MEANING, PROOF, AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN ANGLO-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY:

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE THEME OF REASONABLENESS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN ANGLO-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY FROM THE MID-17TH TO THE EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for
the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the subject

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF. J.M. WOOD

DECEMBER 2020

DECLARATION

I, William Charles Peter Sweet, declare that **MEANING, PROOF, AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN ANGLO-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE THEME OF REASONABLENESS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN ANGLO-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY FROM THE MID-17TH TO THE EARLY 20TH CENTURIES** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

William Sweet 30 December 2020

SUMMARY

This study investigates the theme of the reasonableness of religious belief in Anglo-American philosophical theology from the mid-17th to the early 20th centuries. Through the analysis of key texts by William Chillingworth, John Tillotson, John Locke, David Hume, William Paley, Richard Whately, John Henry Newman, William Clifford, and William James, it provides a systematic account of reason and reasonability, of the criteria for argument and proof, and of the meaning and truth of religious belief, and their role in understanding what 'the reasonableness of religious belief' meant in the theology of this period in Britain and North America .

The first, or 'formative' phase of this discussion begins with 17th century theologians, such as Chillingworth and Tillotson. This study examines their understandings of faith and religious belief, their criteria for proof and reasonableness, and the role of reason and evidence within theology for belief. It then turns to Locke and Hume, who refined these understandings of religious belief, and their novel criteria according to which belief can be reasonable, and by which one can be reasonable in believing.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries there is a second phase in this discussion, where theologians seek to defend the reasonableness of religious belief against a range of critics. This study focuses, first, on Paley who, in a number of works, provides 'evidences' of Christian religious belief – hence, his identification as an early 'evidentialist' – and, second, on Whately, who presents a more developed account of the forms of argument and, thereby, of proof and the reasonability of religious belief. Their respective conceptions of 'proof' and religious belief, though sometimes misunderstood, show a marked shift from those of earlier figures.

Finally, this study investigates a third phase in the discussion of this theme – responses to the evidentialism of Paley and Whately in Newman, who qualifies and 'contains' evidentialism, by making important distinctions concerning faith, reason, and reasonability; in Clifford, who extends evidentialism and uses it to challenge religious belief; and in James who, by introducing the notions of 'overbelief' and a 'right to believe,' endorses but also limits evidentialism.

This study, then, provides new understanding of the origins of the discussion of reasonableness in Anglo-American philosophical theology; into the relation of reason to belief and, particularly, to religious believing; into the nature of religious belief; and into the place of proofs and arguments in determining reasonability in believing and belief.

Key words: reasonability; proof; religious belief; philosophical theology; evidentialism; epistemology of religion; foundationalism; meaningfulness; John Locke, David Hume, William Paley, Richard Whately, John Henry Newman, William Clifford, William James

ISISHWANKATHELO

Esi sifundo siphanda umxholo wokufaneleka kwenkolo yezonqulo kwimfundiso yefilisofi yamaNgesi namaMelika ukusuka embindini wenkulungwane ye-17 kuya ekuqaleni kwenkulungwane yama-20. Ngokuhlalutya izicatshulwa eziphambili zikaWilliam Chillingworth, John Tillotson, John Locke, David Hume, William Paley, Richard Whately, John Henry Newman, William Clifford, noWilliam James, sifumana inkcazelo ecwangcisiweyo yokuqiqa kunye nengqiqo, yeenqobo zokuphikisana nobungqina, kunye nentsingiselo, nenyaniso yenkolelo yezonqulo, kunye nendima yazo ekuqondeni ukuba “ukuba sengqiqweni kweenkolelo zonqulo” kwakuthetha ntoni kwezakwaLizwi ngeli xesha eBritani nakuMntla Melika.

Isigaba sokuqala, okanye “esakhayo” sale ngxoxo siqala ngabafundi bezakwaLizwi, ngenkulungwane ye-17, abanjengoChillingworth noTillotson. Olu phononongo luvavanya ukuqonda nenkolelo yabo, iindlela zabo zobungqina kunye nokuqiqa, kunye nendima yesizathu nobungqina phakathi kwethiyoloji yenkolelo, kunye neenqobo zokuziphatha zabo zokuba yeyiphi inkolelo enokuba sengqiqweni, kwaye iyeyiphi eqiqileyo umntu anokuyikholelwa.

Ekupheleni kwenkulungwane ye-18 nasekuqaleni kweye-19, kukho isigaba sesibini sale ngxoxo, apho abafundi bezakwaLizwi befuna ukukhusela ukuba sengqiqweni kweenkolelo zonqulo bezikhusela kubagxeki abaninzi. Olu phononongo lujolise, kuqala, kuPaley, othi kwimisebenzi eliqela, aveze “ubungqina” benkolo yobuKrestu – yiyo loo nto watsho waziwa njenge “ngqina” lokuqala. Okwesibini, uphononongo lujolise

kuWhately, onika ingxelo ethe vetshe ngeengxoxo ezazikho, kwaye, ngaloo ndlela enika ubungqina kunye nengqiqo yokholo. Uluvo lwabo “lobungqina” kunye nenkolelo yezenkolo, nangona ngamanye amaxesha ingaqondwa kakuhle, zibonisa ukutshintsha okuphawulekayo ukusuka koko kwakunjalo ngaphambili.

Okokugqibela olu phononongo luvavanya isigaba sesithathu kwingxoxo yalo mxholo ngenkulungwane ye-19 – oko kukuthi, iimpendulo kubungqina bukaPaley noWhately kuNewman, ofanelekileyo kwaye “oqulethe” ubungqina, ngokwenza umahluko obalulekileyo malunga nokholo, kunye nengqiqo; kuClifford, owandisa ubungqina kwaye abusebenzise ukuphikisa inkolelo yezokholo; nakuJames owathi, ngokwazisa iingcinga “zokubaxa kokukholelwa” kunye “nelungelo lokukholelwa” waxhasa kodwa wanciphisa ubungqina.

Olu phononongo, ke, lubonelela ngokuqonda okutsha ngemvelaphi yengxoxo yokuqiqa kwizifundo zeLizwi zefilosofi yamaNgesi namaMelika: ngokunxulumene nokunxibelelana kwesizathu nenkolelo kwaye, ngakumbi, kwinkolo; ngokubhekisele kuhlobo lwenkolo; nangokunxulumene nendawo yobungqina kunye nempikiswano ekumiseleni ukuba nokuqiqa ekukholweni.

Amagama aphambili: Ukuqiqa; ubungqina; inkolo; ifilisofi yezifundo zeLizwi; ubungqina; i- epistemoloji yenkolo; isiseko; ukuba nentsingiselo; John Locke, David Hume, William Paley, Richard Whately, John Henry Newman, William Clifford, William James

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek die tema van redelikheid van geloofsoortuiging in Engels-Amerikaanse filosofiese teologie van die middel-17de tot vroeë-20ste eeu. Die ontleding van kerntekste deur William Chillingworth, John Tillotson, John Locke, David Hume, William Paley, Richard Whately, John Henry Newman, William Clifford en William James bied 'n sistematiese weergawe van rede en redelikheid, van die kriteria vir argumente en bewys, en van die betekenis van waarheid van geloofsoortuigings en die rol daarvan om te verstaan wat "die redelikheid van godsdienstige geloof " in die teologie van hierdie tydperk in Brittanje en Noord-Amerika beteken.

Die eerste, of "formatiewe" fase van hierdie bespreking begin met 17de-eeuse teoloë soos Chillingworth en Tillotson. Hierdie studie bestudeer hul begrip van geloof en geloofsoortuigings, hul kriteria vir bewys en redelikheid en die rol van rede en bewys in hul teologie van geloof. Dit draai dan na Locke en Hume wat hierdie begrip van geloofsoortuigings verfyn het en hul nuwe kriteria waarvolgens geloof redelik kan wees en waardeur 'n mens redelik kan glo.

In die laat-18de en vroeë-19de eeue is daar 'n tweede fase in hierdie bespreking waar teoloë die redelikheid van geloofsoortuigings teen 'n aantal kritici wil beskerm. Hierdie studie fokus eerstens op Paley wat in 'n aantal werke "bewys" van die Christelike geloofsoortuiging bied – dus word hy as 'n vroeë "bewysregtelike" geïdentifiseer – en tweedens, op Whately, wat 'n meer ontwikkelde weergawe van die vorme van argumente, en daarby, bewys van die redelikheid van geloofsoortuiging voorlê. Hulle onderskeie begrippe van "bewys" en geloofsoortuiging, alhoewel soms misverstaan, toon 'n duidelike verskuiwing van die vroeëre figure.

Laastens bestudeer hierdie studie 'n derde fase in die bespreking van hierdie tema in die 19de eeu – dit is reaksie op die bewysregtelikheid van Paley en Whately in Newman, wat bewysregtelikheid kwalifiseer en "insluit" deur belangrike onderskeidings te maak oor geloof, rede en redelikheid; in Clifford, wat bewysregtelikheid en gebruik uitbrei om geloofsoortuigings te bevraagteken; en in James, wat bewysregtelikheid deur die idees van "oorgeloof" en "'n reg om te glo" goedkeur maar ook beperk.

Hierdie studie bied dan 'n nuwe begrip van die oorsprong van die bespreking van redelikheid in Engels-Amerikaanse filosofiese teologie: rakende die verhouding tussen rede om te glo en, spesifiek, geloofsoortuiging; die aard van geloofsoortuiging; en die plek van bewyse en argumente om redelikheid in geloof en oortuiging te bepaal

Sleutelwoorde: redelikheid; bewys; geloofsoortuiging; filosofiese teologie; bewysregtelikheid; wetenskapsleer van geloof; grondslag; betekenisvolheid; John Locke; David Hume; William Paley; Richard Whately; John Henry Newman; William Clifford; William James

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Professor Hannelie Wood for her advice and constant support throughout my doctoral studies at UNISA.

I am very grateful for the friendship and advice of the late Rev. Professor Alan P.F. Sell, formerly Professor of Christian Doctrine and Philosophy of Religion at the United Theological College, Aberystwyth, Wales, who encouraged me to pursue this project many years ago. Professor Hendrik Hart, of the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, Canada, has been a friend and an interlocutor for many years. Our conversations and exchanges led me to investigate the origins of our different perspectives and, thus, to the present study. I must particularly acknowledge my teachers at the Centre Sèvres in Paris, France, especially the late Fr Édouard Pousset, sj, who convinced me that I could be a better theologian if I first had a thorough grounding in philosophy. It has been a long wait for them, and for me.

Sections of Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 are based on articles previously published, but extensively revised:

- Evidentialism at its Origins and Anglo-American Philosophy of Religion, in *God and Argument - Dieu et l'argumentation philosophique*, edited by W. Sweet. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999: 189-213.
- John Henry Newman and the Prospects for a Dialogue among Faith, Reason, and Culture. *Lumen* 1/2 (2013): 8–27.
- Paley, Whately, and ‘Enlightenment Evidentialism.’ *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (1999): 143-166.
- William James, the Transcendent, and the ‘Right to Believe,’ in *Essays on Religious and Political Experience*, edited by R. Shukla and R. Feist. Leuven: Peeters, 2016): 141-170.

