Chapter 1   A Doctrine of Critical Theology

1. What Is Theology?

What is meant by the term "theology" as it is used in this treatise? Like the term "religion," theology is used by different people to label many things that are quite different from one another. A general definition covering all these different usages would have to be a definition that makes abstraction of everything that is different and retains only that which is common to all of them. But is there in fact anything that is common to all the different ways people use the term "theology"? If there is then will there be enough left in the definition for anyone to make *practical* use of it after one makes abstraction of all the differences that exist in how the term is used?

Rather than immediately presuppose answers to these questions, let us first look at some of the word's usages. Webster's 1962 unabridged dictionary [Webster (1962)] provided three definitions, all of which are widely used today:

> **Theology:** 1. the study of God and the relations between God and the universe; study of religious doctrine and matters of divinity. 2. a specific form or system of this study as expounded by a particular religion or denomination. [Webster (1962)]

These definitions seem simple enough, but then Webster's goes on to provide a list of twelve "species" of theology distinguished by adjective modifiers such as: ascetical; Biblical; dogmatic; moral; polemic; and so on. That's a lot of theological species for something falling under the general definitions above. People who professionally specialize in one of these theological species also show a tendency to drop its adjective modifier and speak as if their specific type of theology is the only correct usage of the word. For example, Wikipedia (as of 9 Apr., 2018) tells us "theology" is

> the critical study of the nature of the divine. It is taught as an academic discipline, typically in universities, seminaries, and schools of divinity.

Rather surprisingly, when used as a *noun* the dictionary definition of "divine" in English refers only to "a man skilled in divinity; a clergyman." This is clearly not what is meant in the Wikipedia definition above. In its most frequent usages the word "divine" is an adjective derived from the Latin word *divinus* which meant "inspired, pertaining to a deity." For the Romans the term "deity" (*deus*) originally meant "a god," and after the establishment of Christianity it came to mean God in the singular to the Romans.

To some, including your author, it seems at the least a bit inconsistent to say or imply "the divine" *has* a nature considering that most religions place God (or, if you prefer, "the divine") *above* the natural world – which is to say God is *super*natural. For instance, Isaiah says of God,

> It is He who dwells above the circle of the world[1]. [Isaiah 40:22]

In most polytheistic religions we likewise often find deities described in ways that place them somehow "above nature" in the sense that the deities are regarded as entities who or which control and command

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[1] Different English translations of the Old Testament express this quotation in slightly different ways but the general idea is the same. Howsoever people viewed it in ancient times, today no major religion envisions God as dwelling in outer space just as no one except a few crackpots think the sky is blue because it is made of water. But all major religious doctrines view God as being somehow above or beyond our mortal "temporal plane" of existence. There are still some primitive religions, such as that of the BaMbuti Pygmies of the Congo, in which spirits are held to exist side-by-side with us as part of the natural world of human experience, but in these cases we do not find any evidence that these people have made any systematic formulation of their faith that would be called a "theology."

natural phenomena. In its earliest and most primitive forms, a deity is often confounded with or identified as the particular natural phenomenon itself. For example, Hesiod wrote,

> Verily at the first Chaos came to be, but next wide-bosomed Earth, the ever-sure foundation of all the deathless ones who hold the peaks of snowy Olympus, and dim Tartarus in the depth of the wide-pathed Earth, and Eros, fairest among the deathless gods, who unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men within them. From Chaos came forth Erebus and black Night; but of Night were born Aether and Day, whom she conceived and bare from union in love with Erebus. And Earth first bare starry Heaven, equal to herself, to cover her on every side and to be an ever-sure abiding-place for the blessed gods. [Hesiod (*c*. 700 BC), *Theogony*, 115-128]

Around 700 to 800 years later an unidentified Greek author who is called Apollodorus shows us how this mythology evolved for the Greeks over the centuries:

> Sky was the first who ruled over the whole world. And having wedded Earth, he begat first the Hundred-handed as they are named . . . After these, Earth bore him the Cyclopes . . . of whom each had one eye on his forehead. But them Sky bound and cast into Tartarus, a gloomy place in Hades as far distant from earth as earth is distant from the sky. And again he begat children by Earth, to wit, the Titans . . .
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>   But Earth, grieved by the destruction of her children who had been cast into Tartarus, persuaded the Titans to attack their father and gave Cronus an adamantine sickle. And they, all but Ocean, attacked him . . . And having dethroned their father, they brought up their brethren who had been hurled down to Tartarus and committed the sovereignty to Cronus.
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>   But he again bound and shut them up in Tartarus, and wedded his sister Rhea; and since both Earth and Sky foretold him that he would be dethroned by his own son, he used to swallow his offspring at birth. . . . Enraged at this, Rhea repaired to Crete, when she was big with Zeus, and brought him forth in a cave of Diete. . . .
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>   But when Zeus was full grown, he took Metis, daughter of Ocean, to help him, and she gave Cronus a drug to swallow which forced him to disgorge first the stone and then the children he had swallowed and with their aid Zeus waged war against Cronus and the Titans. They fought for ten years, and Earth prophesized victory to Zeus if he should have as allies those who had been hurled down to Tartarus. So he slew their gaoleress Campe and loosed their bonds. And the Cyclopes gave Zeus thunder and lightning and a thunderbolt, and on Pluto they bestowed a helmet and on Poseidon a trident. Armed with these weapons the gods overcame the Titans . . . and to Zeus was allotted the dominion of the sky, to Poseidon the dominion of the sea, and to Pluto the dominion in Hades. [Apollodorus (1st or 2nd cent. AD, I, I-II.2]

  In Apollodorus' account we can easily see the confounding of the deity characters with the objects in the natural world over which they were said to rule. We are left to puzzle over the distinction between the deity Sky (*Uranus*) and the sky (*uranus*), the deity Earth (Gaia) and the earth (gaia), and a number of other supernatural vs. natural objects. We can entertain at our leisure other little puzzles that were either not puzzles to the ancient Greeks or else went unnoticed by them. For example, Zeus takes dominion over the sky but where does this leave Sky? The original deities like Sky and Earth slowly fade out of the picture in Greek myths by omission, leaving only the more familiar immortal gods Zeus, Poseidon, Pluto, Hera, their later offspring Apollo, Athena, and so on. We today regard all of this as myth but it is worth remembering that to the ancient Greeks this was not myth but rather religion. Nearly every phenomenon – psychological as well as physical – seems to have had its own supernatural entity; e.g.,

> Now all the other gods and men . . . slumbered the whole night through, but sweet sleep did not hold Zeus, for he was pondering in his heart how he might do honor to Achilles, and slay many beside the ships of the Achaeans. And this plan seemed to his mind the best, to sent to Agamemnon . . . a destructive dream. And he spoke and addressed him with winged words, "Up, go, destructive Dream,

to the swift ships of the Achaeans, and when you have come to the hut of Agamemnon . . . tell him everything exactly as I charge you. [Homer (c. 7th-8th cent. BC), Bk 2, pg. 61]

Such confounding is not unique to European or Middle Eastern cultures. We find similar things in the Americas in, for instance, Mayan, Aztec, and other Native American cultures. In the Ituri Forest of the Congo, where they have lived since before 2500 BC, the BaMbuti Pygmies regard the forest itself as their deity and do not trouble to draw any distinction at all between its supernatural and its physical character. Anthropologist Colin Turnbull, who lived for a time with them, wrote,

