INTRODUCTION

A Brief History of Faith and Reason

Every man is stupid and without knowledge.

Jeremiah 10:14

In a general sense, this project is concerned with the longstanding opposition between faith and reason—the conflict, reconciliation, or deconstruction of which has been an abiding concern throughout Christian history. Thus, in order to contextualize the investigation it will be helpful to begin with a short overview of the development of this antagonism within the journey of religion. An obvious place to begin is with the wisdom of the Greek philosophers, with *philos sophia*, the love of reason, which seeks to understand the nature of how things are.

Traditionally, the philosopher's elevation of reason presupposes a faith in its ability to discover and reliably describe that which is. A central feature buttressing this faith in reason is the law of non-contradiction—a fundamental precept of classical logic, which is, for the most part, presented as an undisputed arbiter of sound reasoning. The modern philosopher and theologian James Anderson serves as exemplar of this assumption; he affirms: "what is deemed unacceptable is for some person to speak against or deny some proposition *whilst also affirming* that same proposition. Such a practice is invariably viewed as the height of irrationality."[1] Nearly two and

1. Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology*, 108.

half thousand years earlier Aristotle articulated the same rule: "if whenever an assertion is true its denial is false and when the latter is true its affirmation is false, there can be no such thing as simultaneously asserting and denying the same thing truly."[2] Logician J. C. Beall observes likewise: "that no contradiction is true remains an entrenched 'unassailable dogma' of Western thought."[3]

Although the Greek philosophers did not have the Judeo-Christian concept of a relationship with a personal god, this period is nonetheless indispensable in charting the interaction between faith and reason, as Paul Helm observes: "the classical period provided the tools of reason which are applied to faith and have been ever since."[4] Ultimately, Aristotle along with Plato sought to show how religious sensitivity evolves from rational inquiry. Plato believed it was the *rational* aspect of his tripartite theory of the soul that yearned after truth and that alone could discover the real. Furthermore, Plato claimed, "it [is] appropriate for the rational element to rule, because it is wise and takes thought for the entire soul."[5] So we find in the Hellenic period both a sensitivity to spiritual truths but also the foundations of rationalism with an ultimate emphasis on the primacy of reason. Accordingly, when the teachings of Christ and the apostles arrived in Athens there was much that St. Paul found in common with Greek philosophy, but also a substantial amount that did not accord with the superior wisdom of the Greeks.

The biblical confrontation of issues of faith and reason is of course an area of enormous complexity and my aim here is only briefly to sketch an outline. But even a cursory summary, however, should recognize that the New Testament presents truth both in accordance with classical reason and also as its antithesis. According to the book of Acts, Paul "*reasoned* [. . .] from the Scriptures, *explaining* and *proving* that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead."[6] Here the emphasis is on Christianity's reasonability; those who believed "were *persuaded*."

2. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1008.a.34, 14.

3. Beall "Introduction in *The Law of Non-Contradiction*," 2–3. It is worth noting that scholars tend to recognize three versions of Aristotle's description of the law of non-contradiction: an ontological variant, a doxastic or psychological form, and a semantic version. For the purpose of our investigation the ontological version—the statement: "it is impossible to predicate contraries simultaneously" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1007.b.17, 12)—will take precedence, since this tends to be the most common application of the law, and indeed, provides the greatest potential for hostility to statements that seem to oppose the law.

4. Helm, *Faith and Reason*, 3.

5. Plato, *The Republic*, 138.

6 Acts 17:2–3, my emphasis.

On the other hand, Paul gives equal emphasis to the view that Christianity appears as folly to the wisdom of the Greek philosophers. In his letter to the Corinthians, he writes: "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, less the cross be emptied of its power."[7] Here, Paul seems to caution against the presentation of religious truths in synthesis with a contemporary understanding of good reason. Instead, Paul associates the gospel message with foolishness, and yet at the same time undercuts this emphasis by preaching that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men."[8] Given these two contrasting attitudes, then, how can we accurately characterize the approach of the New Testament to the dialogue between faith and reason?

The biblical teaching that God alone is wise has often led theologians to downplay or sidestep the reality of this foolishness, perhaps because wisdom seems the more appealing characteristic, especially if the theologian is engaged in apologetics. But the truth that Paul teaches clearly entails a dual dimension: Christianity is both supremely wise *and* supremely foolish. The wisdom that the world does not understand not only seems like folly, but indeed it *is* folly by the world's standards. Festus is thus in a certain sense correct when he tells Paul that he is out of his mind, and yet Paul is also correct in his affirmation that he is not mad but speaking rationally.[9] Therefore, an accurate depiction of the biblical attitude to issues of faith and reason seems to involve a direct challenge to Aristotle's law of non-contradiction in order to uphold the affirmation that faith is both rational and also a scandal to reason.

Broadly speaking, the Christian conjunction of reason and faith seems less complicated in the patristic period that followed, or rather less strikingly paradoxical, as this era by and large can be characterized by Augustine's desire "to understand what we believe,"[10] an idea that forms a central part of his work *De Libero Arbitrio*, written between 387 and 395. Augustine's influential thought established a clear order: faith is primary; reason is always a secondary aid to theological reflection since belief comes before understanding. On the one hand, Augustine defines theology as "reasoning

7. 1 Cor 1:17. "Eloquent wisdom" is the translation of σοφία meaning clever and wise. See also note below.

8. 1 Cor 1:25. Here, Paul draws on the classical concepts of wisdom and folly (*moros* and *sophos*) but inverts their roles by applying a different standard of wisdom that has the outward appearance of *moros*.

9. "Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.' But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.'" Acts 26:24–25.