Portions of this study have also been presented at conferences and workshops in South Africa, Europe, North America, and Asia over the past several years. I am grateful to my fellow participants and colleagues for their comments and criticisms. I owe a special debt to my friends, particularly Dr. Colin O’Connell, Rev. James Scheer, Fr. Dr. Denis Grecco, and Dr. Peter J. McCormick. Though we may sometimes disagree about these matters, I have drawn greatly from their presence, conversation, and insights.

Words cannot express my love for my wife, Heather, and my daughter, Cara. They have been a daily source of love and encouragement throughout this project.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Religious Belief, Reasonableness, and Anglo-American Philosophical Theology

1.1 Background to the study

1.1.1 General

The present study is in the area of Christian systematic theology, in the 'subfield' of philosophical theology. It deals with fundamental issues in Christian doctrine concerning how religious beliefs, doctrines, or dogmas can be known or believed, and particularly deals with how some of these issues were discussed in a formative period in philosophical theology.

The specific orientation and scope of this study is framed by the following questions: Is religious belief reasonable? Is religious believ**ing** reasonable? Are evidence, argument, and proof relevant here and, if they are, how? Though these are by no means new questions, they have long had a hold in philosophical theology, particularly as it has been engaged in the Anglo-American world.

Classical natural theology has tended to the view that religious belief is reasonable and rationally acceptable: it can be rationally discussed, at least some religious beliefs can be demonstrated or proven, and many other beliefs are probable or may be confirmed (even if not proven) by experience. This position has been ascribed to thinkers from at least the time of Thomas Aquinas and is held to be characteristic of Christian apologetics to the present day.

Classical atheology agrees that religious belief can be discussed, but denies that it is reasonable or that it can be proven or demonstrated. It holds, for example, that God's existence is impossible to prove, that there are more plausible hypotheses to which we can turn to explain facts about the world, and that there are positive arguments that would suggest that the traditional concepts of, for example, God, are inconsistent with experience.

Another position (famously associated with the Swiss German Protestant theologian, Karl Barth (1886-1968), though it has had a long history), however, holds that religious belief cannot, strictly speaking, be rationally discussed: it cannot, because the subject matter exceeds human experience and that the 'language' employed to discuss such belief is wholly inadequate. Thus, one can testify to one's belief, or try to elucidate or explain it, but no argument or evidence can *prove* anything of religious belief. (One must, as it were, just believe.) Recent post modern critics propose a similar response, though for different reasons. On this latter view, there can be no demonstration or proof of religious belief, in the sense of giving reasons or evidence that all reasonable beings should admit, because there are no such reasons for *any* belief, and because there is no single standard of what is to count as 'rational' or 'reasonable.'

Further, there are those who hold that, while at least some religious beliefs do not contradict reason and may be said to be 'reasonable' because of their epistemic ground, there cannot be any demonstration even of the most fundamental of them. Argument, then, is not altogether irrelevant, but there can be no deductive proof of religious belief. At best, religious belief may be the legitimate subject of abductive or inductive arguments.

There are, arguably, other perspectives on this question of the reasonableness of religious belief. In general, however, it is clear that there is much debate on whether religious beliefs – or religious belief as a whole (what we might call 'faith') – are the kinds of things that can be the object of demonstration or proof. Moreover, before one can begin to answer the questions of whether religious belief or religious believing is rational or reasonable, one has to ask how we could determine whether it is so – i.e., what standards of rationality or reasonability are relevant here. And, finally, to seek to answer this question presumes that we have some understanding of what religious belief is.

1.1.2. Specific

The present study looks specifically at the questions identified above from within philosophical theology, drawing primarily, though not exclusively, on authors reflecting a broadly classical approach to philosophical theology. When one looks at philosophical theology in the Anglo-American world, one finds that it is widely held that, for religious beliefs to be rationally acceptable, and for religious believing to be reasonable, at least some religious beliefs can be, should be, or are provable.

It is widely held, in Anglo-American philosophical theology, that the criteria for such proof and demonstration do, or ought to, reflect an epistemology that is evidentialist and, arguably, foundationalist.

Evidentialism provides both a criterion for rationality and a moral claim about when one is justified in saying that one knows. As it is generally understood today in philosophical theology[1], the evidentialist view is that "theistic belief is rationally acceptable only if there is sufficient evidence for it" (Plantinga 1981:41), and "[i]t is wrong always, everywhere and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (Clifford 1901: II, 175).

This view is often associated with 'foundationalism,' though it is distinct from it. Foundationalism is a theory that purports to set a standard for what is to count as 'sufficient evidence'. While it has been formulated in different ways,[2] it is generally taken to hold that, for one to have sufficient evidence to hold a belief (i.e., to hold a belief rationally), this belief must be either self-evident, an incorrigible report of experience, or evident to the senses, or deducible from such beliefs.

This understanding of the criteria for the reasonability of religious belief and religious believing continues to be widely held, and is the basis for much of the contemporary critical discussion of religion. As noted in the preceding section, it is true that, in recent years, one finds a number of scholars (e.g., Barth [1938}, Smith {1963] and [1998], Lonergan [1972], Phillips [1963] and [1976], Plantinga [1981] and [2000]) who argue that this 'tradition' and its assumptions (e.g., the appropriateness of evidentialism and foundationalism) misunderstand religious belief within the Christian tradition, misrepresent the character of religious belief, and set a standard for intelligibility, reasonableness, and truth that is altogether inappropriate. Yet this is still far from the dominant view and, in any event, many continue to hold that much of the *earlier* discussion, in the Anglo-American world, maintained at least an evidentialist, if not also a foundationalist, model of the rational acceptability of religious belief – and that this approach continues to frame the contemporary debate.

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[1] The term 'evidentialism' dates from the early 1850s or 1860s; this is discussed primarily in Chapter 4, below. For broader, more recent discussions, see, for example, Feldman and Conee (2004).

[2] The term 'foundationalism' has been used in different senses. In its most general sense, foundationalism holds that "all knowledge must rest on a secure foundation of indubitable truths"; see Hasan and Fumerton (2018). See also, for example, Alston (1976); Haack (1993) and (2000). Because the sense described by Alvin Plantinga (1981) as 'classical foundationalism'– reflects the history of the notion well, and is so widespread in philosophical theology, I will use it this sense.

Discussion on the issue of the reasonableness of religious belief has been particularly strong in the Anglo-American tradition, where it goes back at least to the mid-seventeenth century. From these early articulations, Anglo-American theologians – and also philosophers – have looked at themes of the meaning of religious belief, the reasonableness of religious believing, and their relation to evidence, argument, and proof. Yet these early articulations are relatively unknown or, to the extent that they are known, are sometimes misunderstood. It seems plausible to claim, however, that understanding these early statements may provide some insight into the issue of the reasonableness of religious belief in general.

1.2. Statement of the Research Problem

The problem motivating the present study, then, is: What does it mean to speak of the reasonability of religious belief and of religious believing in Anglo-American philosophical theology from the mid 17th to the early 20th centuries? This involves discussing: How were such key concepts as faith, religious belief, reason, reasonability, proof, and demonstration, understood? What assumptions were made about the nature of religious belief, proof, and the relation of religious belief to argument and proof? Were there shifts and developments in the meaning or use of these concepts during this period and, if so, what implications does this have on the general issue of the reasonability of religious belief? And, given that there is sometimes a tendency to give an anachronistic reading of the work of earlier authors, have these authors in the period under consideration been understood aright?

1.3 The aim of the study

The aim of this study, then, is to address the above problem by examining the work of key figures in Anglo-American philosophical theology, such as John Locke (1632-1704), David Hume (1711-1776), William Paley (1743-1805), John Henry Newman (1801-1890), and William James (1842-1910), and as well as figures who may be lesser known, such as William Chillingworth (1602-1644), John Tillotson (1630-1694), Richard Whately (1787-1863), and William Clifford (1845-1879), in order to see the criteria implicit or explicit in these authors concerning the reasonableness of religious belief, but also their criteria for the reasonableness or rationality of *believing* (e.g., how one might argue for religious belief, and the role of evidence and proofs). This study, therefore, specifically aims at providing an analysis of how these figures understood religious belief – i.e., what religious belief is, and what it means – and reasonability. This study, therefore, will also put one in a position to see whether there are developments or shifts in some of the key concepts or terms, and that bear on the understanding and plausibility of the respective views.

1.4. The objectives of the study

In light of this aim, this study will provide an original review, analysis, and critical discussion of primary and secondary materials concerning the history and development of fundamental themes in the formative period to the beginning of the twentieth century in Anglo-American philosophical theology, as well as argue that there have been shifts and, in certain cases, developments in understandings of reasonability, proof, and religious belief as one proceeds through the authors discussed. This study also considers whether, in order to address the issue of the reasonability of religious belief and its relation to argument and demonstration, there must be a broader account of the nature of religious belief than has generally been given or assumed.

Specifically, this study seeks to address three questions: i) What are the views on the relation of religious belief to reason and argument given by some of the major figures in Anglo-American philosophical theology? ii) What assumptions do these figures make about the meaning, proof, and reasonability of religious belief and religious believing?, and iii) How should these authors be understood, including whether they, and the key concepts they used, have been understood aright?

1.5. The rationale / justification of the study

There is no systematic or sustained single work that traces the development of the understanding of the reasonableness and reasonability of religious belief in Anglo-American philosophical theology from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth-centuries, and that identifies the assumptions made about religious belief and the reasonability of believing (e.g., meaning, truth, and proof) in the major authors of this period. Although there has been some discussion of these authors and these themes individually, much of this is fragmentary, particularly concerning some of the lesser known figures treated. This issue is not just of historical interest. Some of the concerns that are raised and discussed in this study are, arguably, relevant to much of the contemporary discussion of the reasonability of religious belief as it plays out in the Anglo-American world.

1.5.1 Research gap

In short, then, much of the early discussion is relatively understudied, and what has been studied has not been systematically analysed and discussed in the overall theological context. Not only is there a historical gap in the understanding of this earlier period in the history of philosophical theology – e.g., characteristics of the earlier debate in the history of Anglo-American philosophical theology, the reasons why these discussions took place, and the bearing of the earliest parts of the discussion on later stages of that debate – but there is also a need to know whether there may be resources in the history of philosophical theology that may bear on, and provide options to, theologians today. One might also note that there is a need to clarify, and in some cases correct, the understanding of the views of some of the major figures on this issue. (For example, one may well ask whether, in the work of some of the early exponents of evidentialism, the standards of reasonability and proof that they propose are as rigid or extreme as many have taken them to be, and whether some of the principal objections to evidentialism and, therefore, to argument or proof in religious belief, may not, in fact, be warranted.)

1.6. Theoretical framework

To carry out the analysis of the authors discussed in this study, I employ an approach that I have taken in most of my earlier research work – a theoretical framework that may be described as a hybrid of three recognised frameworks.

The first framework that I draw on is that provided by the theologian and philosopher, Bernard Lonergan. In his 1972 *Method in Theology*, Lonergan argues for a method that allows theology to change as it responds to, and as it seeks to mediate, the dynamics of the engagement of religion and culture (understood as the "the set of meanings and values that inform a way of life" [Lonergan 1972: xi). For Lonergan, the tasks of theology can be described as engaging in eight "functional specializations," moving from 'research' through to 'communication' of the result. Part of this activity deals with retrieving and understanding the past, but it also deals with how the theologian 'moves into the future.' At the centre of this, Lonergan notes, are levels of human activity and self-transcendence: being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. This is the general framework that I adopt in constructing or reconstructing the views of the authors that are discussed in the study.