> "The forest is a father and mother to us," he said, "and like a father or mother it gives us everything we need – food, clothing, shelter, warmth . . . and affection. Normally everything goes well because the forest is good to its children, but when things go wrong there must be a reason."
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> I wondered what he would say now, because I knew that the village people, in times of crisis, believe that they have been cursed by some evil spirit or by a witch or sorcerer. But not the Pygmies; their logic is simpler and their faith stronger because their world is kinder.
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> Moke showed me this when he said, "Normally everything goes well in our world. But at night when we are sleeping sometimes things go wrong because we are not awake to keep them from going wrong. Army ants invade the camp; leopards may come in and steal a hunting dog or even a child. If we were awake these things would not happen. So when something big goes wrong, like illness or bad hunting or death, it must be because the forest is sleeping and not looking after its children. So what do we do? We wake it up. We wake it up by singing to it, and we do this because we want it to awaken happy. Then everything will be well and good again. So when our world is going well then also we sing to the forest because we want it to share our happiness." [Turnbull (1962), pg. 92]

The word "theology" derives from the Greek word for god, *theos* (θεος). Its "-ology" suffix denotes "description" or "branch of learning." From this we can reasonably infer it is not-incorrect to say "theology" in its most general connotation means any *systematic* study or theory of a deity or deities. It is also worthwhile to note that the Greek word for "lesson" (*mathema*), denoting "that which is learned," implies that what is learned from or taught by theology is *properly* regarded as a type of mathematical rather than empirical or physical lesson. By this I mean that the "essence" of its object is supersensible – i.e. the object itself is something beyond the horizon of *objectively* immediate human experience, although clearly not beyond the horizon of *subjective* human experience (e.g. the experience of a feeling or an emotion)[2]. The *real meaning* of such an object is *always* ultimately rooted in practical experience, which is to say its meaning is defined by what we do or feel we ought to do with the idea rather than by notions of the object as a substantial thing-regarded-as-it-is-in-itself. Indeed, this "ought to do" feature of the idea is the root of a close relationship between the idea of theology and that of morality.

In one sense I am quibbling over words here; but a topic that tends to arouse sometimes-violent passions in people is a topic for which words and definitions are too important to *not* quibble over. Meanings do matter because "if you do not say what you mean then you will not mean what you say." To convey meanings requires us to be clear about the contexts in which we are using our words.

Some scholars hold that the very ideas of "religion" and "theology" are peculiarly Western ideas without meaning outside of Western cultures. Such views are, of course, correct given some specific definitions of "religion" and "theology" by which one understands characteristics or habits one can point to as essential features of a religion or a theology. One could define "religion" in such a way to enable one to say that, for example, Buddhism and Hinduism are not religions. In point of fact, among scholars the definition of "religion" is a controversial subject and presently has no one generally accepted definition. In this treatise I will try to remedy this lack.

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[2] If the object was beyond the horizon of *both* objective and subjective human experience it would not be an object of which we could have any cognizance at all.

Table I: Categories of Religions by Population

Religion	% of world's population (2010)
Christians	31.4
Muslims	23.2
Unaffiliated	16.4
Hindus	15.0
Buddhists	7.1
Folk Religions	5.9
Other	0.8
Jews	0.2

source: the Pew Forum. The unaffiliated category includes religious people belonging to no established church, agnostics, and atheists.

Personally, I do not see what one would *non-pejoratively* call Buddhism, Hinduism, Chinese Folk Religion, or even the beliefs of the BaMbuti Pygmies if not "religion." According to a study by the Pew Forum, almost but not quite half of the world's people are *not* Christians, Muslims, or Jews. According to them, the percentages of people holding specific religious views can be classified into the categories in Table I. At the same time, it is estimated that only a tiny slice of humankind – somewhere between 0.3% and 7% of the world's people – are avowed atheists. A definition of religion or theology that can only be applied to around 55% of all people can justly be called a bigoted definition.

Every recognized or recognizable religion involves at least one supernatural entity or supernatural abilities attributed to one or more entities (whether supersensible or sensible) or both. In the cases of Taoism and Confucianism this assertion of mine is open to some disagreement but the essential *unity* attributed to the Tao (Taoism) and Tian (Confucianism) is the idea of a monism that is supernatural in the connotation of "supernatural" I next explain. Buddhism in its many branches also adheres to a not-too-dissimilar monism in the sense that "everything" is supernaturally interconnected in causal linkages. In Buddhism there is no personal god but if one were to piece together the themes of Buddhist cosmology one would find interestingly curious similarities between it and Berkeley's philosophy [Berkeley (1712)].

How does the term "supernatural" differ from the term "supersensible"? The term "nature" *properly* refers to the totality of things and their relationships capable of being experienced by human beings. Human experience is possible only by means of our senses (either directly or with the aid of instrumentation). An object is supersensible if that object is incapable of affecting our senses. For example, the number π (pi) is a transcendental number. It cannot be represented with a finite number of digits and can never be written out in full. It therefore has no *sensible* representation and, as an object, π is a supersensible object. We say it is the object of an *idea*, and this is the case for all supersensible objects. Science makes use of ideas of supersensible objects necessarily (for instance, all objects of pure mathematics are supersensible) in order to explain relationships between sensible objects of nature. Without them science could explain nothing. However, in order to make valid scientific use of a supersensible object that object *must* be capable of being connected to sensible objects in a way that makes a congruent *practical and measurable* correspondence with sensible objects of nature.

The supernatural is also and always supersensible but not every supersensible object is a supernatural object. A supernatural entity is one for which its idea contains a notion of causal agency having no corresponding *practical* connection with sensible objects of nature. Instead, its causal agency is ascribed to a problematical "willpower" or "essence" of the supernatural object that cannot be ascertained by any experiment or other scientific labor human beings can carry out. For this reason, science – while it must necessarily employ ideas of super*sensible* objects – can never *legitimately* employ super*natural* objects in a scientific doctrine.[3] This means that science can make *no* scientific pronouncements about the existence

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[3] Science cannot legitimately do so but it does happen from time to time that *scientists* do, usually without recognizing that they are doing so. When they do it, it is a professional fault. For example, causality can never be

or nonexistence of supernatural objects of religion – e.g., it can neither affirm nor deny the existence of a deity – although science can and does make legitimate statements about religious doctrines when those doctrines seek to make statements about *sensible* objects of nature. There is much more that must be said about this, but that discussion is not simple or short and so I postpone it for now and return to it later. The issues involved in it are at root issues of epistemology.