10. Augustine, *Free Choice of the Will*, 7.

or discussion about the Divinity,"[11] and describes the Christian God as "a God who gives blessedness to the rational and intelligent soul."[12] We cannot therefore dismiss the importance Augustine places on human reason. And yet, elsewhere, in his work *City of God*, Augustine rebukes "the unbelievers" who "demand a rational proof from us when we proclaim the miracles of God." He observes that "since we cannot supply this proof of those matters (for they are beyond the powers of the human mind) the unbelievers assume that our statements are false."[13] Here Augustine does not deny that certain acts of God seem unlikely or impossible, but impresses upon the reader the reality of the limitations of his own reason, suggesting that we should not expect to be able to understand all aspects of divinity in a rational manner. Indeed, Augustine interprets rationality as a gift from God that is itself beyond human understanding.[14]

By the sixth century, Pseudo-Dionysius had laid a greater stress on the *via negativa* and with this emphasis came the idea that religious revelation can seem contrary to common sense. "The man in union with truth," he writes, "knows clearly that all is well with him, even if everyone else thinks that he has gone out of his mind."[15] Denys' desire to provide a faithful theological account leads him to describe God using paradoxical expressions such as "brilliant darkness."[16] One of the advantages Denys saw in using paradox to speak of God is that it prevents the individual from fixating upon any single attribute or manifestation; God can be praised in the same breath for his meekness and for his majesty. Denys' commitment to paradox is such that he even undercuts his own apophatic method by maintaining that in addition to being "beyond every assertion," God is also "beyond privations [and] beyond every denial."[17] Denys' paradoxical account of God seems to imply therefore that strict obedience to the law of non-contradiction cannot provide a satisfactory description of the divine. The principle that God is beyond all assertions cannot logically be held together with the notion that God is equally beyond all privations; a thing that is fully meek cannot not also be supremely majestic, unless of course it is accepted that paradoxical statements can provide an accurate means of describing reality.

11. Augustine, *City of God*, 298.

12. Ibid., 299.

13. Ibid., 971.

14. "It is in no trivial measure that a man understands and knows God, when he understands and knows that this knowledge and understanding is itself the gift of God." Ibid., 721.

15. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 110.

16. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 135.

17. Ibid., 136.

Whilst the medieval theologians never lost sight of Denys' practice of speaking paradoxically in an attempt to signify the divine, the significant landmark in the dialogue between faith and reason in the Middle Ages was, of course, the rediscovery of Aristotle, and by the latter half of the thirteenth century the re-integration of Greek logic into Christian dialogue was firmly established. The masterful assimilation of Aristotelian reason into Christian theology by Aquinas (1225–74) has come to be seen by many as the beginning of a deeply rationalized Christianity and the prioritization of reason over mystery.[18] Whilst there is without doubt an element of truth in this, it is easy to misunderstand Aquinas' view of reason on account of its distorted reflection in Enlightenment theism. As Rowan Williams points out, for Aquinas "*intellectus* [. . .] is a rich and comprehensive term which is totally misrepresented if understood as referring to the discursive intellect."[19] Thomas' extensive application of reason always finds its genesis in his prayerful contemplation of the transcendent deity. And, whilst he defends the use of rational argument in theology on the grounds that reason is a gift from God, he is clear to affirm that "philosophy should be subject to the measure of faith."[20] Moreover, in the event of an antagonism found between faith and reason, Aquinas believes it is always the result of faulty reasoning, rather than the exposition of some falsehood in Scripture.[21]

It could be suggested that what Aquinas' work most significantly reveals is that the great quarrel between reason and faith had not yet arrived.[22] In fact, Aquinas goes so far as to say, "it is impossible that those things which God has manifested to us by faith should be contrary to those which are evident to us by natural knowledge."[23] Chesterton describes Aquinas as

18. Whilst it is extremely apparent that Aquinas in no way primacied reason over faith, he could be said to have exalted the role of reason in matters of theology by maintaining firmly "both kinds of truth are from God." Aquinas, *Super Boethium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3.

19. Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, 125.

20. Aquinas, *Super Boethium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3.

21. "If, however, anything is found in the teachings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this error does not properly belong to philosophy, but is due to an abuse of philosophy owing to the insufficiency of reason." Ibid.

22. John Milbank recognizes a similar falsity in distinguishing a strong antagonism in Aquinas' understanding of faith and reason, writing: "this dualistic reading of Aquinas is false." Milbank argues that the Thomistic tension between *divina scientia* and *sacra doctrina* ought to be reconsidered as "a single gnoseological extension" and interpreted together as a sacred unity in pursuit of divine knowledge. *Truth in Aquinas*, 19.

23. Aquinas, *Super Boethium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3. The impossibility of disagreement stems from Aquinas' belief that both faith and reason are gifts from God, and that it is not congruous with God's perfect nature to be an "author of error."

"belong[ing] to an age of intellectual unconsciousness, to an age of intellectual innocence,"[24] and perhaps this, more than anything, characterizes the medieval response to issues of faith and reason. Certainly, there was a strong urge to systematise Christian theology and demonstrate its inherent coherence, but without the modern distinction between the theologian and the philosopher, the objectives of philosophy were met and satisfied in Christian metaphysics.[25] Paul Helm describes the reintroduction of Aristotle into theological thought as "a synthesis and not a take-over,"[26] and one of the principal reasons that Helm's hypothesis seems true and that Hellenic discourse did not usurp medieval piety is that scholasticism always remained skeptical about the role of reason, using it as a means of *interacting* with an already established faith, not by way of primary justification for that belief.