A key question, however, is *how* to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible about the past – and about how the results of such a study may serve in future discussions. Here, I draw on a second 'theoretical framework' - one suggested in the work of the idealist philosopher and archaeologist, R.G. Collingwood. (Collingwood's approach is developed in the work of the historian Quentin Skinner (1969), though I do not follow Skinner here.)

In a number of books (e.g., *The Idea of History*, *The New Leviathan*, and *An Essay on Metaphysics*), Collingwood describes any enterprise in the history of ideas as involving a method of 'question and answer'—of "asking questions and answering them" (Collingwood 1992: 74). Thus, in order to understand exactly what an author said or meant, one needs to know the question or questions that she or he sought to answer. The same dynamic is involved in doing theology; that theology and, more specifically, the study of the writings of the theologians discussed in this study, must recognise the logic of question and answer – that one cannot expect to understand an author's 'answers' unless one understands the questions that she or he had in mind in writing a text. What is particularly valuable about Collingwood's view is that it reminds us of the temptation in intellectual history, and also in theology, to suppose a naïve 'perennialism,' where texts can be understood as standing independently of context, and having a kind of timeless character. That being said, Collingwood (perhaps, unlike Skinner) would allow that one is not ineluctably fixed in a context – Collingwood is not a historicist – and that we must not only think of what the author's intention was (i.e., what a text was "intended to mean and of how this meaning was intended to be taken" [Skinner 1969: 48]), but also that – in many cases – the author thought to communicate to a larger than the immediate audience.

There is, further, what may be called a third 'theoretical framework' that influences the present study – one that is provided by the later writings of the philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Like Lonergan, Wittgenstein obliges scholars to be attentive to language and context in reading texts. Wittgenstein proposed the importance of looking carefully at language or discourse in order to understand and address philosophical problems and puzzles; this applies also in theology. By the focus on language and on related practices, Wittgenstein's work provides a model of looking at religious belief in terms of its practices, and to look at discourses (and, indeed, all practices) by appreciating that criteria for truth and falsity are, at least initially, internal to those practices. This approach is employed in examining the arguments of the authors discussed in this study. This being said, Wittgenstein did not propose to offer a 'theory' of philosophy; Wittgenstein can be seen, in work such as his *Philosophical Investigations* and *Culture and Value*, as offering not so much a theoretical framework as an '*anti*-theoretical framework' – as Wittgenstein denied that there were any overarching explanatory or argumentative hierarchies in philosophy. With this caveat, however, it is fair to say that so far as one sees theoretical frameworks as "a particular perspective, or lens, through which to examine a topic," there is a clear Wittgensteinian character to the analysis carried out in this study.

Each of these theoretical frameworks, then, influences the approach taken to the texts and authors under consideration. All three have an openness to new subject matter and the novelty that is characteristic of human experience, and contribute to what has been called a 'synoptic' method. These frameworks or 'lenses' help to articulate the key questions of this study, but also influence the approach that I take to review, analyse, and discuss the texts and traditions examined.

1.7 Limitations of the study

While this study seeks to carry out an analysis of the key writings of some major figures in the history of Anglo-American philosophical theology, and to draw some conclusions about the shifts and developments of core ideas in the period under study, it is limited in several ways.

The first, as is obvious from the title of this study, is that the present work focuses on *Anglo-American* philosophical theology. While there have been prior studies of the rich traditions of philosophical theology in the Christian tradition in the European continent (e.g., in Pünjer (1880) and in Pfleiderer (1886–88), referred to below), the present study does not seek to duplicate or replace them, but focuses rather, and also more extensively, on the authors who have had a profound influence both within theology but also outside of theology, in the Anglo-American world.

A second limitation of this study is that it approaches this history through the 'lens' of the question of the reasonability of religious belief and focuses on questions of meaning and proof, but leaves aside perspectives that are more 'fideistic' – i.e., perspectives that eschew an emphasis on reasonableness, rationality, meaning, argument, and proof. While some mention of these perspectives appear in the Introductions to several chapters that follow, given the lens adopted, there is no extensive discussion of these alternate perspectives. Were one to adopt a different 'lens,' other figures and perspectives would, obviously, have a place in this study.

A third limitation of this study is that it focuses on the work of only nine individuals (i.e., Chillingworth, Tillotson, Locke, Hume, Paley, Whately, Newman, Clifford, and James), when there are arguably a number of others who might have a claim to being included. Nevertheless, as indicated above, the history of philosophical theology in the Anglo-American world has been importantly influenced by evidentialism, and evidentialism continues to frame much of the current debate in philosophical theology – and, indeed, much of the broad public debate on the reasonability of religious belief. The figures who have been selected are, arguably, representative of what I characterise below as the three phases of the discussion of the reasonability of religious belief in that period – i.e., what we might call the 'formative' view (approximately, 1637-1790), the developed evidentialist view (approximately, 1790-1843), and, third, the major developments of, or responses to, evidentialism (1843-1910) – and their names feature in standard studies of the history of philosophical theology in the Anglo-American world.

A further concern that a reader might have is that the breadth of the chronological range will preclude an adequate survey and review of relevant texts in the treatment of some of the figures. There are, however, three features of the present study that address this concern. The first is that the focus of this study is very specific: i.e., on reasonability and the understanding of the meaning of religious belief and proof. (Indeed, for many of these authors, their views on religious belief and proof are far from explicit, and have to be inferred from their comments about religion and about belief.) The second is that the focus is on authors who were acknowledged in their own time as providing a significant contribution to the discussion of belief, argument, and proof. And the third is that the intention of this study is not to provide a definitive or 'last word' on these figures, but to attempt to draw out the currents, themes, and influences overall on the problem defined above.

Thus, despite the inevitable limitations of this or any such study, given its distinctive focus, by establishing clear parameters for the discussion, this study proposes to make a significant contribution. To see this, I turn now to a brief outline of how the present study fits or is situated in some of the general works on the history of philosophical theology, as well as some of the scholarly work on the principal authors discussed.

1.8 Literature Review

1.8.1. General works on the history of religious thought and theology in the Anglo-American traditions

A relatively recent 'general' work on key figures in Anglo-American philosophical theology is the five volume *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis (2009). The volumes take a chronological approach, and specialist scholars provide short (10 to 15 page) presentations of major figures in the history of philosophical theology and philosophy of religion. But this work omits a number of authors treated in the present study (i.e., Chillingworth, Tillotson, Whately, and Clifford), there is little connection made between the figures who are discussed, and the focus is very broad – encompassing all of their contribution to philosophical theology or the philosophy of religion. It serves as a handbook and encyclopaedia, rather than as a focussed study.

There do not seem to be any recent volumes that survey the history of Christian philosophical theology. Two "classic" overviews date from the mid-19th century. One is Georg Christian Bernhard Pünjer's *History of the Christian Philosophy of Religion from the Reformation to Kant* (1880) (translated by the Scottish Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow, William Hastie[3]). The other is Otto Pfleiderer's four volume *The Philosophy of Religion on the Basis of its History* (1886–88). Both, however, are primarily interested in the German traditions and, particularly, in Protestantism. While both books include a chapter on "English Deism," including Locke and Hume (in Pünjer, Ch 5, 209-287; in Pfleiderer, in Vol 1, Section 1, Ch 4, 109-134), there is little of the Anglo-American traditions beyond this.

Aside from these studies, there are a number of brief – i.e., chapter or article-length – overviews of Anglo-American philosophical theology, providing short historical descriptions, chronologically ordered, of major figures. But they serve more as basic or beginning reference works, and not scholarly studies. Among the more recent are

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[3] As we will see in Chapter 9, below, Hastie was also the author of a contested translation of Cornelis P Tiele's Gifford lectures.

Koterski (1998); Taliaferro, Draper, and Quinn (2010); and Re Manning (2012). While these studies cover many of the authors discussed here, the treatment is very general. Moreover, there is no attempt to isolate common themes or a common problematic – particularly, the themes that underlie the present study. While these studies provide some useful information and background, their aim is far too general to overlap with the work in the proposed study.

A general text of some relevance is that of H.H. Price (1969), based on his two series of Gifford lectures on *Belief*. While there is some effort at engaging issues of reasonableness in relations to meaning and proof, there is a much more limited historical scope, and Price devotes chapters only to Hume, Newman, and Locke.

1.8.2. Individual authors

Scholarly discussion of the reasonability of religious believing and religious belief may be found in some accounts of the major figures treated in this study. Even here, however, the extent of such discussion is uneven. To situate some of this work in the present study, I consider these authors in three phases: first: the earliest phase (the 'formative' view – approximately, 1637-1790), that provides a framework for the ensuing articulations and developments; second: a phase (approximately, 1790-1843), where we find the fullest expression of evidentialism, and a complete statement of questions of reasonability, meaning, and truth within their respective theological work; and, third: a phase (approximately 1843-1910), where one finds a number of major developments of, or responses to, 'the evidentialists'; I focus on three figures from this period.

1.8.2.1 The formative phase of Anglo-American philosophical theology

The initial discussions of the reasonability of religious belief – and, though to a lesser degree, the meaning and truth of religious belief – in Anglo-American philosophical theology, are found in William Chillingworth (1602-44) and John Tillotson (1630-94), both of whom had a significant influence on John Locke (1632-1704).

For **John Tillotson**, Clifford (1990) and Selo (1970) provide background and context, but do not go far into Tillotson's argumentation. Both volumes are primarily historical. (Kim's 2003 PhD thesis on Tillotson is also primarily historical, although it does deal with showing Tillotson's effort to present the "reasonable" nature of "true religion" and the defence of Christianity.)

For **William Chillingworth**, the classical source for background and context is Des Maizeaux (1725). Des Maizeaux quotes extensively from Chillingworth's work, notes Chillingworth's influence on Locke (pp 370-371) and his view on 'believing' (p. 203), and defends Chillingworth against charges of Socianism. Orr (1967) focuses on Chillingworth's understanding of 'reason,' though it does not deal with the relation of Chillingworth's views to the general 17th century debate on the place of reason. A more recent, useful text in explaining Chillingworth's views (and their putative relation to Socinianism) is Mortimer (2010). Neither source, however, contributes much to the analysis of 'belief' and 'faith ' or to questions of 'proof' – except so far as they recognize a concern for the limitations of human knowledge on matters concerning the divine.

To help to situate the scholarly debate on this early phase, the best text – though it far from recent – is Van Leeuwen (1963) which, as its title accurately describes, focuses on the notion of "certainty" in 17th century English thought. Beiser (1996) is useful in understanding the concept of reason (Beiser 1996: 126) and in discussing how reason came to be a standard of truth in the 17th century – though he says little on Chillingworth and less on Tillotson. While Beiser is somewhat unclear in how he understands the notion of the Enlightenment, his study is valuable in that it reminds the reader – as I will argue in the study – of how important it was to some churchmen to have a rational defence of religious belief.

A second stage in this first phase in the development of Anglo-American philosophical theology is found in John Locke and David Hume; my focus here is on their respective understandings of belief, of faith, and of the conditions under which it is reasonable to give assent to (religious) belief.

While **John Locke** is perhaps best known as a political philosopher and for his contributions to epistemology, one of his major interests throughout his life was theology (see Parker 2004). Some historical background to Locke's view is found in Van Leeuwen (1963) (above), but also in an article by Wallace (1984), which deals specifically with some of the sources for Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity*.

