theology that strongly influenced the emergence of Reformed orthodoxy in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Calvin's teachings on divine providence and predestination, the doctrine of sin and the Christian's union with Christ were among his influential contributions to Reformed theology. But Calvin is also known for his doctrine of the natural knowledge of God, roughly, the idea that human beings have some knowledge of God from the light of nature and independent of scriptural revelation. The relationship between this doctrine and traditional natural theology (i.e. arguments for the existence and nature of God) has been a point of controversy among Calvin commentators and philosophical theologians in the Protestant tradition. In this entry I outline this controversy and show why Calvin should be regarded as having made an important, positive contribution to natural theology.

INTRODUCTION

Calvin's educational background and theological work

The structure of Calvin's thought and his influence as a Protestant reformer must be viewed in the light of his own intellectual development and background as a humanist thinker educated in classical literature and law.[1] In 1523, at fourteen

1. The historical information in this section of the paper is drawn from Battles (1996: 47–85), Wendel (1963: 15–68) and Steinmetz (1995: 3–22).

years of age, Calvin began his college education (ostensibly in preparation for the priesthood) in Paris at the Collège de la Marche. Here Calvin came under the instruction of the Latinist and rhetorician Mathurin Cordier, an important influence on the development of Calvin's Latin writing style and an inspiration for the pedagogy Calvin sought to implement in the schools in Geneva many years later. Calvin's stay at the Collège de la Marche was brief, though, and within several months he transferred to the Collège de Montaigu, where he completed his licentiate in arts in 1527. Beginning in 1528 Calvin took up the study of civil law, first at the University of Orléans and then at the University of Bourges, universities where Calvin was taught by influential legal scholars of the day such as Pierre de l'Estoile and Andrea Alciati. Calvin's humanist educational background was evident in his first published book, a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* (On clemency; 1532). Calvin's Seneca commentary demonstrated his acquaintance with classical culture, history and philosophy, but also revealed the philological skills on which he would later rely to produce an impressive series of commentaries on nearly the entire Bible.

Calvin's conversion and break from the Catholic Church, some time between 1532 and 1534, precipitated the redirection of his humanist education and skills toward the efforts of Protestant reform. Calvin directed these efforts initially in Geneva (1536–8), for a short period of time in Strasbourg (1538–41), and then again in Geneva (1541–64), where he served as pastor until his death. In 1536 he published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which functioned as both an introductory theology text and a defence of the Protestant reform movement. Modelled largely on Luther's catechisms, the *Institutes* would undergo significant expansion and many revisions over the years, first during Calvin's Strasbourg years and later in Geneva, by which time the text had blossomed into a complete theological compendium. The 1559 Latin edition (1560 French edition) arguably represents Calvin's culminating and definitive theological statement. On returning to the pastorate in Geneva in 1541, Calvin embarked on a rigorous schedule of in-depth preaching on various parts of the Bible. He had already produced an important commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (in 1540), which allowed him to provide a thorough exegetical engagement with the doctrine of justification by faith, a pillar of Reformation theology. Before his death in 1564, Calvin would produce commentaries on twenty-four of the books of the Old Testament and all but three books of the New Testament, as well as a large number of treatises on theological topics such as predestination, the sacraments and church polity.

Calvin's ambivalence toward philosophical theology

Since Calvin's primary interests were in biblical exposition and in the development of an ostensibly biblically controlled theology, the interests of 'philosophical theology' and 'philosophy of religion' appear foreign to both the letter and

spirit of Calvin's theology. Not surprisingly, Calvin's attitude toward philosophical enquiry about God ranges from disinterest to hostile criticism. His assessment of what the pagan philosophers have achieved with respect to the knowledge of divine things is bleak, partly because of the distorting effects of sin on the human intellect and partly because the pagans lacked the illumination of Scripture. The medieval scholastics, too, despite their possession of the Bible, were a frequent target of Calvin's criticisms. Calvin's humanist background no doubt contributed to his largely negative assessment of philosophical enquiry as represented by 'the Schoolmen'. However, he also saw in the scholastic use of human reason the resources for theological doctrines he judged to be without biblical warrant, if not incompatible with the teachings of Scripture. His general opposition to rational speculation about God is fundamentally rooted in his belief in the incomprehensibility of God, which renders reason intrinsically incapable of knowing the divine essence. Hence, beyond the defects of reason incurred by the Fall, reason has a crucial boundary imposed by the creator–creature distinction. Finally, Calvin's interest in the 'knowledge of God' is governed by a powerful ethical orientation. The knowledge of God should engender and sustain love and worship of God, not simply satisfy our intellectual curiosity or some set of theoretical interests.