Throughout the work of Anselm, the father of the scholastic tradition, we can further trace the medieval sense of harmony between rational argumentation and meditative devotion. In his *Proslogion* (1077–78) Anselm writes: "I give thanks to You, since what I believed before through your free gift I now so understand through Your illumination."[27] In this sentence, we again witness the acknowledgment that both belief and illumination—faith and reason—are gifted from God to the individual. This supports the case that many medieval philosophers did not see faith and reason in antagonism with each other, but believed like Augustine that both were gifts from God. In Anselm's work we observe not just the medieval *sanction* that faith may be investigated with reason, but rather what one might call the medieval *obligation* that seeking rational justification for belief is the duty of a believer. John Wippel concurs with this conclusion, writing: "For Anselm the dialectician to find necessary reasons for that which one already believes is part of the task of an enlightened faith."[28]

Yet, alongside the development of a "rationalized" scholasticism, the medieval period is also known for its embrace of mystical theology,[29] many aspects of which defy rational exposition. The law of non-contradiction, for example, is famously and explicitly overturned in the writing of the

24. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas*, 234.

25. John Wippel agrees with this characterization of Aquinas. He believes "throughout his career Aquinas would remain true to his conviction that there should ultimately be harmony between faith and reason and hence, when they both are correctly practiced, between theology and philosophy." Wippel, *Mediaeval Reactions*, 32.

26. Helm, *Faith and Reason*, 85–86.

27. Anselm, *Proslogion* , 89.

28. Wippel, *Mediaeval Reactions*, 7.

29. Some of the great mystics date from this period, such as Meister Eckhart (*c.* 1260–1327) and Lady Julian of Norwich (*c.* 1342–after 1416).

Christian mystic Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64), in particular in his development of the "coincidence of opposites." In the introduction to Cusa's works Bond reminds us that "by its very nature mystical theology assumes the task of outstripping reason and intellect. It presumes to see what reason excludes as impossible."[30] Bond reflects accurately Cusa's own admission that in order to experience God it is "necessary" to "admit the coincidence of opposites, above all capacity of reason, and to seek the truth where impossibility confronts me."[31] Cusa's teaching of the "coincidence of opposites" is a patent overhaul of the rule of non-contradiction since he strives to comprehend divine paradoxes such as the Trinity and the incarnation "without violating the integrity of the contrary elements and without diminishing the reality or the force of their contradiction."[32] Cusa's mystical writing, full of language embracing impossibility, venturing beyond thinking and transcending rational discourse, is radically divergent from the scholastic theology we claimed previously characterized medieval Christianity. There is another important medieval institution that likewise unsettles our picture of the sedate synthesis of faith and reason: the tradition of holy folly.

John Saward remarks on the unlikely juxtaposition of folly with the schoolmen and asks "why was it that the golden age of the fool coincided with the age of scholasticism?"[33] Saward answers his question by suggesting that "in the late Middle Ages there is an unselfconscious revelling in mirth, joy, and good humour of life in Christ."[34] Saward thus gestures to an important feature of this "intellectually innocent" age, which is the idea that scholastic endeavor could co-exist happily with mystic ecstasy and foolish revelry because there was an implicit understanding of the interwovenness between reason, folly, and mystery.

However, Mark A. McIntosh in his book *Mystical Theology* tells a different story altogether. He describes how "during this period of the rise of scholastic theology there were also shifting trends in Christian spirituality that made it harder for the two realms of life to communicate, let alone nourish each other."[35] For example, he believes that there is an awareness throughout Lady Julian's writing that her mode of theological engagement as a mystic was unlikely to be respected. McIntosh believes that this is because "the ecclesiastical and academic culture of her era was already less

30. Bond, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 33.
31. Cusa, *De Visione Dei*, 9.36.
32. Bond, *Nicholas of Cusa*, 22.
33. Saward, *Perfect Fools,* 81.
34. Ibid., 80.
35. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 63.

than open to the insights of someone situated far from the impressively authoritative halls of the university."[36] Here we are faced with the suggestion that far from an era of "intellectual innocence," the later Middle Ages were in fact an epoch dominated by an intellectualized Christianity, which rather than embracing the words of fools and mystics, inhibited this avenue of spiritual discourse. "The real tragedy," McIntosh writes, "is that by the later Middle Ages fewer and fewer saints, mystics and theologians still knew how to knit spirituality and theology together in their own life and work."[37]

It is hard to decide, given the complexity of the issue, whether McIntosh or Saward offers the more realistic portrayal of the character of medieval theology. In a sense there is no fundamental disagreement since Saward is referring to the High Middle Ages up to around 1300, whilst McIntosh is mainly addressing the attitude during the Late Middle Ages. They are, then, in a narrower sense, both right and there was something of a later medieval shift to demarcate spirituality from scholarship. Certainly during the following period—the Renaissance and Reformation—any remnants of the medieval synthesis of faith and reason were largely abolished by the establishment of a divide between God's revelation and man's rationality. Some element of this divide we can assume stemmed from the scholastic flourishing of the medieval church and the extensive influence of Aristotelian logic.

As we move into the first half of the sixteenth century, a dominant figure in the discussion between faith and reason is, of course, Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther argued that reason outside of grace is bound by sin and that reason therefore can never form the sole basis from which religious truth is articulated.[38] Within the history of faith and reason, Luther presents a strong case against the elevation of reason, arguing instead for the primacy of faith. He cautions the Christian in strong terms: "away with reason, which is an enemy to faith."[39] Luther's more extreme denunciations of reason as "impious and sacrilegious"[40] or most famously as "the Devil's bride"[41] are frequently quoted, though the impression they encourage leaves out the

36. Ibid., 13.

37. Ibid., 63.

38. Alister McGrath describes how "Luther's fundamental point is that 'the Fall' is first and foremost a fall from faith." McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 155. The implication of this belief for Luther is the understanding that atonement requires, above all, faith and that to seek God's justification through any other means (such as rationalized argumentation or the practice of indulgences) is wrong. As a result, Ephesians 2:8–10 became a central verse for Luther's teaching.

39. Luther, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle*, 94.

40. Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 106.