As an example, the Confucian notion of Tian is not the idea of a personal god comparable to the God of Abrahamic faiths. Rather, it means something like "the way things are" or "the regularities of the world" or "all things." The notion of the Tao means something very much alike and there is no English word that corresponds to either of them. In Chinese cosmology the universe ("all that is") creates and orders *itself* out of a primary chaos. Tao – which is essentially indescribable by human words or thoughts – is vaguely understood as "the" spontaneously operating cause of all movement in the phenomena of the universe [Legge (1891), pp. 14-15]. Lao Tzu said of the Tao,

Something mysteriously formed,
Born before heaven and earth.
In the silence and the void,
Standing alone and unchanging,
Ever present and in motion.
Perhaps it is the mother of ten thousand things.
I do not know its name.
Call it Tao.
For lack of a better word I call it great. [Lao Tzu (6th cent. BC), chap. 25]

The notions expressed here have some similarities to Genesis 1:1-2 but dissimilarities as well – a unity of opposites that is very much part of the overall "flavor" of the ideas of Tao and Tian. The ideas of super-natural things always have some fabric of mysticism weaved into them. They are, after all, attempts to explain the inexplicable. As Lao Tzu also said,

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.
The named is the mother of ten thousand things. [*ibid*., chap. 1]

It is a modern tendency, especially among scientists and the scientifically-minded, to use the word "supernatural" in strictly pejorative ways because supernatural objects are inaccessible to science. But doing this is nothing but a prejudice laden with a host of unspoken presuppositions and biases. The chief of these presuppositions is that science is capable of providing true explanations for *every*thing. But this is really just a presupposition of *faith in science*, not a proven accomplishment *of* science. A scientist does have practical as well as emotional needs to have faith that the answer can be found, the problem can be solved, and the truth can be ascertained because understanding nature is neither easy nor quickly accomplished. To *be* a scientist one *must* have faith in science and its methods just as to *be* a priest one

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attributed to a probability because a probability is strictly a supersensible object of mathematics and contains no notion of causal efficacy in its concept. Yet the so-called "Big Bang Theory" of cosmology does precisely this when it says the universe began *because of* a statistical fluctuation (a so-called "vacuum fluctuation"). But this is nothing else than a supernatural idea of causality. There is no practical difference between this causality speculation and positing a "god of probability." If one were to call it a religious basis for the theory, scientists could mount no scientifically legitimate defense against that accusation. On the other hand, the timeline proposed by Creationists makes assertions about sensible objects of nature that *can* legitimately be and *are* challenged by science and *are* refuted by it. The Creationist timeline is hogwash. So is the causality speculation offered to explain the so-called Big Bang. Science and religion are orthogonal topics and it must *always* be seen as a culpable fault when one ventures into the territory of the other.

must have faith in the theology of his church. Faith is not a bad thing nor is it a weakness or a flaw. But even so, there are some things that remain mysteries which science might never be able to truthfully explain. One of these is *life* and its cause or causes. Claude Bernard, whose work laid the foundations of modern physiology and medicine, wrote,

> Now the absence of the scientific attitude of mind is a serious hindrance [to science] because it favors belief in occult forces, rejects determinism in vital phenomena and leads to the notion that the phenomena of living beings are governed by mysterious vital forces which are continually invoked. When an obscure or inexplicable phenomenon presents itself, instead of saying "I do not know," as every scientific man should do, physicians are in the habit of saying, "This is life," apparently without the least idea that they are explaining darkness by still greater darkness. We must therefore get used to the idea that science implies merely determining the conditions of phenomena; and we must always seek to exclude life entirely from our explanations of physiological phenomena as a whole. Life is nothing but a word that means ignorance, and when we characterize a phenomenon as vital it amounts to saying that we do not know its immediate cause or its conditions. Science should always seek to explain obscurity and complexity by clearer and simpler ideas. Now since nothing is more obscure, life can never explain anything. [Bernard (1865), pg. 201]

In this treatise, when I say something is supernatural I mean nothing more than to draw the distinction just explained above. My use of the term is non-pejorative. If it should happen to be the case that I think ill of a particular supernatural object, I will make this clear by expressly saying so. For example, if I call the idea of such an object "hogwash" you can be certain I think ill of it. For instance, I think the idea of Zeus in ancient Greek mythology is hogwash *outside of the contexts of classical literature*. *Inside* those contexts I have no problem with Zeus at all and this does not make me a "pagan."

In saying all this, I do not fail to recognize that the doctrines of faiths followed by the majority of the world's people involve claims of divine revelation. At the same time, however, I cannot disregard the fact that these revelations are confined to a tiny handful of people, have never been experienced by the vast majority of us, and that most of the individuals said to have had a revelation experience are no longer among us to be asked to describe the details of these revelation experiences. We who have had no such revelation experience are asked to accept the revelation thesis "on faith." For many of us including myself this is asking too much because we know that there are and seem to always have been charlatans among us. As it says in Matthew,

> For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great signs and wonders so as to mislead, if possible, even the chosen ones. [Matthew 24:24]

Yet, as the Pew figures show, the great majority of people do follow, or at least affiliate themselves with, a religious faith and it defies credibility to claim *all* of them have been misled or deluded by charlatans. This includes a vast number of people who *do* accept a revelation thesis by personal choice and in full knowledge that there are deceptive individuals in the world. Why (or better, how) can they come to this acceptance with a firm conviction and in full command of their reason? I mean for you to understand that I pose this question without disparagement of this personal choice nor with any purpose of casting it in a suspect light. The *basis* of faith is a legitimate and even fundamental matter of inquiry in theology.

This question is one we will explore more deeply later in this treatise. Until then, let us agree to withhold any prejudicial judgment regarding the place and role of revelation theses in religion or theology or a person's choice to trust or not trust in revelation as part of a religious doctrine. It is enough for now to point out that some people do not find it necessary to subscribe to *any* revelation thesis in order to be persons of faith. It makes no difference to their convictions in their faiths either way. It matters only in terms of how they view the *theology* of their religion.

I argued above that we can reasonably infer it is not-incorrect to say "theology" in its most general

connotation means any *systematic* study or theory of a deity or deities. But we cannot leave it at this. What is a *systematic* study or theory? Can we do one for the topics of religion and theology? How can we tell if we have or have not met the constraint of being systematic? and that the product of the effort is in fact a theology? These are things we can ill afford to take for granted, and that is why it needs a treatise.

The term "systematic" means "having the character of a system," but what is a "system" and how do you know when you have one? In the context of the Critical epistemology used in this treatise [Wells (2006)], a "system" is *the unity of various knowledge under one Idea*; the object that contains this unity is called "the system". An Idea (in German, *Idee*; note that the term is capitalized) is a pure regulative principle of actions. The term "Idea" does *not* mean the same thing as the term "idea." An idea is defined to mean a concept for which the object of that concept is supersensible. These are some basic definitions that will be needed in the pursuit of an understanding of theology.

Let us not impose a crisper definition of "theology" right at this point before we have studied the subject. Let us instead take the approach of beginning with things less abstract and working our way deeper into the topic until we come to its core. Figuratively speaking, let us proceed like we would peel an onion, delving deeper and deeper into the topic until we get to a core understanding of it. Let us begin by taking a look at some of the things that bear the label of a "theology."