However, despite Calvin's widely advertised opposition to philosophical enquiry about God, there are aspects to Calvin's thought that suggest a more optimistic conclusion concerning the interface between philosophy and the Christian faith. Calvin does quote approvingly from pagan philosophers such as Plato, Seneca and Cicero. His concept of God at least unconsciously appropriates aspects of the Greek philosophical tradition, largely mediated through patristic theology, especially that of Augustine (*see* Vol. 1, esp. Ch. 18). However, the most important connection between Calvin and philosophy of religion is found in Calvin's discussion of the natural knowledge of God, most systematically developed in the opening chapters of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The idea that there are truths about God that may be known by human reason, without the light of Scripture, divine revelation or dogmatic theology, is an essential epistemological presupposition of natural theology, the project of developing rational arguments for the existence and nature of God. Given the importance of natural theology to the philosophy of religion, a proper evaluation of Calvin's views at this juncture will illuminate his position on, and potential contributions to, the nature and role of philosophical enquiry about God.

THE NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

In the opening chapters of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (hereafter *Institutes*), John Calvin claimed, "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity … God himself has implanted in all men

a certain understanding of his divine majesty" (*Institutes* 1.3.1).[2] Closely related to this *sensus divinitatis* (sense of divinity) is an external manifestation of God in creation. God "not only sowed in men's minds that seed of religion of which we have spoken but revealed himself and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe. As a consequence, men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him" (1.5.1). This knowledge is aptly designated a *natural* knowledge of God. It is derived from "the order of nature" (1.2.1), and Calvin links it to "natural instinct" (1.3.1) and the "light of nature" (1.3.2). Furthermore, he says that it is "naturally implanted" (1.3.3), "by nature engraven" (1.4.4), "taught by nature" (1.5.12), and "sown in [men's] minds out of the wonderful workmanship of nature" (1.5.15). So Calvin affirms both a *sensus divinitatis* and knowledge of God derived from the *opera Dei* (God's works – of creation and providence).

Like other reformers (e.g. Melanchthon, Bucer and Vermigli) Calvin's acceptance of a natural knowledge of God was based on his exegesis of Scripture, especially Romans 1 and 2:

> God is in himself invisible; but as his majesty shines forth in his works and in his creatures everywhere, men ought in these to acknowledge him, for they clearly set forth their maker ... He does not mention all the particulars which may be thought to belong to God; but he states, that we can arrive at the knowledge of his eternal power and divinity, for he who is the framer of all things, must necessarily be without beginning and from himself. (Calvin 1979b: 70)[3]

Calvin is careful to contrast the natural knowledge of God with knowledge of God that is given by way of sacred Scripture (*Institutes* 1.2.1, 1.6.1). Whereas the natural knowledge of God is the knowledge of God as creator, Scripture communicates knowledge of God as both creator and redeemer. Since the latter is necessary for salvation, the natural knowledge of God is both incomplete and non-saving. Moreover, as will be discussed below, Calvin's doctrine of sin provides another important constraint on the knowledge of God available from nature. Not everything that can *in principle* be known about God from nature may be known *in fact* because of the effects of sin on the human mind. Scripture, then, not only augments but also corrects the natural knowledge of God. Hence, for Calvin, the primary function of the natural knowledge of God is to establish the moral inexcusability of the human race (1.5.14–15). Since God has revealed himself, if there is ignorance of God, the ignorance is culpable.

2. All quotations from Calvin's *Institutes* are from Calvin (1960), cited by book, chapter and paragraph numbers.
3. See Steinmetz (1995) for an account of the exegesis of Romans 1 and 2 among other Protestant reformers.

Calvin's affirmation of natural knowledge of God marks an important point of continuity between Calvin and earlier theologians of the patristic and medieval periods (e.g. John Chrysostom, Augustine, John of Damascus, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas). In fact, since Calvin draws heavily on classical sources such as Cicero's *De natura deorum* (On the nature of the gods), there is arguably continuity between Calvin and the larger Western philosophical tradition. Of course, Western philosophy and philosophical theology have often emphasized rational *arguments* for the existence and nature of God: so-called *natural theology*. Should Calvin's affirmation of natural knowledge of God be read as an endorsement of natural theology? Calvin commentators have not spoken with one voice here. One tier of the debate is largely epistemological: according to Calvin, is the natural knowledge of God inferential? The other tier of the debate is at least partly theological: does the influence of sin in the human personality negate, distort or significantly limit the knowledge of God that would otherwise be acquired from the natural order? The prospects for natural theology in Calvin depend on the answers given to each of these questions.

TWO INTERPRETATIONS OF CALVIN'S ACCOUNT OF THE NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Beginning with the earliest abridgments to Calvin's *Institutes* in the latter part of the sixteenth century, Calvin commentators have typically interpreted Calvin's account of the natural knowledge of God as at least including an inferential element, specifically inferences to the attributes of God from empirically accessible features of the world such as its beauty and order.[4] While the *sensus divinitatis* refers to the nearly universal conviction that there is some sort of divinity, by means of God's manifestation of himself in creation we are able to *infer* the goodness, wisdom and providential power of this deity. On this traditional view the natural knowledge of God is both naturally *implanted* and *acquired* discursively from observable features of the world. Traditionally, this has provided a two-step justification for natural theology. First, by virtue of affirming a *natural* knowledge of God, Calvin accepts a crucial epistemological presupposition of natural theology, namely, the epistemic accessibility of the divine being. Secondly, the natural knowledge of God acquired from the *opera Dei* entails that the divine being is epistemically accessible by way of logical inference. This second point is crucial. It links Calvin's discussion of natural *knowledge* of God to the more specific project of theistic *argument*. Either Calvin's account of the acquired natural knowledge of God involves the actual presentation of theistic arguments or the arguments of

4. See Dowey (1994: 72–81), Sudduth (1995), Warfield (2000: 39–44), Adams (2001: 280–92) and Muller (2003a: 275; 2003b: 173–4).

natural theology formalize inferential elements in the natural knowledge of God. So Calvin either explicitly or implicitly endorses natural theology.