41. Luther, "Second Sunday in Epiphany," 126.

nuances of Luther's dialogue with reason; for it is not that he is hostile to reason in all its manifestations. Indeed, in his response before the Diet of Worms in 1521 he states: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures *or by clear reason* [. . .] I cannot and will not retract anything."[42] Here it is evident that Luther trusts the conviction of his own reasoning, which might suggest that when he speaks antagonistically it is because he believes reason is in a particular instance being used in a manner other than that which God intended.

Generally speaking, however, Luther did see reason as an inadequate and impoverished method of comprehending divine matters. "Reason," he writes, "interprets the Scriptures of God by her own inferences and syllogisms [. . .] how foolish she is in tacking her inferences onto the Scriptures."[43] The gospel, by contrast, Luther explains, "leadeth us beyond and above the light of the law and reason, into the deep secrets of faith, where the law and reason have nothing to do."[44] Faith and salvation for the reformers were seen as gifts that cannot be attained through human reason, and it was during the popularization of their views that the concept of faith underwent a distinct shift from *fides* to *fiducia*, from faith *that* to faith *in*.[45]

By the beginning of the seventeenth century the extreme volatility of the Reformation period had largely abated. Yet growing incompatibility between scientific and religious claims brought about a different set of circumstances whereby faith and reason again came into conflict. The Galileo controversy concerning the geocentric model of the solar system engendered a greater schism, whereby church leaders saw certain advances in science as heretical, and scientists such as Galileo found religious authorities intolerant and ignorant. John Lewis believes that the most prominent effect of the Galileo affair, in particular his trial and imprisonment, was that it "helped in no small measure to create that perceived separation of faith from reason, of religion from physical sciences."[46] Certainly, it was during the seventeenth century that the establishment of the modern polarity between science and religion took root. Science started to be perceived as the authoritative voice in matters of the phenomenal world, and as a result, religion began to be confined to the territory *beyond* the physical. However, as one historian observes, "the great scientists of the seventeenth century, including Kelper,

42. Quoted in Donald K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 182, my emphasis.

43. Luther, *The Bondage of Will*, cited in Helm, *Faith and Reason*, 140.

44. Ibid.

45. For a further discussion on the different interpretations of faith in the Reformation period see McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 115–37.

46. Lewis, *Galileo in France,* 15.

Galileo, and Newton, had pursued their work in a spirit of exalting God not undermining Christianity,"[47] and so it is not totally accurate to characterize the seventeenth century as the establishment of the radical schism between religious faith and scientific reason. Nevertheless, the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century inevitably gave weight to the religious skepticism that arrived with the Enlightenment in the century that followed.

Within the history of faith and reason, the Enlightenment is the high water-mark of rationality; although it is important to note, as McGrath does, that "the Middle Ages was just as much an 'Age of Reason' as the Enlightenment; the crucial difference lay in the manner in which reason was used, and the limits which were understood to be imposed on it."[48] Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant (1724–1804) wanted to see theology develop within the limits of reason alone and, arguably, as a result, lost sight of the careful qualifications maintained by the pre-moderns. Kant declared instead: "The *public* use of reason must at all times be free, and it alone can bring about Enlightenment among men."[49]

The Enlightenment recast rationality in its own image, the guiding sentiment of which Isaiah Berlin describes as the conviction that "all principles of explanation everywhere must be the same."[50] This of course extended from practices of law, politics and science to philosophy and religion. Hence, religion for many believers became an "Enlightenment theism," which according to McGrath had two major consequences: "First, Christianity was in effect *reduced* to those ideas which could be proved by reason [. . .] and second, reason was understood to take priority over revelation."[51] Gavin Hyman, who argues that atheism is "roughly contemporaneous with the birth of modernity,"[52] also describes how one of the major differences between medieval and modern theism was modernity's dissatisfaction with abstract theology and the desire for a more normative and rationalized religion. Hyman believes "Hume and Kant demonstrated how their frameworks disallowed, in principle, any substantive metaphysical knowledge of God."[53]

The chief sentiments of the Enlightenment thus expanded into the modern period; scientific advancement in biology and geology continued to broaden the gulf between reason and faith; evidentialism and verificationism

47. Spielvogel, *Western Civilisation*, 514–15.
48. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 87.
49. Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" 59.
50. Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, 279.
51. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 214.
52. Hyman, *A Short History of Atheism*, 2.
53. Ibid., 45.

gained popularity as the accurate means of testing the validity of a statement; empirical proof was the stipulation of many rationalists and religious truths simply could not satisfy these new demands. For this reason, Hume's essay disparaging the miraculous basis of Christian belief in 1748 was taken seriously, as was Locke's earlier request for faith to show itself in accord with reason. "Faith," Locke taught, "can never convince us of anything that contradicts our knowledge."[54]

Whilst some believers greatly supported the Enlightenment task of bringing religion in line with modern rationalization, others reacted strongly against this. Johann Georg Hamann (1730–88), for example, one of the fathers of German Romanticism, wrote passionately against the attempt to redefine faith in accordance with this strict application of rationality.[55] In his essay, "Metacritique on the Purism of Reason," Hamann argued that "analysis is nothing more than the latest fashionable cut, and synthesis nothing more than the artful seam of a professional leather or cloth-cutter."[56] At the time, Hamann's rebuttal did not pose a significant hindrance to the rationalists. Berlin believes that this was because Hamann was one of few vocal dissenters against the swift imperialization of reason.[57] In the year of Hamann's death, however, an influential ally in the revolt against the supreme rationalization of thought was born.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) was among the first of the nineteenth-century philosophers to dissent from the belief that the universe is ultimately rational. Instead, he developed a proto-Nietzschean rejection of the ultimacy of reason and introduced a pre-Freudian emphasis on desire and drive as what constitutes the knowing of the self. Schopenhauer was critical of Kant and Hegel[58] for their belief that reason is the founding

54. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 529.