There has been extensive discussion of Locke on the issue of belief. There is not only a question of the rationality involved in arriving at or assenting to a belief, but also the moral allowability of assenting to a belief. This is often referred to in the scholarly literature as the debate about ‘the ethics of belief.’ (In fact, discussion of the obligation to believe what is true or to refrain from believing what is unsupported, has dominated much of the current debate in Anglo-American philosophical theology.) A standard text, here, is Passmore 1986 (“Locke and the Ethics of Belief”). Wisdo points out that Passmore argues that “Locke’s extended critique of enthusiasm in later versions of the *Essay* is an attempt to explain why people are more likely to possess false beliefs rather than true ones” (Wisdo 1993:34). A more thorough discussion of the issue appears in Wolterstorff (1996), where Wolterstorff attempts to see what, exactly, Locke’s view is of belief and, secondarily, whether Locke’s view is superior to Hume’s. Wolterstorff is especially useful in distinguishing knowledge and assent in Locke, and in demonstrating the importance of the ethical obligation to assent only to what is (in some way) justified by reason. Locke is also concerned with the standard of evidence for belief, and here he has generally been regarded as a foundationalist. An extensive consideration of Locke’s foundationalism, then, appears in Wolterstorff (1996), but also in Plantinga (1993). Whether Locke is the rationalist that Wolterstorff makes him out to be is a question that bears on the underlying questions of this study.

On the issues of reasonableness and reasonability, some relatively recent studies provide resources for reflecting on this issue of epistemic normativity. These studies deal, however, only indirectly with Locke. For example, McCormick (2014) offers a general treatment of the issue of the ethics of belief, but it is not centred on Locke. Similarly, David Wisdo (1993) provides an account of the ethics of belief, and argues that the rationality of religious belief is connected with an ethics of belief, but little time is spent in the discussion of Locke.

David Hume’s account of belief and justification are extremely complex; there is significant scholarly debate about whether Hume is an ironist, a sceptic, or defending a kind of pragmatism or natural belief, and so on, when it comes to religious belief. Some key critical texts inform the discussion in the chapter. In order to understand what Hume means by belief and, by extension, religious belief, the classic modern study is Flew’s

(1967/2013) *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*. This has constituted the starting point for much of the contemporary understanding of Hume on belief. While some have argued that Hume's account of belief is confused and that Hume uses the term in a variety of senses, Gorman (1993) provides a close analysis of the term 'belief' in Hume, and claims that there is more consistency in Hume than one might think. (Whether this is so requires some discussion.) More specialized accounts of Hume on belief are found in Butler (1960)[4], Tweyman (1986, who focuses, not on the *Enquiry* but on Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*) – and Penelhum (1983), who discuss at length the relation between "natural belief" and "religious belief." Clearly, if there is such a phenomenon of "natural belief" in the context of religion, this could affect Hume's putative rejection of the reasonability of religious belief. My view is that, nevertheless, there is some fundamental inconsistency when we look specifically at how Hume frames religious belief, and this draws on the account of demonstration and reasonableness that appear in Hume's *Enquiry*.

A key text in understanding Hume's position on 'reason' is David Owen (1999). This careful study, first distinguishing Hume's view from that of Descartes and Locke, articulates Hume's theory of probable and of demonstrative reasoning (see also Owen (2003)).The former text is particularly relevant in articulating my own brief account of Hume, though it does not bear fully on what is a religious belief.

This first, formative phase sets up the background for the more thorough discussion of the reasonability of religious belief and of religious believing in what has been called 'the evidential school.'

1.8.2.2 The second phase in the development of Anglo-American philosophical theology

The second phase in the development of Anglo-American philosophical theology is to be found in the work of William Paley and Richard Whately. Both were Anglican clergymen and Christian apologists – Paley, Archdeacon of Carlisle; Whately, Archbishop of Dublin. Conscious of the views of Locke and Hume, and seeking to respond to them on their own terms, the writings of Paley and Whately provide clear examples of evidentialism.

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[4] Butler (1960) is challenged by Gaskin; see Gaskin (1974) and Chapter 4, below.

The focus in their respective work is on 'reasonability.' Surprisingly, however, little of an analytical character has been written on the nature of religious belief in Paley or in Whately.

There are very few book-length studies of **William Paley** – only Le Mahieu (1976) and Clarke (1974)[5] – and only Clarke goes beyond the biographical to enter into an analysis of issues related to evidence. Moreover, much of the critical discussion of Paley's philosophical theology focuses on just one work – his *Natural Theology*. While this work is sometimes ridiculed as having been effectively refuted by Hume's arguments in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, I and other critics have challenged this view of Paley (see Sweet 1999b).

Principal texts for Paley's account of the reasonableness of religious belief are his *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* and the *Horae Paulinae*, which provide clear examples of Paley's understanding of reasoning and proof. But given that much of the critical literature is on *Natural Theology*, one needs also to draw on the critical discussion of that text. One general essay is Gillespie (1990). A more specific study of Paley's argumentative method is Nuovo (1992). (Nuovo argues that Paley's argument is much stronger than usually recognised, and that it successfully subverts Hume's criticisms of it.) Other studies that focus on the logical approach that Paley takes include several essays published in 2010 by O'Flaherty. Eddy (2004) argues that, in *Natural Theology*, Paley was not so much offering a demonstrative argument as consciously employing a rhetorical strategy intended to persuade and to shame critics. As for the kind of argument or demonstration of religious belief that Paley offered, one may look at Oppy (2002), and the reply by Schupbach (2005). A more extensive account of Paley, taking into account a range of his work, is found in Sweet (1999), which I draw on in the present study.

Richard **Whately**, Archbishop of Dublin for some thirty years (1831-63), may be seen as a successor to Paley in the 'evidentialist school', though his work overall had, arguably, a greater impact in Britain and the United States. Whately was not only a churchman and theologian, but a rhetorician, logician, and economist. There are, however, very few book-length studies of Whately: Akenson (1981) and MacMahon (2005) offer sympathetic biographies, but neither author describes or analyses Whately's understanding of religious belief or, for that matter, the criteria for the reasonability or truth of such belief. (While it is not necessary in the present study to investigate Whately's contributions to the history of logic, some useful sources here are Jongsma (1982), and the essays in Gabbay and Woods (2008).)

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[5] Dodds (2003), however, is a very general, short, article length, pamphlet, and not a critical or historical study.

As noted above with Paley, what is particularly relevant to the issues of the reasonability and demonstrability of religious belief is the matter of method. Whately's attention to method is discussed, briefly, in Parton (1997). Most of the critical literature on Whately focuses on his logic and rhetoric – rhetoric being useful so far as it helps to set the parameters of how an argument is supposed to work, the issue of the burden of proof, and, thereby the understanding of reasonableness, Here, then, one may refer to Patokorpi (1996) and to more detailed texts – e.g., Hansen (2006) and McKerrow (1978) – that focus on Whately's theory of argumentation (e.g., arguments involving authority, *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, the distinction between "inferring and proving", and matters of consistency), but these discussions do not address Whately's justification of religious belief. There is, however, very little on Whately's philosophical theology as such. This is all the more curious, as Whately had edited Paley's *Works*, but also because Whately himself put great store on apologetics – a feature adverted to, but not explored, by his principal biographers. There are, nevertheless, two discussions that bear on this: Golden (1996) and Sweet (1999). (I develop this latter article in Chapter 6, below.) Golden's focus is a brief summary of Whately's response (in his (in)famous 1819 *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*) to Hume's account of miracles, as an illustration of what constitutes a convincing proof in rhetoric, but does not consider Whately's other work.

Concerning this second phase, then, the present study not only extends, but adds to, earlier critical work particularly concerning the nature of proof and the understanding of reasonability in Anglo-American philosophical theology.

1.8.2.3 The third phase of Anglo-American philosophical theology

The third phase of Anglo-American philosophical theology is, in large part, a reaction or response to the evidentialism, not just of Paley and Whately, but of some of their predecessors, particularly Locke, and possibly Hume. Three principal lines of response are considered in this study. First, there is a 'Catholic' response, where we find a qualified acknowledgement of the value of evidentialism in some spheres, but not in religion; this is the response of John Henry Newman. Second, there is an extension of evidentialism in a sceptical or atheistic direction, exemplified by William Kingdon Clifford. Third, there is a non-evidentialist view (and critique of Clifford) in William James. (While there were other reactions, such as an 'idealist' response, typical of the influence of Kant and Hegel on Anglo-American thought, they generally did not focus on the themes central to the present study, such as 'reasonability' and 'proof.'

Thus, a first line of response is found in **John Henry Newman** (1801-90) who, at the beginning of his career, was an assistant and younger colleague to Whately, and whose writings sought to provide insight both into the nature of religious belief and into whether and how such belief is reasonable and can be justified. Newman's description of faith and reason, and the connections he sees between them, are important because he presents a perspective on this question – one that is almost totally ignored in contemporary analyses of religious belief – that draws on Locke's and Whately's evidentialism, and yet reflects an approach and insights that have an up-to-date, if not 'post-modern,' character. Perhaps the best known contemporary scholar writing on Newman is Ian Ker. Ker is the author of a number of studies on Newman since 1990 – most significantly, Ker (2009). Additional context is provided in Kenny (1990) and in Collins (1961). A summary of recent philosophical discussion of Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, can be found in D'Aquino (2015). Geertjan Zuijdwegt (2013) provides some interesting background on Whately's influence on Newman's *Oxford University Sermons*.

A key issue in Newman, perhaps more evidently than in any of the other authors in this study, is the concept of religious belief. We find a critical discussion of this in Jay Newman (1986). Two other sources that bring out Newman's conception of religious belief are Jay Newman (1974) and D'Arcy (1931). Further analyses of Newman's concept of religious belief can be found in Price (1969) and Caiazza (2008), who focuses on Newman's discussion of the concept in the *Grammar of Assent*, and who challenges D'Arcy's 1931 analysis of the nature of belief in Newman. Ker and Merrigan (2009) – *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman* – provide relevant chapters on faith (Thomas Morris) and justification (Thomas L. Sheridan).

The central discussion of Newman's work, however, is not on the nature of religious belief; it tends to be on the issues of reason, reasonability, assent (and what Newman calls 'the illative sense'), and certitude. Useful volumes for interpretation here are Ferreira (1980) and Lyons (1978). Newman's discussion of assent, and its relation to the illative sense again figures in Jay Newman (1986) (though this author is critical of Cardinal Newman). Gerard Casey (1984) provides a more thorough discussion of inference and assent, though he argues that "the notion of natural inference is equivocal", and that there is a conflation between inference and assent in Newman's work. Aquino (2004) addresses "Newman's account of the illative sense with insights from recent work in social and virtue epistemology." The discussion of assent involves the larger question of method. Two volumes that deal with questions of theological epistemology and with the concept of truth are, respectively, Moleski (2000) and Merrigan & Ker (2008). Articles in volumes that are of most relevance on the issue of epistemology and method in Newman are Alston (1999), Lamont (1996), Ker (1997), and Price (1969). Finally, on the issue of 'reason,' an interesting discussion of Newman's account of what has been called 'passional reason' is Wainwright (1995). Wainwright's discussion includes examining two other proponents of passional reason, but also advancing a defence of it in the modern era.