However, despite the long-standing and widespread acceptance of the traditional interpretation of Calvin, a number of twentieth-century philosophers of religion have proposed that Calvin's account of the natural knowledge of God can plausibly be interpreted as involving no inferential element at all.[5] As they see things, for Calvin the natural knowledge of God is exclusively immediate. We simply have an innate disposition to form various theistic beliefs, and these beliefs are formed when the disposition is trigged by experiential circumstances such as the observation of the beauty or orderly nature of the cosmos. The position does not deny the conceptual mediacy of the natural knowledge of God, nor that the knowledge of God is mediated by creation in some way. The idea is rather that we do not arrive at belief in God by way of argument or inference from other beliefs or knowledge. The *opera Dei* trigger an innate disposition to believe in God. They do not form the content of beliefs from which we infer truths about God. So natural knowledge of God is analogous to widely held accounts of sensory perceptual knowledge, knowledge of other minds and knowledge of self-evident truths. The knowledge is spontaneously and non-inferentially formed in us in certain experiential circumstances. This interpretation of Calvin undercuts the traditional justification for natural theology by removing the inferential element in the natural knowledge of God. Some authors argue that the immediacy of the natural knowledge of God at least partly explains Calvin's alleged rejection of theistic arguments.[6]

CALVIN AND THEISTIC ARGUMENTS

Advocates of the non-traditional interpretation of Calvin emphasize that Calvin provides nothing like Aquinas' Five Ways, nor the philosophical argumentation of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, René Descartes or Samuel Clarke. This seems correct. However, unless we adopt a fairly narrow conception of inference or argument, this fact does little to prove that Calvin presents no theistic arguments at all, much less that he construes the natural knowledge of God as exclusively non-inferential in character.

Rhetorical and demonstrative types of natural theology

John Platt (1982) and Richard Muller (2003a,b) have each carefully documented the distinction in early Protestant theology between *rhetorical* theistic arguments

5. See Parker (1959: 9 n.1), Plantinga (1980; 2000: 171–7), Hoitenga (1991: 155–7) and Helm (1997: 180–82).
6. See LeCerf (1949: 242–5), Parker (1959: 7–9) and Helm (1997: 181–2).

(arguments from universal consent, providence, simple appeal to design) and *demonstrative* theistic arguments (arguments from final and efficient causality).[7] The latter kinds of argument would eventually dominate Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophical theology. Whether as a result of their humanist training or practical desiderata, the reformers shared a preference for more rhetorically styled theistic arguments classically expressed in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, an important influence on the Reformation doctrine of the natural knowledge of God. The fundamental goal of rhetorical arguments is to persuade, not to satisfy the demands of philosophical clarity and syllogistic rigour. Calvin must be read over against this background of the Reformation preference for a particular kind and style of argumentation. Hence, while "no long or toilsome proof [*demonstratio*] is needed to elicit the evidences [*testimonia*] that illuminate and affirm the divine majesty" (*Institutes* 1.5.9), the knowledge of God is inferentially acquired from the *opera Dei* and may be set forth by way of argument.

Calvin's innumerable evidences and theistic inferences

Calvin speaks of the "innumerable evidences (*documenta*)" in the fabric of the world that declare the wisdom, power and goodness of God. These evidences are drawn from careful observation in astronomy, medicine, and the natural sciences, as well as the more obvious evidences of design in the cosmos that are available to the uneducated, for example the movement and structure of the celestial bodies. "Likewise," he says:

> in regard to the structure of the human body one must have the greatest keenness in order to weigh, with Galen's skill, its articulation, symmetry, beauty, and use. But yet, as all acknowledge, the human body shows itself to be a composition so ingenious that its Artificer is rightly judged a wonder-worker. (*Institutes* 1.5.2)

Notice that Calvin does not say that these evidences declare the *existence* of God. These innumerable evidences declare the attributes of a being whose existence is already known by way of a *sensus divinitatis*.

How exactly does the physical world show or declare God's wisdom, power and goodness? With respect to Psalm 19, Calvin says: "David shows how it is that the heavens proclaim to us the glory of God, namely, by openly bearing testimony that they have not been put together by chance but were wonderfully created by the Supreme Architect" (1979c: vol. 4, 309). How do they bear such testimony? Not by automatically engendering theistic beliefs, but by exhibiting the properties of

7. For a detailed examination of the historical evolution of such arguments in the Reformed tradition, see Sudduth (forthcoming: ch. 1).

order and beauty that are taken as indications of intelligence, power and goodness. The Psalmist is said "to extol the matchless wisdom God has shown in creating the heavens; for the sun, moon, and stars are not confusedly mixed together, but each has its own position and station assigned to it, and their manifold courses are regulated" (*ibid.*: vol. 4, 305). Consequently knowledge of God is *derived from* the contemplation of these features of the world, not merely *occasioned by* the experience of them. There is a logical relation between order and the divine attributes. The inference may be spontaneous, but it is an inference nonetheless, depending on beliefs to the effect that the world exhibits order, beauty and utility in the arrangement of things, and that these properties are indications of wisdom, goodness and power.