2. Species of Theology I: Natural Theology, Moral Theology, and Revealed Theology

Webster's Dictionary [Webster (1962)] provides a list of a dozen species of theology. These are:

ascetical theology; a system of theology which teaches that perfection and the practice of the virtues are attained only through asceticism;

Biblical theology; that branch of theology which aims to set forth the knowledge of God and the divine life by means of the Bible as a whole, and not by isolated passages;

dogmatic theology; theology as authoritatively held and taught by the church;

moral theology; theology in its relations to ethics;

natural theology; the aspect or form of religion distinguished from revealed religion in its exclusive apprehension and consideration of such evidences of the existence and attributes of God as are afforded in nature and natural phenomena;

New England theology; a phase of Calvinism developed in the orthodox congregational churches of New England;

new theology; a reaction against dogmas and creeds of orthodox Protestant churches, first gaining prominence in the last quarter of the nineteenth century;

polemic theology; the learning and practice involved in defending one system of theology or disputing another by scientific and philosophical arguments;

rational theology; theology based on opinions deduced from reason;

revealed theology; theology which depends on revelations or the teachings of the Bible for its authority;

speculative theology; theology in which theory predominates over Scripture and all other authority;

systematic theology; a constructive method of theology which aims at a complete philosophic and systematic statement of theological knowledge.

These dictionary definitions all bear fingerprints of influences of Western religion and philosophy. It is one reason why some scholars argue the words "religion" and "theology" are inapplicable to Eastern cultures and religions. Some issue can also be taken with the explicit introduction of the Bible as part of

some of these dictionary definitions on the ground that this automatically confines the definition to Christianity alone. For example, the definition of "revealed theology" above implies Islam does not have a revealed theology despite the fact Islam holds the Quran to be the infallible Word of God, a transcript of a tablet preserved in heaven and revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. The dictionary definition of "natural theology" above might seem to cover the beliefs of the BaMbuti but only if one ignores the fact BaMbuti society is so completely informal, casual, and *un*systematic that it stretches things too far to say they have any theology at all. BaMbuti belief in the supernature of their forest is so commonsense simple and unquestioning that they have no use or need for any theology to explain it.

While it is far from certain, there is some fairly compelling evidence to suggest a natural theology (as defined above) might be descriptive of the first religions. We do not know when religion first began; it predates history. There is evidence from Neolithic burial sites of human beings holding mystical and superstitious beliefs as far back as somewhere around 10,000 BC. Cro-Magnon cave art dated to around 28,000 BC might also be indicative of mystic or supernatural beliefs but this interpretation has also been disputed and other possible explanations proposed. It is not-impossible that mysticism and superstition might be as old as *Homo sapiens* themselves but, whether it is or not, it is debatable if superstitious beliefs should be called "religions." In English the word "religion" derives from the Latin word *religio*. The Latin word has ten dictionary usages:

1. A supernatural feeling of constraint usually having the force of a prohibition
   or impediment. b. that which is prohibited, taboo; also, a positive obligation,
   rule.
2. An impediment to action proceeding from doubt, awe, conscience, etc., a
   scruple (with regard to).
3. A state of impediment, etc., consequent on the violation or non-observance
   of supernatural laws. b. a question involving such an impediment.
4. A manifestation of divine sanction.
5. A consideration enforcing conformity to a moral principle, a sanction.
6. A sense of the presence of supernatural power, (religious) fear, awe.
7. A quality (attached to a person, place, object, action, etc.) evoking awe or
   reverence, sanctity.
8. The performance of rites, ceremonies, etc. relating to the supernatural. b a
   (religious) practice, custom, ritual, etc.
9. A particular system of (religious) observances, cult.
10. punctilious regard for one's obligations, conscientiousness. b. scrupulous
    regard for. [*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 1997]

From these Latin usages Webster's comes up with seven English usages for the word "religion":

1. belief in a divine or superhuman power or powers to be obeyed and
   worshipped as the creator(s) and ruler(s) of the universe.
2. expression of this belief in conduct and ritual.
3. (a) any specific system of belief, worship, conduct, etc. often involving
   a code of ethics and a philosophy; (b) loosely, any system of beliefs,
   practices, ethical values, etc. resembling, suggestive of or likened to such
   a system.
4. a state of mind or way of life expressing love for and trust in God, and one's
   will and effort to act according to the will of God.
5. any object of conscientious regard and pursuit.
6. (a) the practice of religious observances or rites; (b) religious rites. [Obs.]
7. a religious order or state. [Obs.]

Any conjecturing about what prehistoric humans thought about anything can be nothing but speculation colored by our modern prejudices. We do not know to what degree, if any, prehistoric humans held or

followed beliefs that can be accurately described by any of Webster's seven usages. The ancients could not speak to us in their own voices prior to the invention of writing in Sumer *circa* 3600 BC. This far predates Chinese writing, the earliest evidence of which are the oracle bones of the late Shang dynasty *circa* 1250-1045 BC [Cheung (2018)].

They do not begin explicitly speaking to us about religion until somewhere around 2965-2631 BC (the Pyramid Texts of ancient Egypt and the Akkadian epics of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk). It has always struck me as curious that the earliest evidence of *organized* religion coincides with the appearance of the earliest governments, all of which were military despotisms under the rulership of kings. In every case, religion functioned as an arm of the government in these earliest city-states. But in order for a religion to become organized it must have appeared previously in unorganized forms or there would have been nothing for a ruler or government to bring into order.

The ancient Egyptians believed the phenomena of nature were divine forces; their pantheon of deities is complex with deities personifying aspects of nature in complicated and overlapping ways. The Sumerian pantheon begins with Nammu (the primal waters) and Nammu's children An (the sky) and Ki (the earth). An and Ki mated and produced a son Enlil (who separated heaven from earth and claimed the earth as his domain). Humans were created by Enki (the son of An and Nammu). Later the major deities in the pantheon included An (god of heaven), Enlil (god of wind and storms), Enki (god of water and human culture), Ninhursag (goddess of fertility and the earth), Utu (god of the sun and justice), and Nanna (god of the moon). Sumerian myths include the myth of a Great Flood and numerous other things that heavily influenced the religions of other Mesopotamian people and also have strong parallels in the early parts of the Hebrew Tanakh and Genesis. There are many striking similarities between the Akkadian epics and the Greek mythology of Hesiod and Apollodorus quoted earlier.

The earliest documented monotheistic religion appeared in Egypt in the 14th century BC in the reign of Pharaoh Akhenaten. His deity was Aten (the sun disk god). Monotheism as we know it today, with the exception of the Great Spirit of Native Americans (Gitche Manitou), derives from the God of Abraham.[4] When this first appeared is not known but it necessarily predated the Torah. There is some archeological evidence Hebrew writing may have been invented as far back as around the 10th century BC [Hess (2006)] and if so the time of Abraham would predate this. Natural theology and monotheism are not contrary to each other. Many people today draw the subjectively sufficient reasons for their faiths from reasoning that would have to be called a natural theology. Evidence of organized (rather than natural) theology arguably first appears in Egypt around 3100 BC in the Early Dynastic Period.

By one way of looking at things, every religion and every theology is or contains moral teachings. This means that in one way or another Webster's "moral theology" is a term applicable to them. Whether or not scholars do so attach it seems to depend on how much specific emphasis and focus the theology brings to bear on ethics and moral norms. By "moral" I mean "pertaining to maxims for judging right vs. wrong or good vs. evil."