A second mid-19th century response to evidentialism takes the form of turning evidentialism back on religious belief. This is the approach of **W.K. Clifford** (1845-79). General background texts to Clifford and the 'agnostic' or 'atheist' response to Paley and Whately are Lightman (1987) and Lightman (2001). Among other useful secondary texts, one may refer also to Brown (1947), Turner (1990), Madigan (2008), and Vorstenbosch (2000), though all of these texts are largely historical.

There are several essays dealing specifically with Clifford's 'evidentialist' method. Christian's (2012) essay provides some historical and conceptual background to Clifford's "The Ethics of Belief." Aikin (2014) and Christian (2009) offer ways that one might be able to 'narrow' Clifford's evidentialist maxim and thus save its plausibility.

A defender of Clifford's "inductive moral argument" which challenges believing without sufficient evidence is Brian Zamulinski (see, especially, his (2002), but also his (2008) and (2013)); Nottlemann and Fessenbacker (2020) defend Clifford here, arguing that he is offering a version of a virtue theory of ethics. Allen Wood (2008) also seeks to defend a 'Cliffordian' evidentialism against objections – though I will argue that the fundamental problem with Clifford is not his evidentialism (though it is problematic), but his understanding of the nature of religious belief. This latter issue has rarely been discussed in the critical literature.

A very late 19th century response to evidentialism, but that also reflects a significant shift in the understanding of religious belief and in how to think about the reasonability of belief, is that found in **William James** (1842-1910). For general studies of James on religion, the standard starting point is Suckiel (1996). An older study that still has significant value, is Perry (1935). Rydenfelt and Pihlström (2013) is a collection of essays, including important essays by Wayne Proudfoot and by Guy Axtell, that covers James's general views on religion, but it also includes several essays that focus on James's 'will to believe' argument. For some background on the origin and early development of James' ethics of belief to 1890, see Kauber (1974).

One issue discussed in the critical studies is James's method and the reasonableness of holding a belief. Here, Slater (2009) provides useful insights, but a rich text is Brown (2000). Brown seeks to understand the notions of reason and reasonability that James was employing in his discussion of religion.

Because of controversy over James's view of reasonableness, another issue that is sometimes discussed is James's relation to evidentialism. While James clearly rejects Clifford's standard of evidentialism, this raises the question whether there are other kinds of evidentialism that James may be sympathetic to, or, alternately, whether James is a kind of fideist; this reflects concerns about what lies at the root of James' putative "right to believe" (Thayer, 1983). Here, essays by Putnam (1996) and Weintraub (2003) are particularly relevant. For the relation of James to fideists such as Pascal and Renouvier, see, particularly, O'Connell (1997/1984).

Another key issue that bears on the present study is James's account of religious belief. Here, three books are particularly germane: Brown (2000), that reviews some of the principal interpretations of James's essay on the will to believe, and, in particular, some of the conflicting interpretations of the term belief; Wall (1995), which is a general study that adopts James's approach to religious experience, and then uses the notion of religious experience as a kind of justification (an approach found also in William Alston) for religious belief; and Slater (2009), that explores what one might call James' pragmatic view of religion. Rorty (1996) argues that James has different, and inconsistent, definitions of religion, though Putnam (1996) disputes this. Both Whittaker (1983) and Brown (2000) address the interesting issue of 'overbelief.'

1.8.3 Conclusion

In short, as this brief survey of scholarly literature indicates, there is a clear rationale for the present study. Not only have there not been any studies of the kind proposed here, but there has been only limited discussion of the problem that this study addresses in other scholarly accounts of the major figures who are central to this project. By providing an analysis and presentation of Anglo-American philosophical theology from the mid-17th to the early twentieth centuries – a presentation and analysis focused on the reasonableness of religious belief, and dealing with the meaning of religious belief, what its relation is to argument and evidence, and whether it is provable – the present study seeks to provide a more systematic account of the meaning and development of the reasonableness of religious belief in this period.

1.9 Research methodology

In light of the theoretical framework(s) that are employed in this study, the methods employed are phenomenological, hermeneutical, and analytic. As one finds in several of the authors studied, religious belief is a phenomenon that appears in text (i.e., scripture) as well as daily life and practice (e.g., worship, discourse). When seeking to uncover the meaning and character of these accounts, one must take care how one 'retrieves' and understands the past (see Lonergan and Collingwood, here). One must also be analytic in looking at language (specifically, concepts and arguments – see Wittgenstein, here) as a guide to understand the meaning of religious belief and to assess the practice of religious belief and its assumptions. By using such authors, one can make the respective views of religious belief clearer and can bring them to bear on the question of reasonability.

These 'tools' – phenomenology, hermeneutics, and analytic philosophy – are brought together in this study in order to pursue what has been called (by RFA Hoernlé) a synoptic method. Hoernlé, a philosophical idealist, describes this method as follows: a synoptic philosophy "rests on the assumption that truth has many sides, and that to the whole truth on any subject every point of view has some contribution to make" (Hoernlé 1945: xvi). To access these different sides requires at least "a desire to enter into [the life around one], and to share it from the inside, rather than to stand outside as a mere spectator or even to reject it as foreign to [one]self" (Hoernlé 1945: xvi). In short, then, the synoptic method is an attitude and an ideal – an ideal of comprehensiveness and inclusiveness – and it requires making use of different tools in order to uncover and make explicit the views of the authors studied, but also in seeking to determine the relation among them, and to see the changes and shifts in the ideas they employ.

1.10 Research design

Since the research in this study is primarily historical and analytical, the research design reflects this accordingly. Given that the principal aim of this study is to identify and trace the development of certain themes in a range of theologians and other figures who had a significant impact on theology, it is important to identify key texts and to present the background or context in which these texts were written. (This is in keeping with the Collingwoodian approach identified above.) Thus, each chapter begins with contextual and biographical information, in order for the reader to have a better understanding of the questions(s) that the author(s) addressed or directly or indirectly proposed to answer. To achieve this, it is also important to locate the key texts, as much of the research involves identifying and working through them. By appreciating this historical dimension, the reader is better situated to see how the individual authors understood the issues, and why they explored the questions that they did in the way they did.

Yet, as this study also seeks to identify and clarify a number of embedded assumptions and to analyse concepts in order to make a larger theological claim (as we see, for example, in how Lonergan understands method in theology), the design of this study is also analytical. In many cases, as we shall see, the authors studied did not carefully explain their terms and principal assumptions. This requires, then, an approach that is phenomenological and hermeneutical – seeking to infer from remarks on religious life and practice as well as from texts, the author's views and position – but also analytical, seeking to make these views under examination clear. There is, as well, a synoptic character or mixed method to the research design – which involves 'entering into' the perspective of the authors, rather than to look at them 'from outside.'

Such a research design enables the present study, both to clarify and, in some cases, to correct the general understanding of these authors, but also to question and challenge the understanding of how these authors have a place on an important issue in theology: the meaning, proof, and reasonableness of religious belief.

1.11 Ethical considerations

Given the importance of ethics and integrity in contemporary research, let me note that this thesis is primarily a historical study: it does not affect the authors discussed or involve any personal interaction, and does not involve the use of human or animal subjects. In the gaining access to, and in collection of materials for this thesis, no issues of obtaining informed consent, of confidentiality, and of the like are involved. Although I draw, at times, on my earlier research and publications, all of the work in this study is my own, and no section or material in the thesis is included or reproduced, in whole or in part, without an explicit identification of that material, and detailed, complete, and accurate referencing.

1.12. Outline of the chapters

Beginning with Chapter 2, I provide an account of the 'formative' phase of the discussion of the reasonableness of religious belief and of religious believing.

Chapter 2 starts with some context for understanding the approaches taken in the earliest phase of Anglo-American philosophical theology, which covers the period from approximately 1637 to 1790. Next, I present the accounts of the reasonability of some religious beliefs presented in the work of William Chillingworth and John Tillotson. Both Chillingworth and Tillotson raise the issue of the reasonableness of religious belief and, for an understanding of what the role of reason is in the determination of religious belief, I look first at Chillingworth's *The Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation* (printed in 1637[6]), and, next, at Tillotson's *The Rule of Faith* (1666) and some of the sermons that appear in his *Works* (1742).

In Chapter 3, I turn to the writings of John Locke, who was influenced by Chillingworth and was a close contemporary of Tillotson. It was in 1689 that Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which we find his most extensive account of belief and faith, was published, and it was soon followed, in 1695, by his *The Reasonableness of* Christianity *as Delivered in the Scriptures*, which provides more background on his account of reason and the reasonability of (the Christian) religion. In Locke we find not only an analysis of belief as distinct from knowledge, but an argument for the existence of God, advocacy of foundationalism as a standard for sufficient evidence, as well as an account of the conditions that must be met for reasonable believing – and which supports a latitudinarian view of religious belief.

I conclude the presentation of the earliest phase by looking, in Chapter 4, at the roots of David Hume's views on the reasonableness of religious belief – in his writings in epistemology and on religious belief. While Hume's contributions to theology are indirect and may initially be seen as only extending certain aspects of Locke's epistemology, they led to conclusions that met with a strong reaction from theologians and religious authorities. Hume explores the criteria of reasonable believing or belief and their application to religious belief in a number of texts; the key sources are his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) [Hume 1970], *The Natural History of Religion* (1757) [Hume 2007], and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (published posthumously, 1779) [Hume 1947]. While his 'positive' views of belief are somewhat in tension with one another, Hume reinforced a narrower, more propositional understanding of religious belief, and his critique of religious beliefs and, arguably, religious belief influenced subsequent generations of theologians and religious thinkers.

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[6] See, here, Mortimer (2010: 67) and Orr (1967: 42).

This account of the 'formative' phase of this discussion, then, will support the claim that reason and evidence have a bearing in theology concerning reasonableness in holding religious beliefs. It also provides a framework for later articulations and developments.

Next, I present and discuss a second phase of Anglo-American philosophical theology where one finds the fullest expression of evidentialism, and a complete statement of questions of reasonability, meaning, and truth within the theological work. This covers the period from approximately 1790 to 1843. Here, I look at two principal authors – the Anglican clergymen and Christian apologists William Paley and Richard Whately – authors who had a significant influence in education and in the training of clergy, not only in Britain but also in the United States and Canada.

In Chapter 5, I focus on Paley, who is regarded as one of the first 'evidentialists.' Most of Paley's work was of an apologetic nature, and he was the author of a number of apologetic texts, such as *Horae Paulinae, or the Truth of the Scripture History of St Paul* (1790), *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794) and *Natural Theology* (1802). Here, I show that, among Paley's central concerns, were the reasonability of Christianity and, by extension, the general standards of evidence for religious belief. In his writings, then, Paley sought to address the challenges to religious belief and practice by such sceptics as Hume. Yet he also provides a clearer account of the standard of sufficient evidence than his theological predecessors.

In Chapter 6, I discuss Richard Whately, who may be seen as a successor to Paley in 'the evidential school.' An ecclesiastic and theologian of significant reputation, Whately was one of the 'Oriel Noetics,' a mentor to the future John Henry Cardinal Newman, and is considered to be largely responsible for the revival of the study of logic in England in the early part of the nineteenth century. Much of Whately's apologetic finds its place in his *Essentials of Rhetoric* (1828), though some is also to be found in his (in)famous 1819 *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*, and in some of his later essays[7] and his annotations to his edition of Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* (1859). Whately insists that "it may be possible and easy, and in many cases, highly desirable, to have *sufficient reason* for believing what we do believe" – including one's religious beliefs. I show, however, how such a standard is not particularly onerous, and why he believes that belief claims can generally meet a standard of reasonability.