55. Matthew Bagger highlights Hamman's refusal to accept the principle of non-contradiction as an abiding maxim: "responding to Enlightenment criticism of orthodox Christianity, the influential Prussian thinker Johann Hamann gives paradox a very different valuation [. . .] he adopted the medieval mystical notion of the coincidence of opposites, gave it his own interpretation and claimed to prefer it to the principle of non-contradiction." Bagger, *The Uses of Paradox*, x.

56. Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 217.

57. Berlin, *Three Critics*, 279. "He [Hamann] attacked the entire outlook in every particular; and feeling himself a David chosen by the Lord to smite this vast and horrible Goliath, he marched into battle alone."

58 Although Hegel argued for a supremely rationalized noumena, in order for this rationality to be effective in society he believed that the individual must abstract from the realm of phenomenal experience since within everyday reality he claimed there is a "law of contradiction" operative. So, although Hegel gives fuel to the Age of Reason, he nevertheless raises a specific objection to the law of non-contradiction by stating that the phenomenal is in a state of becoming and constant flux.

principle of a just society, and their reliance upon logic as the way of reaching this truth. Like Hamann before him, Schopenhauer sought to dethrone reason from its imperial reign: "He argues that rationality confers on us no higher moral status than that of other sentient beings."[59]

Schopenhauer is an interesting figure to consider from a theological perspective, since on the one hand it would seem in the interests of religion to qualify the claims for an entirely rational justification for belief. Yet on the other hand, his work argued for the possibility of achieving moral excellence without religion and so he is in this sense an unlikely ally for the church. His book *On the Basis of Morality* is concerned primarily with critiquing the Kantian dependence upon God as the only possible postulate for moral behavior. Instead, Schopenhauer argues, gallantry, selflessness, and compassion are "universal and occur irrespective of religion."[60] The separation of the religious from the moral led Schopenhauer to associate religion with the irrational and with superstition. This interest in the sociological and psychological explanation of religious belief was continued after his death, culminating at the turn of the century in Freud's declaration that religious belief compensates the need for a father-figure.

Freud (1856–1939) expressed the view that while religion had once been beneficial to the civilization of humanity, the rational development of the human race meant that there was no longer a social need to believe in religion, and that those who tried to maintain its importance did so for psychological reasons and acted neurotically. Freud sided with the empirical atheism of his age when he spoke of the inevitable demise of religious belief driven by a heightened rationality. "In the long run," he wrote, "nothing can withstand reason and experience, and the contradiction which religion offers to both is all too palpable. Even purified religious ideas can not escape this fate, so long as they try to preserve anything of the consolation of religion."[61] Freud's ideas contributed to the spread of secular modernity by attempting to reduce religious belief to a psychological phenomenon, and by continuing the subjection of religious ideas to criticism set within the limits established by the Enlightenment.

Of course, not all nineteenth-century thinkers accepted the need to acquiesce to the demands posited by the empiricists. Kierkegaard's existentialism, for example, recalled the pre-modern delimitations: "human

59. Janaway, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, 6.

60. Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of* Morality, 201.

61. Sigmund Freud quoted in O'Neil and Alchtar (eds.), *On Freud's "The Future of an Illusion,"* 60.

reason," he cautioned, "has boundaries."[62] In the face of the preoccupation with rationality Kierkegaard (1813–55) described belief as a leap and faith as a risk, claiming "the absurd and faith are inseparables."[63] Kierkegaard's conjunction of absurdity and Christian faith shares obvious parallels with the pairing of literary nonsense and theology, which we will be discussing in greater detail in the final chapter. For the present, however, it is worth noting that Kierkegaard is a central figure in the dispute against the universal validity of the law of non-contradiction for the chief reason that he held paradox as a logically baffling but integral part of Christian faith. Yet, perhaps the most important nineteenth-century figure who railed against the narrow scope of Enlightenment rationality was Nietzsche (1844–1900), whose general thrust was oddly parallel to Kierkegaard, although it stemmed from entirely different criteria.

Nietzsche, heavily influenced by Schopenhauer, proposed a significant and direct challenge to classical logic and in particular to the law of non-contradiction. In *The Will to Power* he describes the law as "*coarse* and *false*."[64] He describes it as "a subjective empirical law, not the expression of any 'necessity' but only of an inability."[65] As Michael Green points out, "Nietzsche does not argue that the principle of non-contradiction should be abandoned. He does, however, argue that an acceptance of the principle is not demanded by the nature of the world."[66] Nietzsche provides a profound objection to the ontological validity of the rule of non-contradiction, urging us to recognize that the avoidance of the unity of contraries is a psychological desire and not a universal imperative. At a fundamental level Nietzschean thought is an attack upon the stability and scope of philosophical reasoning; even the basic components of logical formulae such as subject, object and attribute are not accepted as a "metaphysical truth."[67] Instead, he argues, "these distinctions have been *made*."[68]

Nietzsche's description of the artificiality of logic is a close echo of Hamann's criticism of rational analysis as "nothing more than the latest fashionable cut," and it is in this capacity—as an enemy to the staunch rationalists—that some recent theologians instead of being offended by Nietzschean atheism, have discovered that his work may be used to support their case.

62. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 5.
63. Ibid., 7.
64. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 32.
65. Ibid., 30.
66. Green, *Nietzsche and the Transcendental Tradition*, 56.
67. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 28.
68. Ibid., 54.