Many people of faith assume or hold-to-be-true that religion is the foundation of morals and a system of moral laws. To put this another way, they hold it to be true that religion is the *source* of moral law and morality (as a system of moral laws) is the *outcome* or product of religion. However, if this was true then it would logically follow that followers of one particular religion would be obliged to regard followers of other religions – and those who subscribe to no religion at all – to be to at least some degree amoral or immoral people unless by some chance their religion teaches all the same moral laws despite whatever other differences in doctrine exist between the two religions. To some extent this underlies the negative connotations carried by words such as infidel, unbeliever, and heretic – terms that are often used as part of a "justification" for slaughter when a people or a government launches a religious pogrom.

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[4] Despite their different origins, the ideas characterizing Gitche Manitou and the God of Abraham are remarkably similar.

Yet it is undeniable that there are a great many people who would be judged by most of us as "good" and "moral" people despite the fact that they follow a different religion or even no religion at all. Perhaps, to Western eyes, the most famous case of this in the 20th century was Gandhi. The fact that there are such people poses a knotty problem for some theologians. The notion that a person of another faith, who in all other aspects is a "good and moral person," would nonetheless still be damned *only* because he held a different faith is an idea striking many people as extremely unjust and immoral – and no monotheistic faith I am aware of holds God to be unjust or immoral[5]. It is a conundrum most often dealt with by making it part of the doctrine that even perfect adherence to ethics is not enough to pardon an infidel. Dante wrote of this aspect of 14th century Catholic doctrine in his *Inferno*:

> In truth I found myself upon the brink of an abyss, the melancholy valley containing thundering, unending wailings. . . . "Let us descend into the blind world now," the poet[6], who was deathly pale, began; "I shall go first and you will follow me." . . . And he said to me: "The anguish of the people whose place is here below has touched my face with the compassion you mistake for fear. Let us go on, the way that waits is long." So he set out, and so he had me enter on that first circle girdling the abyss[7].

> Here, for as much as hearing could discover, there was no outcry louder than the sighs that caused the everlasting air to tremble. The sighs arose from sorrow without torments, out of the crowds – the many multitudes – of infants and women and of men.

> The kindly master said: "Do you not ask who are these spirits whom you see before you? I'd have you know, before you go ahead, they did not sin; and yet, though they have merits, that's not enough because they lacked baptism, the portal of the faith that you embrace. And if they lived before Christianity, they did not worship God in fitting ways; and of such spirits I myself am one. For these defects, and for no other evil, we are now lost and punished just with this: we have no hope and yet we live with longing." [Dante (*c*. 1341), Canto IV, pp. 31-33]

The remark made by Dante's Virgil, that he and the others were damned because "they did not worship God in fitting ways," is possibly an oblique reference to Exodus 20:3 ("You must not have any other gods besides me") – a law that authoritarian state religions often find to be conveniently expedient.

Other scholars take a more nuanced view that religious doctrines *teach* morality but morality itself is not founded in religion. Theology influences ethics but is not the source of ethics. The philosopher Kant – who was a deeply religious man but did not regard *churches* or their doctrines as *authorities* – wrote:

> Religion is the contemplation of moral law as divine precept.

> Theology, insofar as it has influence on ethics, is (moral) religion; insofar as it contains a special object of ethics, it is a *cultus*[8]. This would presuppose religion.

> For religion it is enough to have faith; for a *cultus* one must know, otherwise it is hypocrisy.

> Moral religion is that which makes better human beings.

> A *cultus* is religion which, if it is to be genuine, presupposes human beings who are already good since they should take to heart Duty toward God himself.

> The mere possibility of divine existence is already sufficient for moral religion, though it does not amount to faith.

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[5] even if the scriptures of that religion occasionally seem to attribute to God characteristics that in a person are held to be moral faults. Here I am specifically thinking about translations of Exodus 20:4 that depict God as saying he is a jealous God and of Job 1:6-12 where God permits Satan to visit calamities upon Job.

[6] The poet is the ancient Roman poet Virgil. He was Dante's guide on his journey through Hell.

[7] the first circle of Hell.

[8] "cult" in English. Kant does not use this word in a pejorative sense. He uses it in its Latin connotation of observance and fulfillment of religious obligations.

> Faith is absolutely necessary for a *cultus*, but is hardly sufficient.
>
> For the proper service of God knowledge is required; otherwise one prays merely to be assured in all cases, not from conviction. [Kant (1776-95), 18: 515]

He goes on to say,

> Religion is *moral disposition* (not pragmatic disposition) so far as it had grounds in the *cognition of God*; but this certainly does not need to be known for certain; it can merely be a pure Idea of God that is morally right (though as speculation full of errors), and, second, it need only contain the conviction that *it is at least possible that there is a God*, or beyond that a strong faith. For the former morality is not required; but if it is there, then in combination with that problematic judgment it can give religion. For the latter a morally good disposition is already required. [*ibid*., 18: 516]

Kant's moral philosophy has what Palmquist has called a theocentric orientation. For all of his long life Kant labored to find some way to prove God exists substantially but never succeeded. Palmquist tells us,

> 'Theocentric' here does not mean Kant requires human *knowledge* of God to serve as the basis of or center for all other types of knowledge. On the contrary, it means the problems surrounding our understanding of the nature and reality of God serve as the central driving force of his philosophy. [Palmquist (2000), pg. 8]

Kant is reckoned one of the three greatest philosophers who have ever lived (the other two are Plato and Aristotle). Our modern distinction between "science" and "philosophy" is due to him and he wrote a number of works on the topic of morals. He wrote one philosophical book on religion [Kant (1793)] but he was not a theologian despite the theocentric orientation of his philosophy.

The main point to take away from Kant here is that while religion and moral laws are closely inter-twined, they are not precisely the same thing. Elsewhere he wrote,

> The moral subsists for itself (in accordance with its principle) without the presupposition of a deity. [*ibid*., 18: 455]

By "the moral" (*die Moral*) Kant means that which is the purpose and end of moral laws. One can have moral purposes, moral imperatives, and moral maxims yet be under no divine command. Where ethics and religion come together is where the person's moral disposition is joined to his concepts of God (or, in the case of polytheistic religions, gods). In Kant's view,

> God's regime is not despotic but paternal. It does not say: Do not reason, just obey; but rather: Reason diligently so that you can demonstrate your reverence for God from your own conviction, freely and unafraid – a reverence that would be of no worth at all if it were forced out of you. [*ibid*., 18: 446]

It logically follows from this that *theology* properly aims at finding a systematic and thorough-going understanding of one's idea of God. The obvious challenge this presents is: How does one go about finding such an understanding?

The way most often tried is to subscribe to a revealed theology. In Christianity, Islam, and Judaism the revelations are held to have been given directly to prophets through contact with God or angels. It is more or less the same in the case of Hinduism but with a notable variation. As Narayanan explains,

> In the Hindu tradition, deities descend to the earth as human beings and human beings ascend to a divine status. Salvific truth is said to be mediated by these holy persons. The earliest holy men and women who "saw" the truth and compiled the *Vedas* were called "seers." . . . In many Hindu communities, the sacred teacher is considered to be as important as the deity and is venerated and even worshipped; other communities, however, do not consider the teacher to be so significant.