Both Paley and Whately insisted on a fundamental, if not necessary role of reason, argument, and proof in the adoption of religious belief, which led to the epithet 'evidentialist.' Nevertheless, their accounts of the standard of religious believing are more subtle than generally recognised. Paley and Whately are much less known in the history of philosophical theology than they should be, and their careful efforts to set the conditions for the reasonability of religious belief arguably provide a rigorous response to earlier sceptical critique.

The discussion of the third phase of Anglo-American philosophical theology (1843-1910) explores three major developments of, or responses to, evidentialism. First, I outline a 'Catholic' response, where we find a kind of evidentialism but, at the same time, a contextualizing of it; this is the response of the ecclesiastic, poet, theologian, and, later, Cardinal in the Roman Church, John Henry Newman. Second, there is an extension of evidentialism by the mathematician and philosopher W.K. Clifford. Third, there is a view drawing both on religious experience and on a critique of Clifford, found in the work of the philosopher and psychologist William James.

In Chapter 7, then, I present the views of Newman. Although much of his work is apologetic (in the form of sermons or explicit apologiae), there are three key texts that provide insight both into the nature of religious belief and into whether and how such belief is reasonable and can be justified. The relation of faith and reason and the reasonability of believing are dealt with, at length, in his *Essay in aid of a Grammar of*

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[7] For example, his 1828 *Essays on Some of the Difficulties in the Writings of St. Paul,* and his 1838 *Easy Lessons on Christian Evidences* (later titled *Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences*).

Assent (1870). But his understanding of religious belief, and in what way it is related to reason, appears in earlier texts; some were published as his *Oxford University Sermons* (1843/1900); others were only posthumously published in his *Philosophical Notebook* (Newman 1969-70). This chapter focuses on how Newman describes the different senses of faith and reason, but also what connections he sees between them. It also explores how reasonability can be a consequence of the use of what Newman calls 'the illative sense.' As noted above, Newman's discussion is particularly important because he offers an epistemology that recognises the strengths of evidentialism, and yet has a contemporary, 'post-modern,' character.

In Chapter 8, I present the forceful version of evidentialism of William Clifford. Clifford's impact on philosophical theology is significant, primarily because of an essay that has had a remarkable longevity, "The Ethics of Belief" (1876/7). Clifford extends earlier evidentialism by arguing that not only was it a requirement of 'rationality' that one have 'sufficient evidence' for one's beliefs, but that one also had a *moral* obligation to believe *only* on sufficient evidence. Here we see not only a more formal statement of an ethics of belief than that found in Locke, but the exposition of a standard of reasonableness that is refined as a form of evidentialism, and that argues against the reasonability and the morality of holding beliefs on faith alone. Drawing on this essay, and on a lesser-known essay by Clifford, "The Ethics of Religion," this chapter goes beyond much of the earlier discussion of Clifford by noting the structural similarities between Clifford's account of proof and the approaches of Paley and Whately, by considering the claim that Clifford's standard for evidence is a foundationalist one, and by examining his justification for his extension of evidentialism and the implications for the reasonability of belief in general.

Chapter 9 provides a third reaction or response to evidentialism – that of the American philosopher and psychologist, William James (1842-1910). James makes a significant contribution to both the development of a pragmatic method of reason and justification – what he called 'radical empiricism' – and the understanding of the phenomenon of religious experience. The focus of this chapter is James's claim that the foundationalist-evidentialist analysis is unacceptable, and that one can know religious beliefs to be true – or, at least, one can be reasonable in holding them – for reasons other than one's ability to demonstrate them. I identify two stages in James's argument: first, his positive argument for the legitimacy of religious belief and for mystical experience, and second, his critique of evidentialism. I also discuss the role played by the usually underappreciated notion of 'over-belief' in James's work, investigate the implications for James's account of religious belief, and consider the implications for talking about the reasonableness of religious belief.

In the final chapter, Chapter 10, I provide a general assessment of the preceding discussion of the reasonableness of religious belief in Anglo-American philosophical theology from its formative phase to the final writings of James, noting the changes and shifts in the understandings of reason, belief, and proof, and particularly the implications for the reasonableness of religious believing. I also offer an explanation for these shifts in the notion of reasonability. I conclude with some suggestions for how these results might bear on theological discussion today, and with some general remarks on some of the nuances and important differences that have been found in the course of this study.

1.13 Conclusion

In the chapters that follow, then, the reader will find a review, analysis, and critical discussion of some key ideas in the history of Anglo-American philosophical theology between the mid-17th and early 20th centuries, particularly concerning the reasonability of religious belief and about the assumptions concerning religious belief that underlie this. Through a careful reading of the writings of some central figures, this study seeks to provide an exposition not only of reasonability and the criteria for it, but also of the nature of religious belief. In the process, it will suggest that there are shifts and, in some cases, developments in understandings of religious belief as one proceeds. This study, therefore, provides an insight into the Anglo-American tradition that has influenced theology in the English speaking world, and will assess the received view of the relevance of evidentialism and foundationalism in philosophical theology. This study also suggests that, in order to address the question of the reasonability of religious belief, and its relation to argument and demonstration, there must be a broader account of the nature of religious belief than has generally been given or assumed.

Chapter 2

The Formative Phase I: Chillingworth and Tillotson

2.1 Introduction: The context of early Anglo-American philosophical theology

The origins of the theological and philosophical debate in the Anglo-American world concerning the reasonability of religious belief are closely connected with the religious turmoil in 16th and early 17th century England. In 1531, King Henry VIII began to enact a series of measures that soon led to a formal separation of the Church in England from the Catholic Church, most notably through the Act of Supremacy in 1534.[1] The actual separation was, however, a much more drawn out matter.

When Henry died in 1547, he was succeeded by his Protestant son, Edward VI, who sought to solidify this 'reform' (e.g., through the creation of a collection of texts for daily prayer, divine worship, and the administration of the sacraments, the Book of Common Prayer), though there was significant resistance. But Edward died at 15, after nominally reigning for only six years, and was succeeded by Henry's daughter, Mary, who was a Catholic and who 're-established' the Catholic Church in England in 1553 – initially with wide popular support. When Mary died in 1558, without issue, her half-sister Elizabeth became queen and, re-established the reform through the Act of Supremacy (1558) and the Act of Uniformity (1559).

Many people, however, remained Catholic, particularly in the north and south west in England. (Catholicism remained in Scotland, under Mary Stuart, until 1560, and officially until 1579.[2]) When Elizabeth died in 1603, she was succeeded by James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England. Raised in the (Protestant) Church of Scotland, James had been baptised a Catholic, and was tolerant of Catholicism; he allowed Catholic practice and Catholic priests – usually Englishmen who had gone to the European continent to study and be ordained in the Catholic Church – in the country. This policy continued under his son, Charles I, who succeeded to the throne in 1625 and who, though a Protestant, had a Catholic wife.

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[1] I.e., *Public Act* (1534) [An Act concerning the King's Highness to be Supreme Head of the Church of England, and to have Authority to reform and redress all Errors, Heresies and Abuses in the same] 26 Henry VIII c.1: "the king of this realm shall be reputed to be the only supreme head of the church of England; that as such he shall enjoy all titles, jurisdiction, and honors to the said dignity appertaining."

[2] See The Church Act (1579); 1567/1579. See also Lyall 2016: 5-10, and Hetherington 1843.

The unsettled character of the theological situation throughout this period – from the early 1530s to at least the execution of Charles I in 1649, led theologians to wrestle with the question of religious belief and its relation to reason, argument, and proof, but not in the way in which it had been considered much earlier, by figures such as Aquinas. For the question of the relation was initially not so much one of natural theology or apologetics – i.e., providing, or attempting to provide, proof of religious belief or faith – but a more centrally theological one – i.e., whether a religious belief or putative article of faith was true – or, (how) could one be certain of a religious belief. In the religiously pluralistic environment of the early 17th century, where the established Church – the Church of England – was confronted by the activities of Catholic priests, often Jesuits, who were apologists for Catholicism, the questions arose: What might, or ought, one believe to be a Christian? How can one be certain on matters of faith or have true beliefs? Also, What exactly *is* faith? Is it related to an institution or church? Is it a set of (propositional) beliefs? Is it an assent to such beliefs? a disposition? And, while there may have been other elements involved as well, such as the 'rediscovery' of philosophical scepticism, the initial debate was one internal to theology.

It is in this distinctive context, then, that theologians and churchmen, such as William Chillingworth (1602-44) and John Tillotson (1630-94), came to engage the issue of the relation of reason to faith. What they sought to do was not primarily to vindicate religious belief as such (e.g., belief in God) or to show that the Christian faith in general was reasonable – all parties took these for granted – but, more moderately and theologically, to show that 'reasonableness' was an appropriate and useful criterion for determining matters of faith of which human beings can be certain, and that reason was an appropriate tool in a theological investigation into what one may or should believe.[3]

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[3] Sarah Mortimer writes that there could be "reliance upon individual reason, rather than [simply] on Scripture read through the eyes of faith." Mortimer (2010: 110). See also the discussion in Clifford (1990).

Nevertheless, this approach was controversial. First, given the context and the debates between Protestants and Catholics, challenges to the doctrines of Catholicism did not obviously entail support for those of the established Church. There were a variety of Protestant confessions (e.g., Arminians (Remonstrants), Calvinists (Reformed), and Presbyterians) – rejected by the established Church as instances of a latitudinarianism in religion – that also benefitted from debates on the role of reason within faith.[4] Second, there was concern about how far reason, reasonability, and proof had a place in religion. Some, called 'Socinians,'[5] insisted that Christian doctrine be entirely rational; they rejected, for example, the Trinity and the pre-existence of Christ. But this was widely regarded as a heretical view.

There was a third important controversial consequence of this approach. Once one admits a role for reason and evidence within theology, it is just a short step to holding that reason and evidence bear on the truth of all theological claims, and of religious faith as such; this is what Locke and Hume were to do. Before turning to that, it is useful to look more closely at how theologians, such as Chillingworth and Tillotson, understood the role of reason in relation to faith and, therefore, 'set the stage' for 17th and 18th century thinkers. The aim of the remainder of this Chapter, then, is to present how the reasonability of faith, and the relation of faith and reason, came to be an issue in Anglo American (philosophical) theology, and what some representative figures of the period understood by the notions of faith and reason, and the relations between the two.

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[4] Latitudinarians were Anglican clerics and theologians, particularly in the 17th century, who held that certain Christian doctrines, while based on tradition or past practice, could not be demonstrated or known with absolute certainty, and that the doctrines necessary for Christian belief were relatively few. As a result, they allowed for a wide degree of latitude on which Christian teachings were necessary for salvation. These churchmen were often regarded as heterodox. See Marshall (1998).

[5] Socinianism was a Christian theological tradition, dating from the 1540s, and based on the writings of the Italians Lelio and Fausto Sozzini. While sometimes used broadly to refer to the beliefs and practices of 'non-conforming' Christians, Socinians generally held that religious beliefs must be known by or confirmable by natural reason, and so they rejected a number of orthodox Christian beliefs, such as the Trinity and Christ's divinity. For a short summary of the tradition, see Mortimer (2016).