Calvin summarized the natural theistic inference in his commentary on Romans:

> God has presented to the minds of all the means of knowing him, having so manifested himself by his works, that they must see what of themselves they seek not to know – that there is some God; for the world does not exist by chance, nor could it have proceeded from itself. (1979b: 71)

Calvin here alludes to the design argument, on which he elaborates with greater detail in the *Institutes* 1.5.2–3, 6–8, and in his commentaries on Psalms 19 and 104. The inference to God takes the form of a disjunctive argument that eliminates chance and natural principles as alternative explanations for the data in question.

Finally, Calvin finds a sanction for theistic arguments in Paul's preaching to pagans in the Book of Acts. When confronting the people of Lystra in Acts 14, Paul proved the oneness and providence of God by way of "natural arguments" (*naturalibus argumentis*). Although Paul did not rigorously reason "after the manner of philosophers", since his audience was not highly educated, Calvin claims that Paul nonetheless relied on the principle that "in the order of nature there is a certain and evident manifestation of God" (1979a: 19, cf. 16). Paul develops and clarifies this manifestation by way of arguments. Similarly, in connection with Paul's appearance before the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in Acts 17, Calvin says that Paul "showeth by natural arguments (*naturalibus argumentis*) who and what God is, and how He is rightly worshipped" (*ibid.*: 154). Calvin adds, "Furthermore, because he hath to deal with profane men, he draweth proofs from nature itself; for in vain he should have cited the testimonies of Scripture" (*ibid.*: 157–8).

Melanchthon and Calvin

One can better appreciate the link between logical argument and Calvin's appeal to testimonies to God in nature by comparing Calvin's account with Melanchthon's

treatment of the natural knowledge of God. In his 1532 *Commentary on Romans* (of which Calvin was both familiar and spoke favourably), Melanchthon affirms the natural knowledge of God: "For in some manner reason naturally understands and possesses signs (*signa*) and arguments (*argumenta*) collected from God's works in the whole of natural order. Hence we infer (*rationcinamur*) the existence of God, by whom the natural order was founded" ([1532] 1965: 73, trans. in Platt 1982: 18–19). Melanchthon adds that this ability to draw inferences about God from the created order depends on a preconception (*prolepsis*) of God naturally implanted in the human heart. Although Melanchthon briefly listed some examples of the *signa* and *argumenta* in the 1532 edition of his Romans commentary, in the 1540 edition he greatly expanded his treatment, listing nine arguments for the existence and nature of God. Most of these arguments are rhetorically styled arguments, but at least two are metaphysical and demonstrative in character. The rhetorically styled arguments follow a general pattern: (i) there is some observational datum *O*; (ii) *O* could not have come about through chance; therefore (iii) some intelligent, powerful or good being is the cause of *O*.

The similarities between Melanchthon and Calvin at this juncture should be clear. Calvin's appeal to the movement of the heavenly bodies, the arrangement of the parts of the human body and the punishment of wrongdoers in society forms the essential content of nine of Melanchthon's theistic arguments. In Melanchthon, however, the inferential nature of appeals to cosmic and social order is seen in clear relief because these rhetorical arguments are placed alongside causal or metaphysical arguments, which were the stock-in-trade of natural theology in the medieval period. This is obscured by Calvin's omission of the metaphysical proofs and his exclusive concentration on rhetorical arguments grounded in the Stoic tradition and expressed in Cicero's *De natura deorum*. Nonetheless, sixteenth-century readers would have recognized the continuities between Calvin and Melanchthon at this juncture.

Immediacy and inference

It is important to clarify that on the traditional interpretation the natural knowledge of God is not exclusively inferential, for there is a distinction between the *sensus divinitatis* and the external witness. Some knowledge of God (e.g. a creator who ought to be worshipped) is naturally implanted in us by nature. This *sensus divinitatis* can be taken as immediate knowledge, but it is fairly minimal in content. As Dowey (1994) indicates, Calvin introduces the divine attributes of wisdom, power and goodness only in connection with the visible manifestation of God in creation (*Institutes* 1.5), not in the context of the affirmation of the *sensus divinitatis* (1.3). While the attributes of God are plausibly contained in the concept of God as creator, the idea of God implicated in the *sensus divinitatis* needs to be tethered to the revelation of God in creation. Inferences from creation serve both to confirm and refine a native belief in God. These inferences presuppose

an antecedent *sensus divinitatis*.[8] From this vantage point, the project of natural theology reflectively elaborates and systematically develops the natural knowledge of God. Yet this knowledge first comes to people in a spontaneous manner in their experience of and reflection on the world. Natural theology as theistic argument presupposes natural theology as natural knowledge of God.