[Narayanan (2005), pg. 55]

Buddhism, too, has its teachers operating in such a central role although in its case the fundamental unity between the person and the universe calls for replacing the notion of "revelation" with "enlightenment." As Eckel explains,

Siddhartha's[9] wanderings eventually brought him to the foot of the Bodhi Tree or the "Tree of Awakening." He seated himself beneath it in a last attempt to win freedom from death and rebirth. He was assailed by the evil god Mara, who sent his daughters to seduce him and his sons to frighten him away. But Siddhartha withstood Mara's onslaught and, during one final night of meditation, became enlightened about the Dharma ("truth" or "law") of human existence. With this he could properly be called a *budda* ("awakened one").

After his awakening, the Budda walked to a deer park in Sarnath, near Varanasi, where he met five of his former companions. He taught them a sermon, or discourse (*sutra*), known as the "First turning of the Wheel of the Dharma [Law]." The story of Buddhism as an organized religious tradition begins with this serene and newly wise teacher conveying the results of his awakening to a handful of companions, who formed the nucleus of the Buddhist *samgha* ("Community"). [Eckel (2005), pp. 114-115]

Taoism, too, has its foundations in "sacred persons" said to have received divine revelations [Oldstone-Moore (2005a), pp. 251+.]. Confucianism, on the other hand, has its teachers but they are more like the earliest Greek philosophers such as Thales of Miletus – wise men of accomplishment whose examples others sought to emulate [Oldstone-Moore (2005b), pp. 353-359].

This approach of following the teachings of a prophet, seer, or enlightened teacher requires the least amount of effort on the part of the majority of a religion's faithful. In a manner of speaking, one only needs to "ask the rabbi" for answers – and ignore the fact that *your* personal "rabbi" is probably *not* one of the persons who has experienced a divine revelation addressing the question. But more serious, according to Kant's view, is that the element of diligent reasoning and self-conviction is absent in this sort of subscription. In its place is substituted a requirement for faith in the understandings of *others* rather than your own. This is attended by risks for both teacher and follower, probably the most dangerous of which is a tendency for the teacher to be transformed into an authoritarian ruler instead. The dialectic logic underlying this tendency was articulated by Thomas Aquinas:

The usage of the multitude, which according to the Philosopher[10] is to be followed in giving names to things, has commonly held that they are to be called *wise* who order things rightly and govern them well. Hence, among other things that men have conceived about the wise man, the Philosopher includes the notion that "it belongs to the wise man to order." Now, the rule of government and order for all things directed to an end must be taken from that end. For, since the end of each thing is its good, a thing is then best disposed when it is fittingly ordered to its end. . . . The name of the absolutely wise man, however, is reserved for him whose consideration is directed to the end of the universe, which is also the origin of the universe. [Aquinas (1259-64), pp. 59-60]

But then one is faced with the important problem of deciding who these trusted others are to be. What is to be the basis for this trust? and how far is this trust to be extended? Whence comes *self*-conviction?

In this treatise, by the word "conviction" I mean "subjectively complete holding-to-be-true based on an objectively sufficient ground." By "holding-to-be-true" I mean "the conscious reference of a determinant judgment to the state of one's general understanding concerning the manner in which that judgment is regarded as being true." A person's holding-to-be-true can range from being uncertain to being certain

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[9] Siddhartha Gautama, the person revered by Buddhists as "the Budda" or "Awakened One."
[10] Aristotle

about the truth of a judgment. On one side of this range lies *faith*, by which I mean "holding-to-be-true on a subjectively sufficient ground with consciousness of doubt." On the other lies *belief*, by which I mean "*unquestioned* holding-to-be-true-and-binding on the basis of a merely subjective sufficient reason and without consciousness of doubt." In this treatise, **faith and belief are not the same thing**. "Subjectively sufficient reason" means a reason that needs nothing additional in order for a person to affirm a judgment *affectively* (i.e., to "feel" or "sense" that the judgment is correct). One central aim of this treatise is to explore and examine bases for religious faith grounded in subjectively sufficient reasons. Another is to examine if and when one person's religious convictions can peacefully and pragmatically coexist with those of other people in the daily commerce of life. If I may be permitted to wax poetic for a moment, perhaps the path to such understandings is also the path to "peace on earth, good will toward men."

3. Species of Theology II: Argumentations

The three species of theology discussed in section 2 might be called "proper" theologies because they are religious systems focused substantially on deities or supernatural unities of things in relationship to humankind. As such they stand under a common genus. "New England theology" and "new theology" belong to this same genus as particular special schools of theology. New England theology was a peculiar school of Calvinism but no longer exists as an active school of theological thought. New theology is a particular school of thought within Catholic theology. What is distinctive about them is the content of their doctrines. Precisely because they are doctrinally specialized subdivisions of Christianity, these two entries in Webster's list merit no special discussion for purposes of this treatise[11].

This still leaves seven other entries in the list. These seven differ in genus from the others because they are not distinct species of religious systems but rather are *approaches* to theological reasoning on matters of church doctrine. They usually aim to improve their given religion's understanding of itself. They are thus argumentations rather than theologies properly so called. Furthermore, as theological argumentations these seven are predominantly approaches developed for and found in Christian theologies.

Ascetical theology might be called a "behavioral" approach to theology. It is *formally* understood as the organized study or presentation of spiritual teachings found in Christian scriptures and the doctrines set out by early and generally influential Christian theologians such as the Apostolic Fathers [Lake (1912); (1913)]. It is *practically* understood as means for following Christ by which one can attain Christian perfection. These generally means include rejecting or denying that which is disordered within oneself, learning to love and trust God, and leading a life of prayer by which one grows toward union with God.

Biblical theology, as the term is most commonly used, is a particular method or emphasis within biblical studies. It is also used to refer to the collation and restatement of material contained in the Bible without the sorts of logical analysis and dialectical correlations usually found in systematic theology.

Systematic theology is a discipline within Christian theology for formulating an orderly, rational, and coherent account of the doctrines of Christian faith. It strives to compare and relate all of scripture to create a systematized statement about what the whole Bible says about particular issues.

Dogmatic theology is that part of theology dealing with theoretical "truths of faith" concerning God and God's works. As the name implies, it is about the orthodox dogma recognized by an organized church body. The word "orthodox" derives from the Greek word *orthodoxia* ("right thinking"). The word dogma comes from the Greek *dógma* ("that which one thinks is true"; "true opinion"). Its purpose is to formulate and communicate doctrine considered essential to Christianity and which if denied would constitute heresy.

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[11] It is no part of this treatise to make any religious study of the divisions of Christianity, e.g., Roman Catholic, Orthodox Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Latter Day Saint, and so on. Likewise, it will not treat the Sunni and Shia divisions of Islam, any of the multitude of divisions within Hinduism, etc. This treatise is not a polemic.

Polemical theology is that part of Christian theology concerned with the history of controversies maintained within or by the church and with conducting the defense of essential church doctrines from arguments made against them by nonmembers (and sometimes members) of the church. Part of this also involves arguments by which an antithesis being argued by others can be refuted. It would not be too much of a metaphorical stretch to call polemical theology "theological lawyering."

Rational theology is a dialectical approach to trying to prove the existence of God. Dialectical reasoning is reasoning wherein one judges without distinction about objects that cannot be given in experience as if these objects *were* objects of possible experience. A simple example of dialectical reasoning can be illustrated as follows: (1) the universe could not have given birth to itself; (2) therefore the universe must have been created by something other than itself; (3) such a creator is called God; (4) therefore God exists. A rational theology is a sort of logico-mathematical approach to formulating a religious doctrine. Kant found that proposed proofs of the existence of God were divisible into three kinds of arguments: the ontological arguments; the cosmological arguments; and the teleological arguments.