2.2 William Chillingworth[6]

Born in 1602, a year before the death of Elizabeth I, Chillingworth graduated from Trinity College, Oxford, in 1618. Although he was influenced by Remonstrants, he became a Fellow of Trinity in 1628. Through much of his early life, Chillingworth was caught up in debates concerning whether a Christian had to be a Catholic. In 1630, opting to make a decision on the issue, he became a Catholic and went to Douai, in France, to study at the English College there. He returned to Oxford the following year[7], however, and to Protestantism in 1634.[8] In 1637, he published his most important work, *The Religion of Protestants, a Safe Way to Salvation*[9]; Chillingworth did not argue so much for the error of Catholicism or the truth of Protestantism, as for the allowability of Protestantism. The following year, in 1638, Chillingworth subscribed to the Thirty Nine Articles[10], becoming a member of the Church of England, and, in July of that year, was made Chancellor of Salisbury Cathedral. Because of the importance that Chillingworth gave to reason, he was accused of Socianism, but his 'high church' views also led him to be suspected of having returned to Catholicism. Chillingworth joined the royalist army at the beginning of the English Civil War (1642). When the royalist army took refuge in Arundel Castle, in 1642, he became ill and, when the army withdrew, he was captured by Puritan forces. Chillingworth died in 1644, five years before the execution of Charles I, and the establishment of the Commonwealth by Protestant Puritans. His writings influenced figures such as Tillotson, Locke, and, later, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[11]

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[6] Basic biographical material is available in the *Dictionary of National Biography*: see Creighton (1886: X, 256–7). The classical biography of Chillingworth is DesMaizeaux (1725). (DesMaizeaux, who worked largely in "drudgework" as a copy editor, was known to Pierre Bayle, Locke, and Hume.) A more recent study of Chillingworth is Orr (1967). See also Mortimer (2010) and Vickers (2008) (on Chillingworth, esp pp. 48-58).

[7] There has been some question about what Chillingworth did at Douai, or even whether he even attended the College there. See Orr (1967:38-39). See also Aubrey (1898 I: 171-174(; and Tulloch (1872: I, 272-273).

[8] Creighton (1886).

[9] *The Religion of Protestants a safe way to salvation.* [*Or An answer to a booke entitled Mercy and truth, or, Charity maintain'd by Catholiques, which pretends to prove the contrary*], A New and Complete Edition. London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, 1846. **References to this text in this chapter are to this edition.**

[10] The Thirty-Nine Articles is a summary of the principal doctrines of the Church of England, and are included in The Book of Common Prayer.

The principal questions for Chillingworth were whether and how one can be certain about matters of faith. The Catholic Church offered magisterial authority as a rule or guide, but was that necessary? Was it even relevant?

Chillingworth's most important work, *The Religion of Protestants, a Safe Way to Salvation*, seeks to address these questions. *The Religion of Protestants* is a reply to a volume by Edward Knott (a pseudonym of Matthias Wilson, a Jesuit apologist and controversialist), who had argued in two books that "Protestancy unrepented destroys salvation" (RP 24, see 33, 63, ff). Knott, like many other Catholic apologists, had argued that the Protestant view rests on an assumption that ultimately destroys the case for Protestantism – that, in rejecting the Catholic teaching authority or Magisterium, there is no reliable means of knowing religious truth and, thus, Protestantism leads to scepticism. Chillingworth replies that Knott's arguments fail, and that there is "no reason why, among men of different opinions and communions, one side only can be saved" (RP iii; cf. 59) – that Protestantism has resources to maintain itself, holds all that is necessary for one to be a Christian, and so is, at least, a plausible alternative to Catholicism.

At the very root of this debate, and of Chillingworth's book, is the place of reason. To decide matters of religious controversy – i.e., matters where there is a dispute about what religious claims are true or are certain – Chillingworth claims that reason may and should be a guide. Moreover, on the general issue of "the rule of faith" (e.g., RP 93) – i.e., what must be believed to be a faithful believer – Chillingworth argued, again, for a role for reason. A rule of faith, Chillingworth writes, is one that "contains all the material Objects of faith, is a compleat and total, and not only an imperfect and Partial Rule" (RP 94). While Scripture serves as such a rule, he notes, however, that "Every text of scripture, though it hath the perfection belonging to a text of scripture, yet it hath not the perfection requisite to a perfect rule of faith" (RP 94); "it is one thing to be a perfect rule of faith, another *to be proved so* unto us" (RP 94, emphasis mine). In short, in order to be certain about matters of faith, and to have a 'rule of faith,' reason must be involved.

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[11] Chillingworth influenced Tillotson (see below), Locke (see Worcester [1889:110-112], and Chapter 3, below) and Coleridge (1853).

2.2.1 Reason and reasonability

For Chillingworth, scripture is sufficient as a rule of faith only if it is properly interpreted; this is not simply a matter of following tradition, but involves reason.

> In the Preface to *The Religion of Protestants*, Chillingworth writes:
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> "But I, for my part, unless I deceive myself, was and still am so affected, as I have made profession, *not willing*, I confess, *to take anything upon trust*, and to believe it without asking myself why; no nor able to command myself (were I never so willing) to follow, like a sheep, every shepherd that should take upon him to guide me; or every flock that should chance go before me; but most apt and *willing to be led by reason* to any way, or from it… " (RP 2, emphasis mine)

How does Chillingworth understand reason? Reason is "natural reason" (i.e., the capacity to know, understand, and infer, that human beings naturally possess), and what is reasonable – i.e., how far one ought to adopt a view – depends on "the *evidence* that is given" (RP 203, emphasis mine).[12]

Reason is valuable because it provides (the arguments that provide) certainty. But there are at least two kinds of certainty. Chillingworth speaks of "rational and acquired certainty" (RP 66)[13] as well as of 'moral certainty,' (RP 66)[14] though he rarely uses the former terms. 'Rational and acquired certainty' would be that produced by mathematical demonstration or, as the case may be, direct sense experience. 'Moral certainty' would be that produced by other forms of argument, for example, involving testimony and the use of inductive (though he does not use this term) inference.[15] Thus, what kind of certainty one has, and whether it is reasonable to believe something, is relative to the subject matter.

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[12] See Beiser (1996: 126).

[13] Though he uses the phrase only once.

[14] Cf. RP 418. Chillingworth also refers to "certainty of evidence" and "certainty of adherence" and of that which is "metaphysically certain" (RP 66), though he defines none of these terms.

There is, then, no single method or way by which one can be certain of something. Thus, if the subject matter is mathematics, a demonstrative, deductive method is suitable and can properly be said to produce knowledge and certainty. If the subject matter is the perceptible world, the proper method involves sense perception and, given the general reliability of the senses[16], allows for certainty. Similarly, the rules and procedures of the law also provide a method for making legal judgements.

Chillingworth acknowledges that such different methods, though they do not necessarily guarantee inerrancy, provide certainty. He writes:

> “for my sense may sometimes possibly deceive me, yet I am certain enough that I see what I see, and feel what I feel. Our Judges are not infallible in their judgments, yet they are certain enough, that they judge aright, and that they proceed according to the Evidence that is given, when they condemn a Thief or a Murderer to the Gallows. A Traveller is not always certain of his way, but often mistaken: and doth it therefore follow that he can have no assurance that Charing-Cross is his right way from the Temple to White-Hall?” (RP 185)

The preceding methods, dealing with law and experience (such as perception), then, provide a moral certainty, but that kind of certainty is ‘all that the matter will bear.’ Chillingworth states that it would be “unreasonable as to expect mathematical demonstration … in matters plainly incapable of them” (RP 2) and, he writes, it is a “froward [i.e., difficult to deal with] and undisciplined scholar, who desires stronger arguments for a conclusion than the matter will bear” (RP 2). Still, we can speak of ‘certainty’ as the product of [the evidence of] sense perception, or the product of judicial reasoning.

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[15] See Chillingworth, *Works* (1838: I, 115-116) for an example. On ‘induction,’ see (1838: I, 10, 17, 29).

[16] Chillingworth writes, quoting Richard Hooker: “I have taught, that the assurance of things which we believe by the word, is not so certain as of that we perceive by sense” (RP 413).

Natural reason can, then, make it reasonable for one to be certain of, or believe much. But Chillingworth does not, however, say that it can prove everything, and he is careful to distinguish his position from the Socinians. For he also rejects the view (which he attributes to Catholic apologists) that "'Nothing ought or can be certainly believed, further than it may be proved by evidence of natural reason;' (where, I conceive, natural reason is opposed to supernatural revelation)" (RP 16). Indeed, Revelation is also a legitimate source of knowledge (see RP 8, 65, 246). Nevertheless, Chillingworth claims that at least some religious truths, or articles of faith, can be known by reason.

2.2.2 Faith

What does Chillingworth mean by faith, or religious belief? In *The Religion of Protestants*, Chillingworth regards Knott's account of faith as something "'obscure' yet certain" (RP 416-17, cf pp. 451, 458), as problematic, and he rejects Knott's view "that faith should be an absolute knowledge of a thing not absolutely known, an infallible certainty of a thing, which though it is in itself, yet is not made to us to appear to be, infallibly certain" (RP 417).

Chillingworth states that not only is the term, 'faith,' vague, but there may be religious claims that are not part of faith. Thus, there is, to begin with, a distinction to be made between 'faith' and other religious claims; he remarks: "why you should conceive that all differences about religion are concerning matters of faith, in this high notion of the word, for that I conceive no reason" (RP 469).

Moreover, on the matter of faith itself, Chillingworth distinguishes different senses of the word 'faith.' Chillingworth refers to "*historical faith*" (RP 65), "articles of faith" (RP 241, 258, cf. 186), but also the individual's faith or assent to these articles or "claims" (RP 450). By 'historical faith,' Chillingworth means "… an assent to Divine Revelations upon the Authority of the Revealer, Which though in many things it differ from Opinion, … in some things … it agrees with it" (RP 65).[17] These revelations are contained largely in scripture, and what can be derived from it. This ‘historical faith’ is expressed in articles of faith.

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[17] See Simon (1976: II, 98, n. 4): "The Puritans distinguished between assent, or ' historical faith ', and saving faith, i.e. actual experience of 'a work of grace'."

“Historical faith” is, however, not obviously very extensive; Chillingworth writes: “ofttimes” by “the faith” is meant only that doctrine which is “necessary to salvation” (RP 469). It is this faith that comes directly from Scripture that serves as ‘the rule of faith’ (RP 91, 94). But it is not clear how much content this ‘faith’ includes. Chillingworth writes:

> “He that believes all fundamentals cannot be damned for any error in faith, though he believe more or less to be fundamental than is so. That also of the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son — of purgatory — of the church's visibility — of the books of the New Testament, which were doubted of by a considerable part of the primitive church (until I see better reason for the contrary than the bare authority of men) — I shall esteem of the same condition” (RP 269, see also 204).

Even scripture, by itself, is not sufficient to provide the content of faith, for not all that is in scripture is part of faith. Chillingworth writes that one may “know[…] the Scripture to contain all fundamentals, (though many more points besides, which makes it difficult to say precisely what is fandamental [sic] and what not…)” (RP 488, Answer to the 7th chapter, § 14). That being said, he also holds that faith must line up either with the explicit word of scripture, or be deducible from it.