Gavin Hyman describes Nietzsche as "the last thinker of modernity or the first thinker of postmodernity,"[69] and it is particularly amongst postmodern theologians that Nietzschean thought has been embraced rather than rejected. Among others David Tracy, Graham Ward, and David Deane have argued that when Nietzsche announced the death of God, he killed the god *of modernity*, the deity who "could not fit what counted as rational."[70] By suggesting that human logic is not the ultimate arbiter of truth, postmodern theologians argue that he did not succeed in killing the biblical, pre-modern, or medieval deity; rather, the god that died was an idolatrous god.[71] Thus, even though it would have to await the outworking of modernity, Nietzsche's work, in spite of its author's intentions, helped to open the way for something of a recovery of the Thomist and Augustinian ordering of faith and reason, where reason does not exercise superiority over faith. The breakdown of the sovereignty of reason had begun and the circumstances in the latter half of the nineteenth century were ripe for a less rationalistic apologetic.

It was in this context that figures such as G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) were prompted to declare with boldness that in certain crucial ways Christian truth departs from what is commonly constituted as rational. "While we are being naturalists" he writes, "we can suppose that Christianity is all nonsense; but then, when we remember that we are Christians, we must admit that Christianity is true even if it is nonsense."[72] Chesterton's conviction has the potential to disarm the religious cynic who believes that once the illogicalities of faith are pointed out religion loses its credibility. What Chesterton reveals is that the authority of faith does not rest on human conceptions of rationality. This suggestion calls into question the ability of logical descriptions to convey the full reality of the Christian message.

Chesterton is famed for his frequent appeal to paradox. As a result, much of his writing offends those rationalists who hold the law of non-contradiction as unbreakable. Chesterton's use of the paradoxical is so pervasive that critics have suggested he uses paradox simply to shock his reader, to create humor, or to shroud Christianity's logical flaws in the more romantic trappings of mystery. However, Chesterton declares at the beginning of *Orthodoxy*: "I know nothing more contemptible as a mere paradox; a mere ingenious defence of the indefensible."[73] When he uses paradox he does so because he believes that there are instances in Christian doctrine

69. Hyman, *History of Atheism*, 176.
70. Tracy, "Fragments," 171.
71. See Ward's Introduction to *The Postmodern God*.
72. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas*, 106.
73. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 15.

that cannot accurately be expressed without deviating from the law of non-contradiction. It is not that Chesterton rejected common-sense logic for the sake of it; indeed, he believed that reason is central to theology and tells us an enormous amount about the way the world is. But he emphasized that reason does not tell us *everything*, and sometimes that which seems quite unreasonable might in fact be a closer representation of the truth.

The wider context in which Chesterton was speaking was a particularly tumultuous time in the history of faith and reason. His sparring partners H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw were in many ways representative of mainstream Victorian views, since, following the industrial revolution and the popularization of German philosophy there had been an explosion of skepticism. And yet, this growth of secularism was juxtaposed with a fervent religious revival across the denominations. Along with Chesterton, one of the central figures preaching the validity of Christianity's seeming "mass of mad contradictions"[74] was John Henry Newman (1801–90). His defense in *Grammar of Assent* (completed in 1870) argued that logic did not meet the challenges of real life. "As to Logic," he wrote, "its chain of conclusions hangs loose at both ends [. . .] it comes short both of first principles and of concrete issues."[75] The significance of Newman's work is that he not only suggested, like Kierkegaard, that faith should not be assessed within the boundaries of logic, but he also attempted to show the shortcomings of secular rationality and how religion, assessed internally, is in fact natural and plausible. This was in part an argument against the law of non-contradiction, since Newman, like Chesterton, exposed paradoxical realities and observed how reason was inadequate to account for such phenomena. "It is plain," Newman argued, "that formal logical sequence is not in fact the method by which we are enabled to become certain of what is concrete."[76] In sum, the Victorian period exhibited a splintering of religious ideas due to the rise and respectability of agnosticism and skepticism, yet it also coincided with a powerful orthodox religious revival. It was in this complex and contested period that Lewis Carroll (1832–98) lived and wrote.

In the twentieth century, the writings of Darwin and Freud remained central to the attack on faith by reason; secularism became widespread and scientific advancement, no longer hindered by theological authority, gained increased prestige and importance. Science and religion grew further apart and yet, perhaps due to the antagonism of the proceeding century, a mood of tolerance arose in certain circles and with it a strong desire for a more

74. Ibid., 162.

75. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 272.

76. Ibid., 276.

pluralist approach to knowledge. Wittgenstein's concept of language games satisfied the concern for a more relativistic assessment of meaning, although this was met simultaneously with opposition by strong evidentialitsts such as Flew and Clifford, who wanted to assess all claims of faith from the presumption of atheistic values. Ronald Nash explains how according to Clifford "[i]t is always the believer's responsibility to produce reasons or evidence to support his belief."[77] The effect of this extreme emphasis on verification via empiricism meant that for Clifford, Flew, Ayer, and their followers: "there is never sufficient evidence or proof to support religious belief."[78]

However, the non-religious world was by no means governed by staunch evidentialism. In fact, alongside the increasing popularization of logical positivism among philosophers, scientists began to undercut the infallibility of the evidentialist's claim. As certain aspects of theoretical physics became more advanced, greater skepticism accompanied its observations. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in 1927, along with growing evidence in support of "chaos theory," began to throw some doubt on the universal reliability of reason.[79] The twentieth century is therefore very difficult to summarize in terms of a general reaction to issues of faith and reason since alongside evidentialism and verificationism, this period also witnessed the arrival of such things as pluralism, quantum theory, Dadaism, and deconstructionism.

The end of the Second World War instigated the meltdown of a whole variety of conventional beliefs and standards. The basic principle of absolutism was railed against in a host of contexts from politics, religion, and society to art, morality, and science. During the 1960s one of the most significant figures contributing to the deconstruction of absolutist ideas was Michel Foucault who challenged historical conceptions of madness and sought to depict unreason in a more positive light. In *Madness and Civilisation* Foucault addresses the historical "fear of madness" and the "dread of unreason."[80] He traces the history of society's response to cases of madness and insanity, and comes to the conclusion that madness is associated with art and can be understood as a tool or expression by which "the world is forced to question itself."[81] I shall return to this issue in the chapter on the

77. Nash, *Faith and Reason*, 72.

78. Ibid., 71.

79. In 1947 C. S. Lewis in his book *Miracles* makes a similar observation: "Science itself has already made reality appear less homogenous than we expected it to be: Newtonian atomism was much more the sort of thing we expected (and desired) than Quantum physics." Lewis, *Miracles*, 41.

80. Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, 211.

81. Ibid., 288. "Through madness, a work that seems to drown in the world, to

anarchic, in which I consider a similar function of nonsense, which, like the madness described by Foucault, has a marginal presence and through it, I suggest we are able to reflect critically upon the phenomenal world. Like Foucault, I examine the history of folly and observe a close connection between lunacy and wisdom. However, the aspect of Foucault's work that is most valuable for our present discussion is his recognition of "the great theme of the madness of the Cross."[82]

In *Madness and Civilisation*, perhaps unintentionally, Foucault provides a brief but brilliant Christology of madness. He coins the phrase "Christian unreason"[83] and describes how Nietzsche and Dostoevsky pave the way for its rediscovery following its exile by the militant seventeenth-century pursuit of reason. He characterizes this period as the wait "for Christ to regain the glory of his madness, for scandal to recover its power as revelation, for unreason to cease being merely the public shame of reason."[84] Foucault's interest in the value of madness and unreason is indicative of the return to a less empirical-based philosophy that blossomed in the second half of the twentieth century. Although Foucault's focus is primarily socio-historical, his work was nevertheless significant in the decline of the popularity of logical positivism and the rise of its philosophical nemesis: deconstructionism.

By any account, the work of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) had, and continues to have, a major impact on the fundamental assumptions of Western philosophy. His influence is pervasive and extremely controversial, and although it is possible here to give only a very brief and limited overview of a particular aspect of his work, his importance to current debates on metaphysics can hardly be over-emphasized. Thinkers such as Lyotard, Deleuze, Nancy, and Marion are all deeply indebted to Derrida's work, as are whole movements such as postmodernism and post-structuralism.[85]

reveal there its nonsense, and to transfigure itself with the features of pathology alone, actually engages itself with the world's time, masters it, and leads it; by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself."

82. Ibid., 78.

83. Ibid., 79. "Christian unreason was relegated by Christians themselves into the margins of a reason that had become identical with the wisdom of God incarnate."

84. Ibid.

85. The historian Donald Yerxa explains: "The theoretical origins of postmodernism are primarily located in the post-structuralist philosophy that emerged in France during the latter 1960s and blossomed in the 1970s." Yerxa lists Foucault and Lacan alongside Derrida as the chief thinkers associated with the movement's genesis. Yerxa, *Recent Themes in Historical Conversation*, 69.

Like Nietzsche before him, Derrida launched an attack on the general application of and strict adherence to the law of non-contradiction. However, before we consider this attack in more detail, it will be helpful to situate this aspect of his thought within the context of his work more generally, which is antagonistic of the wider metaphysical assumptions embedded in the history of Western thought.

It is of course a difficult task to propose a starting point of Derrida's philosophy, given its contestation of origins, but there are several critical components to his theory of deconstruction with which it might be useful to begin. At base, deconstruction criticizes the Platonic idea, perpetuated by Western metaphysics, that the essence of a thing is more significant than its appearance, since essence is transcendental and therefore its meaning is fixed and definite. In this sense, both metaphysics and language are *logocentric* and give primacy to the signified over the signifier. What Derrida refers to as "the absence of the transcendental signified,"[86] however, calls into question this monolithic conception of essence and attempts to destabilise binary oppositions within both metaphysics and language by focussing on the marginal *aporias* of meaning.

Throughout his work, and particularly in "Plato's Pharmacy" and "Dissemination,"[87] Derrida demonstrates how binary oppositions are both arbitrary and unstable and have no fixed transcendental origin.[88] Instability occurs because "meaning is nowhere punctually *present* in language [. . . ,] it is always subject to a kind of semantic slippage."[89] In other words, Derrida insists that there is never a perfect unity of signifier and signified. Therefore, metaphysical assumptions, which rely upon the stability of meaning, undercut themselves and meaning is set free from the security of transcendental attachment. It is important to note in this connection that the sign in a sense is *self*-deconstructing; Derrida does not approach a text with a set of external maxims that seek to undo the fixed meaning. Rather, Derrida draws attention to an inherent and already existing instability within the system and thereby reveals the radical interdeterminacy of its signs.

We are now perhaps in a better position to suggest more specifically how Derrida contributes to the argument against the infallibility of the law of non-contradiction. In order to contain the discussion, I am going to focus on two aspects of his work that specifically require acceptance of a "both/and"

86. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 50.

87. Both essays can be found in Derrida, *Dissemination*.

88. He begins *Of Grammatology* by announcing "the de-sedimentation, the deconstruction, of all significations that have their source in that of the logos," 11.

89. Norris, *Derrida*, 15.

logic: the trace and *différance*.[90] When Derrida refers to the "trace," he is indicating "an absence that defines a presence."[91] Derrida believes every present event contains traces or spectres from the past and anticipations of the future. "It is not absence instead of presence," writes Derrida, "but a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun."[92] In other words, every experience is both its own unique event and at the same time present in repeatable future moments and marked by past occurrences. These non-present elements are, according to Derrida, in some real sense present, though marked by an absence—an absence, which because it is nonetheless present troubles the law of non-contradiction. Aristotelian logic, by contrast, would maintain that something within an event is either present *or* absent—hence, there cannot be both presence *and* non-presence, as is the case with Derrida's concept of the trace.