THE NOETIC EFFECTS OF SIN

While it would appear that Calvin unambiguously asserts that human beings possess some natural knowledge of God, even an inferential natural knowledge of God, a sanction for natural theology in Calvin also depends on Calvin's understanding of the relationship between the natural knowledge of God and the noetic effects of sin.

Calvin and the noetic effects of sin

Calvin argued that inherited and personal sin corrupts the *sensus divinitatis* and blinds human beings from seeing the revelation of God in the created order. Calvin speaks of this knowledge as "the primal and simple knowledge to which the very order of nature would have led us *if Adam had remained upright*" (*Institutes* 1.2.1). This suggests that the natural knowledge of God is a reality only before the Fall of Adam and the entrance of sin into the world. After discussing the corruption of the natural knowledge of God due to the "blindness of the human mind", Calvin says, "if men were taught only by nature, they would hold to nothing certain or solid or clear-cut, but would be so tied to confused principles as to worship an unknown god" (1.5.12). Calvin ends the discussion of the natural knowledge of God by saying, "men soon corrupt the seed of the knowledge of God, sown in their minds out of the wonderful workmanship of nature", and "we lack the natural ability to mount up unto the pure and clear knowledge of God" (1.5.15). The chapter that follows the discussion of the natural knowledge of God and its corruption by sin asserts the necessity of Scripture as a guide, not merely to knowledge of God as redeemer but equally to rectify the knowledge of God as creator.

On the basis of this sort of textual evidence, some prominent Calvin commentators, including Karl Barth, Peter Barth, G. C. Berkouwer and T. H. L. Parker,

8. For example, knowledge of God as creator presupposes a being with power, but it does not analytically entail the exercise of power in providential control over the world. When Calvin speaks of the power of God manifested in the created order, it is typically power exercised in providence (*Institutes* 1.16.1–3). So the visible works of creation may be viewed as augmenting the content of a preconception of God implanted in human nature. Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.13, and Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* (Against the professors) 9.61.

conclude that, according to Calvin, the natural knowledge of God is nothing more than an abstract *possibility* for fallen and sinfully corrupted human reason.[9] According to these thinkers, Calvin maintained that the noetic effects of sin have *in fact* completely extinguished the natural knowledge of God. So there is no basis in Calvin for any *actual* natural theology. However, the plausibility of such an argument depends crucially on just how we understand Calvin's view of the epistemic consequences of sin.

The knowledge of God

To this end, it is important to be clear about just what Calvin *means* by 'knowledge of God'. He begins his entire discussion on humanity's knowledge of God in the *Institutes* by clarifying this.

> Now, the knowledge of God, as I understand it, is that by which we not only conceive that there is a God, but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know of him. Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where this is no religion or piety. Here I do not yet touch upon the sort of knowledge with which men in themselves lost and accursed, apprehend God the Redeemer in Christ the Mediator, but I speak only of the primal and simple knowledge to which the very order of nature would have led us if Adam had remained upright. (1.2.1)

The natural knowledge of God, then, embraces several different elements. It includes (i) propositional content: (a) conceiving that there is a God and (b) grasping what benefits us and is proper to his glory. Calvin links the perception of various divine attributes to (b), for example the perception of God's goodness, power and wisdom as they are manifested in the works of creation and providence. He links the perception of our duties to God to both (a) and (b). But Calvin's 'knowledge of God' is not merely *propositional* knowledge of God. Calvin emphasized a second element, (ii) piety. Calvin defines piety as "that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces" (1.2.1). While one might be tempted to see (ii) as an effect of knowledge of God, Calvin links them more closely. Calvin says that God is not known where there is no piety or religion, and "all right knowledge of God is born in obedience" (1.6.2). Calvin disparages knowledge that is disinterested or merely theoretical in nature: "And here again we ought to observe that we are called to a knowledge of God: not

9. See Barth (1935), Parker (1959: 27–39), Berkouwer (1979: 30–31, 46–7, 152–3), Beversluis (1995) and Barth & Brunner (2002: 106; cf. 107–9). Parker actually allowed a remaining, although corrupted, *sensus divinitatis* but denied knowledge of God derived from the *opera Dei*. For a response to Beversluis, see Sudduth (1998).

that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart" (1.5.9). Hence, Calvin emphasizes that "our knowledge should serve first to teach us fear and reverence" (1.2.2) and "knowledge of this sort, then, ought not only to arouse us to the worship of God but also to awaken and encourage us to the hope of the future life" (1.5.10; cf. 2.13.1). Again, he writes: "the knowledge of God does not rest in cold speculation, but carries with it the honoring of him" (1.12.1). "True knowledge of God", then, is a matter of the intellect and the will (i.e. choices and affections).[10]

In several passages where Calvin draws attention to the effects of sin on the natural knowledge of God, he focuses on the impact of sin on the ethical aspects of humanity's knowledge of God, not its propositional content. *Institutes* book I, chapter 4, which introduces the corruption of the natural knowledge of God, links this corruption very closely to the absence of piety, false worship and disobedience to God. The post-lapsarian "confused knowledge of God" is contrasted with the "piety from which religion takes its source" (1.4.4; cf. 1.4.1). Calvin goes on to elaborate:

> For where they ought to have remained consistently obedient throughout life, they boldly rebel against him in almost all their deeds, and are zealous to placate him merely with a few paltry sacrifices ... while their trust ought to have been placed in him they neglect him and rely on themselves. (1.4.4)

God's revelation of himself in nature is said to "flow away without profiting us" (1.5.11) and "in no way lead[s] us into the right path" (1.5.14). So, for example, we "ought, then, to break forth in praises of him but are actually puffed up and swollen with all the more pride" (1.5.4). Hence, Calvin concludes, "we lack the natural ability to mount up unto the pure and clear knowledge of God" (1.5.15). In these important passages, Calvin contrasts the pre-lapsarian moral and religious efficacy of the knowledge of God with its post-lapsarian failure in this regard. This ethical emphasis is perhaps more readily apparent in the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, in which Calvin introduced 'knowledge of God' only as a short preface to his extended discourse on the law of God.

The retention of epistemic elements

Calvin clearly affirms the retention of *some* correct propositional content in humanity's natural knowledge of God.[11] Calvin refers to an instinctual "awareness

10. See Parker (1959: 107; cf. 106), Wendel (1963: 152–3) and Dowey (1994: 3; cf. 24–31).
11. See Postema (1992), Bouwsma (1992), Dowey (1994: ch. 3), Steinmetz (1995: 28–32), Warfield (2000: 44–5) and Muller (2003a: 273–6).

of divinity" by which "all" perceive that "there is a God" and that "He is their maker". He also speaks of a "deep-seated conviction that there is a God" (1.3.1), "a sense of deity inscribed on the hearts of all" (1.3.1), "some conception of God is ever alive in all men's minds" (1.3.2), people's minds as "imbued with a firm conviction about God" (1.3.2) and "this conviction ... that there is some God" (1.3.3). He goes as far as to claim that "the unity of God has been engraved on the hearts of all" (1.10.3). In each case the context indicates that Calvin is speaking of *fallen* and *unregenerate* human beings. For instance, Calvin says, "to prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has planted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty" (1.3.1). Again, there is "no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a God" (1.3.1). "The impious themselves", he says, "exemplify the fact that some conception of God is ever alive in all men's minds" (1.3.2). He says that this sense of divinity "can never be effaced" (1.3.3), nor "uprooted" (1.4.4). Hence a "general knowledge of God doth nevertheless remain still in them" (1979a: 170). While this knowledge is "unstable and fleeting" (*Institutes* 1.3.3) and a "confused knowledge of God" (1.4.4), it is knowledge nonetheless.

THE LIMITS AND RECONSTRUCTION OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

There is a remaining concern, however. The retention of some correct propositional content in man's natural knowledge of God might be insufficient to ground any *system* of natural theology. So the *de facto* validity of natural theology may be a hallow sort of validity. In Calvin's view, just *how much* can the natural light of human reason know about God in its fallen, corrupted state?

The limited scope of propositional knowledge of God

While a *sensus divinitatis* remains in nearly all, sin nonetheless negatively impacts the content of the natural knowledge of God. Human beings fall into a "huge mass of errors" in their thoughts about God (*Institutes* 1.4.4), especially when it comes to their thoughts about the nature of God (1.4.2–3, 1.5.4, 1.5.11–12). Speaking of the manifestation of God's wisdom, power and goodness in creation, Calvin says:

> most people, immersed in their own errors, are struck blind in such a dazzling theater ... however much the glory of God shines forth, scarcely one man in a hundred is a true spectator of it! (1.5.8)

> Human reason, therefore, neither approaches nor strives toward, nor even takes a straight aim at, this truth: to understand who the true God is or what sort of God he wishes to be toward us. (2.2.18)

Human beings "do not therefore apprehend God as he offers himself, but imagine him as they have fashioned him in their own presumption" (1.4.1). Moreover, the noetic effects of sin are often mediated by personal sins, so epistemic blindness is in many instances self-inflicted (1.4.2). Finally, Calvin does not deny "competent and apt statements about God here and there in the philosophers", but he claims that they merely happen upon these truths (2.2.18).

In several places Calvin parses the ignorance of the unregenerate mind in terms of an ignorance of *who* or *what* God is, where this is compatible with a knowledge *that* God is. With respect to Romans 1:20, Calvin wrote: "We conceive that there is a Deity; and then we conclude, that whoever he may be, he ought to be worshipped: but our reason here fails, because it cannot ascertain who or what sort of being God is" (1979b: 71).[12] So while the noetic effects of sin leave the knowledge that there is some God intact, they infect with confusion and error the knowledge of who or what sort of being God is.[13] Perhaps Calvin's contrast cannot be too strictly followed here, but his intent I believe is to restrict the *scope* of the natural knowledge of God in fallen people, going as far as to say that some sinful minds do not recognize the divine attributes of eternity, wisdom, justice and goodness, although these are manifested throughout creation. The propositional content of the *sensus divinitatis* is simply the knowledge that there is some creator and that he ought to be worshipped. While this self-evidently entails the existence of a being with power and knowledge, it does not necessarily entail the existence of an all-wise and all-good being who exercises complete providential care over the world, but these latter concepts are essential to Calvin's doctrine of God. What post-lapsarian minds grasp by nature, then, is fairly general, perhaps supplemented to varying degrees by some knowledge of the divine attributes from the *opera Dei*.