Ontological arguments date back to Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 AD). Arguments of this kind attempt to prove God exists without appeal to revelation or scripture. One example is Descartes' argument which basically went: (1) God is a being with every positive perfection, i.e., God lacks nothing; (2) a being that does not have existence lacks something; (3) therefore God exists [Descartes (1641), Med. III]. Descartes' argument was regarded by the theologians of his day as being a specious argument. Anselm's argument carried more weight among them. It goes: (1) God is something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought; (2) for something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought to exist in reality would be greater than for it to exist in the mind alone; (3) something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought must therefore exist in reality as well as in the mind [Davies & Evans (1998), pg. xii]. Personally, I don't see much to distinguish Descartes' argument from Anselm's but apparently 17th century theologians did.

Cosmological arguments begin with some pervasive feature of the world and argue from there to the existence of a first cause of that feature. For example, motion and change is a feature of the world and so there must be a cause of motion and change – a "mover" of things. Because that "mover" does something (causes something else to change or move), there must be a cause of the mover's action. This remote cause also does something (moves the immediate mover), and so there must be a cause of its motion, etc. The argument continues by mathematical induction until it arrives at an "unmoved prime mover" (see, e.g., Aristotle (date unknown) pp. 423-433). Theology identifies this "unmoved prime mover" as God.

Teleological arguments begin with observations of the regularity of nature and of adaptations of means to ends. From this they infer that this *order* in nature must be the product of design and take this inference to establish the existence of a supernatural designer, usually identified as God. Teleological arguments are also variously called physico-theological argument, argument from design, or intelligent design argument. The earliest record of a teleological argument is attributed to Socrates. Plato and Aristotle developed complicated approaches to it but it was the ancient Greek stoics who developed a battery of creationist "intelligent design" arguments. As you can see, teleological arguments have been around for a very long time.

Unfortunately, problems with the premises of the argument exist in all three cases. Kant was able to show that valid proof of God's existence by means of any of these three types of arguments is impossible [Kant (1787) B: 618-658]. As we can tell from his later notes, correspondence, and works, this was not an outcome he wanted. We see him still trying to find some way to wiggle around it up to the end of his life.

Speculative theology is a term that designates a method within systematic theology for marshalling all subsidiary tools and other helps in order to collect its materials, employ the guidance of philosophy or speculative surveys, and combine all of these into a systematic whole. It can therefore be regarded as a sub-branch or subdiscipline of systematic theology as a whole.

To sum up, these seven species of the usage of the word "theology" are specific methods or approaches

used by practicing theologians. In what follows in this treatise it is impossible to *not* employ the sorts of arguments and reasoning that could be arguably classified as "belonging" to one or another of them (at least adjectively). However, the formal designations just reviewed do refer to specific doctrines of method that are *not* actually a part of *this* treatise. Any resemblance is merely an accident of appearance.

4. Theology as Critique

The theology laid before you in this treatise does not neatly fit into any of Webster's usages. It has some quite strong aspects of rational theology and it also has some quite strong aspects of speculative theology. It is systematic but not systematic theology as this term is explained above. It has its connections with moral theology and it might be called a new theology except for the fact that it is not a reaction against dogmas and creeds. The downside of trying to fit it with any of the labels listed above is the risk of drawing a false connection between it and some existing organized church or creed. It is to reduce such risks that I call it by the name Critical Theology. This is a way to set it apart from too-strict associations with the species of theology found in Webster's.

Yet even with this name there remains some risk of misplaced association. Scholars of religion speak of academic endeavors called by names such as Biblical criticism, higher criticism, lower criticism, textual criticism, and historical criticism. "Criticism" as a label generally denotes an analysis and judgment of the merits and faults of literary or artistic works. This treatise does none of that. It will from time to time talk about history, and it will from time to time disagree with some religious prescription or dogma, but it is no part of my intention to "criticize" anyone's religion. This doesn't mean *I* agree with *your* religion or religious position. It just means I'm not going to argue about any such disagreements. It isn't my intention in writing this treatise to try to "convert" or "save" anyone; nor do I seek to *be* "converted" or "saved" by anyone. As it advises in the Quran,

> Each community has its own direction to which it turns. Race to do good deeds and, wherever you are, God will bring you together. [Quran 2:148]

The "Critical" in "Critical Theology" refers to *Critique*. By this term I mean "a scientific examination grounded in an epistemology-centered metaphysic." Even this requires a few additional words of explanation, however. By "scientific" I do **not** mean this work is a *science*. It cannot be one because it takes as its starting point a metaphysically problematic first hypothesis, namely, the hypothesis "God exists." This hypothesis is called **the first article of faith** in this treatise with the term "faith" taken to mean "holding-to-be-true on a subjectively sufficient ground with consciousness of doubt." I ask no more of any reader than for you to read this treatise *as if* you subscribe to this first article. I do not ask you to *actually* subscribe to it. Do as you will but with an open mind and without passion. If you can do this, read on; if you cannot, it is better for you to stop here. A closed mind lives in solitary confinement and

> Passionate men, like fleet hounds, are apt to overrun the scent. [Fuller (1732), 3849]

What an "epistemology-centered metaphysic" is also requires a brief explanation. At the level of its *practical* root meaning, a "metaphysic" is nothing more and nothing less than "the way one looks at the world." Starting in infancy and continuing into adulthood, every human being constructs for him- or herself some set of baseline understandings, maxims of thinking, and *practical* moral imperatives and tenets he or she uses to make judgments about things and about what is to be regarded as right and wrong. Each person holds unexamined and unquestioned presuppositions and beliefs, learned habits of thinking, and finds ways of dealing with the effects of feelings and emotions. He or she, in other words, establishes a *private and personal metaphysic* that "colors" his entire outlook on the world and on events. If he or she encounters a thing or event that contradicts something in this personal metaphysic, he or she will regard that thing or event as paradoxical and might even find the experience to be psychologically traumatic.

A personal metaphysic is the product of an individual's unique experience. Every one of us builds one and without it a person could not function or meet the challenges of life. As each person's personal experience is unique, so also is each person's private metaphysic. However, because every person *constructs* his or her own metaphysic, so also every person has it in his or her power to amend and alter it. This freedom and ability extends so far in some cases as to lead to a systematic formulation of a *scientific* metaphysic. In Western civilization the first people to undertake such a formulation were the ancient Greeks beginning with the Greek philosopher Parmenides at the end of the sixth and beginning of the fifth centuries BC [Marías (1967), pp. 20-24]. Parmenides and almost all other ancient Greek philosophers constructed *ontology*-centered systems of metaphysics. The one Greek who appears to be the exception to this was the philosopher Protagoras, who is remembered for his pronouncement, "Man is the measure of all things; of those that are, that they are; and of those that are not, that they are not" [Marías (1967), pg. 37]. Both Protagoras and Kant developed *epistemology*-centered systems of metaphysics.