Différance also confuses the law of non-contradiction, for Derrida insists on the reality of difference within identity—that is to say, that within the identity of the thing is also contained its difference. In *Aporias* he writes, "The identity of a language can only affirm itself as identity to itself by opening itself to the hospitality of a difference from itself or of a difference with itself."[93] Here, we see how Derrida opposes the Aristotelian insistence on a univocity of meaning by playing with identity and suggesting that there are differences within the same essence. It is important to appreciate that in speaking of *différance* Derrida is not simply opposing univocity with polysemia but suggesting that the singular only exists as a playful movement between multiple identities and that identity even within itself is polysemous.

At this stage, we can begin to see how Derrida's ideas relate to the nonsense literature of Lewis Carroll. The following example from *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* is a helpful clarification of the contrasting logic of *différance*. The White Knight tells Alice the name of a song, but Carroll, in a proto-Derridean fashion, facetiously suggests that a single signifier cannot fix the identity of a song:

> 'The name of the song is called "*Haddock's Eyes*."'

90. There are of course a variety of other importance instances where Derrida seeks to expose the fallibility of the law of non-contradiction. One such example concerns his commentary on Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, in which he elaborates on Rousseau's unification of the contradictory aspects of the process of articulation. He concludes that "it does not suffice to understand Rousseau's text within the implication of the epochs of metaphysics or of the West." Ibid., 246.

91. Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy*, 228.

92. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 372.

93. Derrida, *Aporias*, 10.

> 'Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?' Alice said, trying to feel interested.
>
> 'No, you don't understand,' the Knight said, looking a little vexed. 'That's what the name *is called*. The name really *is* "*The Aged Aged Man*."
>
> 'Then I ought to have said 'That's what the *song* is called?' Alice corrected herself.
>
> 'No you oughtn't: that's quite another thing! The *song* is called "*Ways and Means*": but that's only what it's *called*, you know!'
>
> 'Well, what *is* the song, then? said Alice who was by this time completely bewildered.
>
> 'I was coming to that,' the Knight said. 'The song really *is* "*A-sitting On A Gate*."'[94]

The extract seems comically to differentiate between what the song "is"; what it is "known as"; what it is "called"; and what its "name" is called. These proliferating signifiers "*Haddock's Eyes*," "*The Aged Aged Man*," and so forth are ludicrously divergent, and yet all relate to the identity of the song, and so the meaning of the song as a whole appears to be located playfully in the inter-relationship between the perpetually shifting signifiers. As with Derrida's theory of *différance*, each of these names gestures to a single identity, which thus appears to contain within itself a multiplicity of differences, which in turn suggests that no signifier contains the identity uniquely, "*A-Sitting On A Gate*," for example, does not encapsulate the essence of the song; it is simply another signifier. In this way, Carroll, like Derrida, demonstrates that there is no single fixed identity, and although Alice keeps attempting to grasp the meaning, the White Knight, playing a Derridean role, presents a playful proliferation of signifiers, which points towards a perpetually receding signified.

Our commentary on Derrida thus far has suggested that he may be an ally to this project to the extent that his ideas contest the universality of the law of non-contradiction. However, it is also clear that Derrida's relationship to the theological imagination is somewhat hostile. He insisted, for instance, "the age of the sign is essentially theological,"[95] and with the deconstruction of *logocentricism*, in many ways sought the undoing of Christian theology. Yet, despite his ambiguous relationship to the religious, for certain theologians such as John Caputo,[96] Derrida opens the way for the recovery of

94. Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, 186–87. Hereafter referred to as *LG*.

95. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 14.

96. For an extensive inquiry into the presence of the religious within Derrida's work see Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*.

pre-modern conceptions of the possible by drawing upon the impossible. Caputo states "Deconstruction is a passion and a prayer for the impossible, a defense of the impossible against its critics."[97]

Here we see how Derrida might be of service to religious thinking since the critics against whom Derrida defends the impossible are those who perceive Enlightenment rationality as absolute. Derrida believes that traditional logic limits meaning to the confines of the possible and by doing this makes the articulation of an idea such as hospitality or forgiveness not "worthy of the name,"[98] since forgiveness, logically speaking, can only be applied to that which is forgivable. However, for Derrida (and for Christianity) true forgiveness entails forgiveness of the unforgivable or it is not forgiveness at all, hence the only true or possible meaning of forgiveness is impossible. This is one of the reasons that Caputo seems justified in stating that "being impassioned by the impossible, is the religious, is religious passion."[99]

Whilst Derrida never described himself as a postmodern, his deconstructive ir(religion) has nevertheless been adopted, as we saw with Nietzsche's philosophy, by postmodern theologians as a way of returning to a less secular metaphysic by embracing the collapse of the onto-theological conception of God. Ian Edwards, for example, believes that the "boundary-less space" of unknown possibilities (and impossibilities) is one area where Derrida and theology intersect. Edwards explains: "what can happen within a boundary-less space is unlimited. It is here where Derrida finds a kinship with negative theology. Both deconstruction and negative theology [. . .] attempt to assert what cannot be asserted."[100] Of course we cannot simply assume that when Derrida unsettles certain delimitations imposed by reason this is automatically of value to faith. Yet, in a sense, Derrida provides a negative warrant for the present thesis by exploring and vindicating a territory beyond the conclusions of classical logic, which as we have seen throughout this introduction are often at odds with Christian beliefs. The particular merit of Derrida's thought is that from a non-religious perspective he fulminates against the same foe as St. Paul, Denys, the medieval mystics, Luther, Kierkegaard, and the other propagators of truth claims that carry us the other side of reason.

97. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, xx.

98. Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 309. By contrast, Derrida believes we are required "to think the *possible* [. . .] *as the impossible*." Derrida, *Paper Machine*, 79.

99. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, xx.

100. Edwards, "Derrida's Ir(religion)," 144. It is of course important to recognize that whilst différance and apophaticism share similar passions there are, nevertheless, significantly distinct from each other.