Unregenerate and regenerate natural theology

However, while Calvin was keenly aware of the ways in which fallen humans corrupt the content of the natural knowledge of God, he was also careful to draw a distinction between reason as it functions in fallen, *unregenerate* persons and reason as it operates in fallen *regenerated* persons guided by the Holy Scriptures.[14]

12. See Muller (2003b: 155–9) on the Reformed distinction between *an deus sit* (whether there is a God), *quid sit* (what he is), *quails sit* (what sort of being he is).
13. Calvin explicitly draws attention to this in connection with Acts 17; he says that the apostle Paul attempted to show the men at Athens by natural arguments *who* and *what* God is, and thus *how* he should be worshipped, "for they were persuaded that there was some divinity … [but] there remaineth a confused opinion concerning the nature of God" (1979a: 158).
14. See LeCerf (1949: 388), Dowey (1994: 73–7, 131–46), Moroney (2000: 9–12) and Warfield (2000: 68–70).

First, regeneration entails an illumination of the mind that enables the Christian to see God's natural revelation more clearly:

> Men's minds therefore are wholly blind, so that they see not this light of nature which shines forth in created things, until being irradiated by God's Spirit, they begin to understand by faith what otherwise they cannot comprehend … the faithful … to whom he has given eyes, see the sparks of his glory, as it were, glittering in every created thing.
> (1979e: 265–6; cf. *Institutes* 2.1.9, 3.2.33)

Secondly, the Christian has the Scriptures, which function like a pair of spectacles, assisting those with weak eyesight to perceive more clearly the manifestation of God in his works: "For by the Scripture as our guide and teacher, he [God] not only makes those things plain which would otherwise escape our notice, but almost compels us to behold them; as if he had assisted our dull sight with spectacles" (1979d: 62; cf. *Institutes* 1.6.1, 1.14.1). Finally, as a restoration of the image of God, regeneration entails a restoration of the distinctly affective or ethical elements in the natural knowledge, which Calvin maintained was lost through the Fall. For the believer, natural theology will be integrated into the distinctly practical sphere of piety.

While the natural theology of the unregenerate is unsound in principle and in fact, Calvin can point positively toward the appropriation of natural theology by the Christian. Here natural theology represents the reflective exploration, presentation and clarification of the revelation of God in the created order in the context of faith. In his commentary on Psalm 19, Calvin says: "David, with a view to encouraging the faithful to contemplate the glory of God, sets before them, in the first place, a mirror of it in the fabric of the heavens, and in the exquisite order of their workmanship which we behold" (1979c: vol. 4, 307). Calvin too urges the believer to consider the *opera Dei*, not to speculate into the secret essence of God but to consider the nature of God as revealed in the workmanship of the universe (*Institutes* 1.5.9). Hence, while Calvin was critical of rational theological enquiry by the philosophers, he sees such enquiry as more than appropriate in the context of faith:

> It is vain for any to reason as philosophers on the workmanship of the world, except those who, having first been by the preaching of the gospel, have learned to submit the whole of their intellectual wisdom (as Paul expresses it) to the foolishness of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:21). (Calvin 1979d: 63)

Indeed, Calvin is explicit that divine grace should not "prevent us from applying our senses to the consideration of heaven and earth, that we may thence seek a confirmation in the true knowledge of God" (*ibid.*: 64).

Calvin's commentary on Psalm 104 provides a good illustration of this. At some points Calvin's reasoning simply provides illustrations accessible to natural reason of the observable benefits that result from the temporal and spatial order that the Psalmist declares God has established. In other places Calvin goes further to outline natural arguments that have as their conclusion what is explicitly affirmed by Scripture itself. For example, in Psalm 104:5–9 the Psalmist affirms that by his power God has laid the foundations of the earth so that it remains stable, and God has fixed boundaries between the oceans and dry land so that each remains in its place. Calvin, however, reasons *to* this testimony of Scripture *from* observation and principles of natural philosophy. Calvin argues roughly as follows. It is evident to the senses that (1) the oceans do not overflow their banks and flood the entire earth. (2) If there is no God who by his power restrains the oceans, then the oceans would overflow their banks and flood the entire earth. We know (2) since it is a principle of natural philosophy that (3) the tendency of water – owing to its unstable and fluid properties – is to flow over the boundaries set by the dry land. Therefore, (4) there is a God who by his power restrains the oceans.[15] In this way, Calvin reasons to the testimony of Scripture on the basis of observation and principles of natural philosophy. While Scripture affirms (4), and perhaps suggests that there is a cogent inference from (1) to (4), Scripture does not provide the argument from (1) to (4).