An epistemology-centered metaphysic is a system of pure rational knowledge through concepts based upon a theory of how human knowledge is possible. It deals with the sources, scope, and boundaries of pure Reason and reasoning. This treatise is based on such a metaphysic [Wells (2006); (2009)]. It is called the Critical Philosophy and has its roots in the work of the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant in the 18th century. It is important to note, however, that Critical Theology is not a metaphysic and not a science. It is the result of *philosophizing* but I deny it is a *philosophy*. I call it what it is: a theology.

In the history of philosophy, theology has long been treated as part of philosophy, just as science was. A distinction between modern science and philosophy has been generally recognized since the 19th century but, to most professional philosophers, theology in at least some aspects is still regarded as a part of philosophy. I demur from this practice. Just as Kant drew a distinction between the special sciences we know today and the study and practice of philosophy, so also a distinction must be drawn between proper theology and philosophy. Philosophy, Kant wrote, is the system of all philosophical knowledge [Kant (1787), B: 866]; knowledge (in German, *Erkenntnis*) is cognition held-to-be an inalterable assertion of truth. Cognition that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west is knowledge; concepts concerning the supernatural are not. Supernatural objects are objects of *speculation*. Chapter 2 begins with this topic.

One can *treat* theology philosophically because a *philosophic argument* is one that is rational, sensibly composed, and dispassionately calm. One who makes such an argument out of concepts grounded in a metaphysic is said to *philosophize* even when the subject matter concerns objects outside of the domain of science. The objects of a doctrine of theology are such objects and the ideas of these objects properly concern speculative relationships between a deity and human beings. Theology proper is a philosophic doctrine distinct from that of a science but, because of the distinctive character of supernatural objects, its concepts are conditioned by hypothetical premises (e.g., "God exists") and so cannot be held-to-be *inalterable* assertions of truth. Theology proper is, in regard to supernatural Objects, what science proper is in regard to natural Objects. Philosophy proper is a doctrine of *metaphysics*. All this is to say: philosophy, science, and theology are distinct from one another and should not be confounded with each other through ambiguities of language. A philosophic *doctrine* is not a doctrine *of* philosophy.

5. Points of Theological Inquiry

Once we draw these fine distinctions between philosophy, science, and theology then what is it that is especially distinctive about theological doctrines in general? A scholar whose special field of scholarship is a doctrine constituting a system in accordance with a principle of a disciplined whole of knowledge is called a scientist. The ideas which constitute a doctrine of religion cannot claim the lofty status of *knowledge* because the region of the supernatural lies beyond the horizon of possible human experience. The truths asserted by these ideas cannot be predicated on *objectively inalterable* grounds but only upon *subjectively sufficient* ones. Such an assertion of truth is called **faith**. *A scholar whose special field of scholarship is a doctrine constituting a system in accordance with a principle of a disciplined whole of*

*faith is called a **theologian***. From this it immediately follows that such a doctrinal system is a **theology**. Grounding in religious faith is what makes theology distinct from the doctrines of science or philosophy.

Kant wrote,

> All Knowledge[12] is either empirical, i.e. derived from experience, or rational: arising from Reason, hence possible *a priori* [13] and self-supporting. Among the former will have been counted experience proper and history (i.e., reliable reports, hence Knowledge from the experience of others). The second kind of certitude is independent from all experience.

> All empirical certitude is combined with consciousness of the contingency of the truth; for experience teaches well that something is constituted in one way or another or that something has happened, but never teaches that it could not have been constituted or happened otherwise. [Kant (1776-95), 18: 290]

Theology seeks systematic and inalterable assertions of truth with consciousness that one's holding-to-be-true is grounded in *logically apodictic* judgments which follow from *subjectively* sufficient premises for understanding *given* foundational articles of faith. An Object of this kind of reasoning is called an ***Ideal***.

We do not lack examples from theologians whose works are exemplary models of theological practices and techniques (regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with their findings). Thomas Aquinas, who is accounted the greatest European theologian of the Middle Ages, is one of them. His most influential work, *Summa Theologica*, is still the central point of reference for the theology of the Roman Catholic Church. *Summa Theologica* opens with the following words:

> To place our purpose within proper limits, it is necessary first to investigate the nature and extent of this sacred doctrine. Concerning this there are ten points of inquiry.

> (1) On the necessity of this doctrine? (2) Whether it is a science? (3) Whether it is one or many? (4) Whether it is speculative or practical? (5) How is it compared with other sciences? (6) Whether it is wisdom? (7) What is its subject-matter? (8) Whether it is a matter of argument? (9) Whether it rightly employs metaphors and similes? (10) Whether the Sacred Scripture of this doctrine may be expounded in different senses? [Aquinas (1265-1272)]

These ten "points of inquiry" likewise provide a suitable beginning for the treatise. With a moment's reflection I think you can see some of these are already dealt with. The others we will be dealing with.

History more than amply demonstrates that religion has been and continues to be a force for great good in the world. It also amply demonstrates religion has been and too often continues to be a force for great evil. Which case it is in any particular instance depends on the attitudes, zealousness, and even the fears of *people* who either hold with or oppose some particular interpretations of a religious doctrine, or who take particular actions which they justify on particular doctrinal grounds, or undertake in obedience to authority figures under whom they hold themselves subjects. These historical characteristics of organized religions all by themselves are clear indicators of why sound theological doctrine is a practical necessity. Can its faithful *be* faithful to its teachings if they do not correctly *understand* those teachings?

How does one interpret a religious doctrine correctly? Are there rules for interpreting that one can follow? *Can* an item of doctrine *be* interpreted "correctly" at all? How does one judge an interpretation to be correct vs. it being a misinterpretation? How does one gauge the applicable scope of an interpretation? Is an interpretation valid in every respect (absolutely valid) or is it contingent upon some set of conditions? When it is the latter, what are these conditions and what are the limitations in the scope of the interpretation?

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[12] in German, *Wissen*.

[13] *a priori* means "prior to experience".

The potential of religion for great good or great evil hinges upon answers to such questions as these. If any religious doctrine is to be *self-consistent* – which is a minimal requirement for any set of opinions to *be* regarded as a *doctrine* – there must be some set of grounding tenets and principles for judging its veracity and its practicality. An exposition of such a set of grounding tenets and principles *is* a theology in the wide sense of that word.

Regarding Aquinas' second point of inquiry, we have already made a beginning in answering that point. Theology is not a science in the context of the modern meaning of that term. However, it would be quite erroneous to presume this also means there is no point of connection between theology and science. We have to consider not only the Ideal of the religious deity but also its relationships with human beings. A human being is an object of the natural world and, as such, is an object of human experience. Therefore it is not only *proper* but *necessary* for human nature to enter into theology. One's theological ideas cannot be correct if they require human nature to be something other than what experience teaches us it is. In his unfinished *Opus Postumum* Kant wrote that the highest standpoint of transcendental philosophy is "God, the world, and the thinking being in the world (Man)" [Kant (1804) 21: 32]. This highest standpoint is the idea of a synthesis of ideas about the Objects of theology with those of physical nature ("the world") and human nature. In this we see the directions that Aquinas' second and third points of inquiry will take us.

As for the remaining points of inquiry, the answers will emerge in the study itself. Let this be the segue into the chapters that follow.

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