For Calvin, then, the *de facto* validity of natural theology is not undermined by the limits imposed on reason by the noetic effects of sin. While it is impossible for the unbeliever to erect an adequate system of theology relying solely on the resources of natural reason, the epistemic constraints on the natural knowledge of God point to the need for recontextualizing natural theology, placing it in a Christian context. First, on Calvin's view, the believer, in whom the image of God is being restored, is in the best position to consider the manifestation of God in the works of creation and providence. Secondly, rational reflection on general revelation must be situated within the larger framework of biblical theology, so that it plays a role in the systematic development of the doctrine of God. Of course, the Christian reconstruction of natural theology is compatible with the apologetic deployment of theistic arguments. An abiding *sensus divinitatis* provides a point of contact with the unbeliever, as demonstrated in Paul's preaching in the Book of Acts. Paul can argue with unbelievers about the nature of God because they possess a *sensus divinitatis*. So a natural theology that emerges in the context of biblical revelation may direct itself to those situated outside biblical revelation, but this is possible only because Calvin believes there is a universal, innate religious impulse. But natural theology remains fundamentally a rational excursion in the larger journey of biblical and dogmatic theology.

15. Calvin develops this argument, a form of inference to best explanation, in his comments on Psalm 104, verses 5, 6 and 9. See Calvin (1979c: vol. 6. 148–52).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have examined two prominent features of Calvin's account of the natural knowledge of God that illuminate his positive contributions to philosophical reflection on God. Like many of the reformers, it was Calvin's biblical theology that grounded his acceptance of a natural revelation and the actuality of a natural knowledge of God based on this natural revelation. It was also this biblical theology that set important constraints on the extent to which reason could, of its own resources, develop any systematic account of the being and attributes of God. Hence, for Calvin, rational reflection on the being and attributes of God must be situated in a Christian context, where it will retain its proper ethical orientation and avoid the stultifying 'labyrinth' of reason. This stands in sharp contrast to how natural theology would be conceptualized by the end of the seventeenth century. For Calvin, natural theology must be an aspect of the system of revealed theology, not a rational preface to it. Natural theology provides a clarification and confirmation of faith, not a rational basis for it.

It is not surprising that twentieth-century theologians have often viewed Calvin as an opponent of natural theology. They – unlike Calvin – have typically assumed a one-dimensional view of natural theology as a rational system of theological truth placed alongside, and prior to, revealed or dogmatic theology. While clearly rejecting *this* sort of natural theology, Calvin endorses a very different kind of natural theology. In suggesting the contextual nature of reason itself, the possibility of a Christian natural theology is introduced, for natural theology can now be construed as a product of natural reason functioning in a distinctly Christian context. In this way, Calvin may be read as sanctioning a Protestant project of *fides quaerens intellectum*, a project that at the hands of subsequent Calvinists would prove instrumental to the development of a system of Reformed theology and a theologically inspired philosophy of the Reformed faith.

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On NATURAL RELIGION/THEOLOGY see also Chs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 19, 23; Vol. 4, Chs 8, 12; Vol. 5, Ch. 23. On THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION see also Ch. 3. On SCRIPTURE see also Chs 4, 15; Vol. 1, Chs 9, 13, 17; Vol. 2, Ch. 19; Vol. 4, Ch. 3; Vol. 5, Ch. 12. On SIN see also Vol. 1, Chs 10, 13.

5

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

Marc Foglia

Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) came from a rich bourgeois family that acquired nobility after his father fought in Italy in the army of King Francis I of France. For his grandfather and father the sixteenth century was a period of remarkable social ascent. Yet, from 1562 onwards, France became "a disturbed and sick state" (III.8, F.719)[1] as the wars of religion between Catholics and Huguenots were fought with varying intensity to 1592. In fact, religious faith was only one aspect of the crisis; family clans and friendships did not always correspond to confessional differences. A number of his family members and friends converted to Protestantism, but Montaigne remained faithful to the Catholic Church. Replicating Petrarca's choice in *De vita solitaria* (On the solitary life), he chose to dedicate himself to the Muses. In his library, which was quite large for the time, he had wisdom sayings carved on the wooden beams. These sayings were drawn from the Book of Ecclesiastes, Sextus Empiricus, Lucretius and other classical authors, whom he read intensively.

In spite of a tradition rooted in the nineteenth century, which tended to relegate his work to the expression of a frivolous subjectivity, Montaigne shook some fundamental aspects of Western thought, such as the superiority we assign to human beings over animals (II.12), to reason over custom (I.23), to reason over the world and to European civilization over others (such as the "Barbarians" of Brazil, I.31). He put his judgement to trial, drawing not only from the classics or from historians, but also from his own experience, examining varied opinions, facts or customs in critical sequences he called 'essays'. This literary form, to which Montaigne himself gave birth, calls for hermeneutical subtlety. The reader cannot pick up a passage and simply assert, 'Here is what Montaigne believes'. In

1. References to Montaigne's *Essays* are cited by book (Roman numerals, corresponding to one of the three books of the *Essays*) and chapter numbers; the letter F indicates the Donald M. Frame translation and edition (Montaigne 1948), and the subsequent number is a page number in that work.