Interestingly, Chillingworth allows that there could be things that are revealed (and, so, are part of ‘faith’) that one can, legitimately, *not* believe – because one may not know them to be revelations and, therefore, cannot be expected explicitly to believe them. For example, doctrines such as

> “That Adam and the angels sinned: that there are angels, good and bad: that those books of scripture which were never doubted of by any considerable part of the church are the word of God: that St. Peter had no such primacy as you pretend: that the scripture is a perfect rule of faith, and consequently that no necessary doctrine is unwritten: that there is no one society or succession of Christians absolutely infallible. These, to my understanding, are truths plainly

> revealed by God, and necessary to be believed *by them who know they are so*. But not so necessary, that *every* man and woman is bound, under pain of damnation, particularly to know them to be Divine revelations, and explicitly to believe them." (RP 260, emphasis mine)

There is another sense of faith, and that is the assent that the believer gives to a doctrine or an article. This seems to be like a trust or commitment that, by itself, may not have much cognitive content. Moreover, as noted above, such a faith can be 'incomplete' and yet still count as 'faith.' Thus, there are degrees of faith[18]: Chillingworth writes "as Opinion, so Faith admits Degrees; and that, as there may be a strong and weak Opinion, so there may be a strong and weak Faith" (RP 65).

What does it mean to be certain about one's faith? Chillingworth insists that the believer can be certain of some articles of faith, though the kind of certainty that the believer has is 'moral certainty', and is not based on demonstration. Indeed, this certainty may not be particularly strong. Chillingworth holds, while the articles of "faith to be in themselves truths, as certain and infallible," we may not (strictly speaking) know or be certain of them as we are certain of the products of sense or science (RP 412-13). For Chillingworth, then, "our faith is an assent to" certain 'fundamentals' such as the "conclusion, that the Doctrine of Christianity is true ... whereof we can have but a Moral certainty" (RP 66), but not more than this.[19]

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[18] Chillingworth writes this in response to the view of Knott – that, if one element of faith is wrong, one has lost faith altogether, i.e., that "Every least error in faith destroys the nature of faith" (RP 487) or "that any small error in faith destroys all faith" [RP 490]). Chillingworth replies to Knott:

> "faith, even true and saving faith, is not a thing consisting in such an indivisible point of perfection as you make it, but capable of augmentation and diminution. Every prayer you make to God to increase your faith, or (if you conceive such a prayer derogatory from the perfection of your faith) the apostles praying to Christ *to increase their faith*, is a convincing argument of the same conclusion." (RP 413, emphasis Chillingworth, underscoring mine)

Thus, there are degrees of faith.

[19] Chillingworth writes: "I do heartily acknowledge and believe the articles of our faith to be in themselves truths, as certain and infallible, as the very common principles of geometry and metaphysics. But that there is required of us a *knowledge* of them, and adherence to them, as certain as that of sense or science; that such a certainty is required of us under pain of damnation, so that no man can hope to be in the state of salvation, but he that finds in himself such a degree of faith, such a strength of adherence; this I have already demonstrated to be a great error, and of dangerous and pernicious consequence." (RP 412-

Faith, then, can be understood as the possession or expression of an epistemic attitude or disposition towards someone or something, and of which one can be certain, but it is not a kind of knowledge. Chillingworth asserts that “faith is not knowledge, no more than three is four, but eminently contained in it, so that he that knows believes, and something more; but he that believes, many times does not know, nay, if he doth barely and merely believe, he doth never know…” (RP 412). In short, faith is like opinion – not knowledge – and, just as there can be weaker and stronger opinions, so there can be weaker and stronger faith. Thus, articles of faith can be true and certain, though there may be, strictly speaking, no knowledge of them, but even “certainty of adherence is *not* required to the essence of faith” (RP 452, emphasis mine).

As an assent, then, faith seems to be not just cognitive but dispositional, and the level of certainty one has is psychological rather than strictly cognitive or epistemic. Faith, in short, is primarily an individual assent that includes the belief that certain propositions are true, and that one is disposed to act in accordance with them even if, at some level, these propositions are not fully understood. Faith is psychological (i.e., a disposition) as well as cognitive (i.e., describing a state of affairs). But that to which one assents is still a proposition: as we have seen above, we can “assent to” the “conclusion, that the doctrine of Christianity is true” (RP 66), and that “All which God reveals for truth is true” (RP 66).

2.2.3 Reason, reasonability, and proof

Chillingworth’s emphasis on reason in interpreting scripture and judging belief is illustrated in a story about a time, just after his return to England from Douai, when he was living with the family of Lady Falkland, who were Catholics. Chillingworth was reputed to have discussed religion with Lady Falkland’s daughters, insisting that “everyone ought to be able to give a reason of his faith,” and arguing that “it was not

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13, emphasis mine). Locke quotes the first part of this passage, with agreement, in his “*Letters to the Right Rev. Edward Lord Bishop of Worcester*” (Locke 1823: 4, 275-76).

enough to believe the right, unless they could defend the reasonableness of it" (cited in Simpson 1861: 69).[20] Lady Falkland asked him to leave.

So, how can we have 'moral certainty' about the articles of faith, or about "the doctrine of Christianity," or about faith itself? As we see, reason, reasons, and proof are relevant here. Yet it is a delicate matter to determine how far is reason involved. Chillingworth used Socinian arguments against Knott[21], and so was himself accused of Socianism, though, as noted earlier, he made an effort to show that religion or faith was not entirely a matter of proof or argument from natural reason. Moreover, Chillingworth argues that the putative 'Catholic' view of the role of reason – that reason must be productive of certainty – is also untenable.[22]

Chillingworth is confident that individuals are capable of being appropriately certain of some beliefs. Concerning the place of reason and proof in relation to faith, Chillingworth writes *"*It is impossible that any man should certainly believe any thing, unless that thing be either evident of itself, (as that, twice two are four, that every whole is greater than a part of itself,) or *unless he have some certain reason* (at least some supposed certain reason) and infallible ground *for his belief*" (Works 1838: III, 356)).[23] He says, further, that a person can have "an absolute certainty" of some beliefs or articles of faith – for example, "of this thesis – all which God reveals for truth, is true – being a proposition, that may be demonstrated, or rather so evident to any one that understands it, that it needs it [i.e., demonstration] not" (RP 66). Moreover, scripture itself provides certain belief. Chillingworth states "That all things necessary to salvation are *plainly* delivered in Scripture" (RP 289, emphasis mine).

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[20] See Fullerton (1883, ch. 9), Hamlin (2005: 200), and Beiser (1996: 107). Whether Chillingworth was being duplicitous about his religious beliefs, and was attempting to convert the daughters to Protestantism (as the Simpson volume suggests), or was working out his own return to Protestantism (as Mortimer [2014: 66] suggests) is not clear – but also not necessary for this study.

[21] See Mortimer (2010: 65-78).

[22] Chillingworth finds this view in Knott, and quotes Knott's remark that: "We must therefore, for the ground of our faith, find out a motive obscure to us, but most certain in itself, that the act of faith may remain both obscure and certain" (RP 390).

[23] See also Chillingworth's "A Discourse against the Infallibility of the Roman Church, with an Answer to all those texts of Scripture that are alleged to prove it," in *Works* (1838: III, 307; cf RP 382).

Yet even when one looks at the ‘plainest’ scripture, there is a role for reason here for, Chillingworth asks, “*what certain ground have I to warrant me* that [a] consequence [“from scripture truly interpreted”] is good, and this interpretation true? And if answer be made, that reason will tell me so; I reply, … that this is to build all upon my own reason...” (Works 1838: III, 309).[24] In other words, in matters other than what is self-evident, including some matters of faith, there is room for, and a need for, reason – e.g., for a ‘rational’ reading of scripture.

We also have a moral certainty of at least some beliefs; this is dependent upon argument. He continues, “yet of this hypothesis ”That all the articles of our faith were revealed by God,” we cannot ordinarily have any rational and acquired certainty, more than moral, founded upon these considerations: first, that the goodness of the precepts of Christianity, and the greatness of the promises of it, shews it, of all other religions, most likely to come from the Fountain of goodness” (RP 66). In other words, moral certainty of some articles of faith can be acquired on rational grounds; the evidence for such articles of faith is from the effects, and so, what we would call today, involving an inductive inference.[25]

Thus, first**,** there are some matters of faith that people can *through reason* “see” as true. Chillingworth writes, for example, that “reason will convince any man, unless he be of a perverse mind, that the Scripture is the word of God: and then no reason can be greater than this; God says so, therefore it is true” (RP 465).

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[24] This comes from Chillingworth’s “A Discourse against the Infallibility of the Roman Church.”

[25] Still, the certainty of the conclusion cannot exceed the strength of the premises. As an illustration of this, in *The Religion of Protestants*, Chillingworth writes: “Now our faith is an assent to this conclusion, that the doctrine of Christianity is true; which being deduced from the former thesis, which is metaphysically certain, and from the former hypothesis, whereof we can have but a moral certainty, we cannot possibly by natural means be more certain of it than of the weaker of the premises; as a river will not rise higher than the fountain from which it flows. For the conclusion always follows the worser part, if there be any worse; and must be negative, particular, contingent, or but morally certain, if any of the propositions from whence it is derived be so: neither can we be certain of it in the highest degree, unless we be thus certain of all the principles whereon it is grounded: as a man cannot go or stand strongly, if either of his legs be weak: or, as a building cannot be stable, if any one of the necessary pillars thereof be infirm and instable; or, as if a message be brought me from a man of absolute credit with me, but by a messenger that is not so, my confidence of the truth of the relation cannot but be rebated and lessened by my diffidence in the relater”(RP 66).

Second, as noted earlier, reason is necessary to faith in the reading of scripture itself; "every man by reason must judge both of scripture and the church" (RP 512). For while some things that we read there, Chillingworth says, are so obvious and evident that they are not a matter of any reasonable dispute, others are "evidently, or even probably deducible from" scripture.[26] Thus, even if one knows scripture "to contain all fundamentals (though many more points besides, which makes it difficult to say precisely what is fundamental and what not" (RP 488)), it is clear that reason has a role in faith (RP 488, cf RP 16).

But, third, Chillingworth's view is that, since human beings have the capacity for reason, even if one does not have access to revealed truth, there may be aspects of faith that are available to them through 'natural light.' Correlatively, however, without reason or a rational justification or argument, there is no obligation to believe, and it may even be inappropriate – unreasonable – to believe.[27] Chillingworth states that "God desires only that we believe the conclusion, as much as the premises deserve." The absence of reason or evidence warrants – indeed, requires – not believing. Chillingworth writes: "But that I should believe the truth of anything, the truth whereof cannot be made evident with an evidence proportionable to the degree of faith required of me, this I say for any man to be bound to do is unjust and unreasonable, because to do it is impossible" (RP 418). Thus, regarding belief in things that contradict or are inconsistent with human reason, it would (therefore) be impossible to provide “certain assent” to such things and, therefore, that it would be better to “not believe at all” (RP 6).

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[26] See RP 16. In response to Knott, Chillingworth writes: "I believe all those books of Scripture which the church of England accounts canonical to be the infallible word of God: I believe all things evidently contained in them; all things evidently, or even probably deducible from them." See also Mortimer (2014: 218).

[27] See RP 66: "though men are unreasonable, God requires not any thing but Reason. … God will be satisfied, if we receive any degree of light which makes us leave *the works of darkness* and *walk as children of the light*. … God desires only that we believe the conclusion, as much as the premises deserve; that the strength of our faith be equal or proportionable to the credibility of the motives to it. Now though I have and ought to have an absolute certainty of this thesis, "All which God reveals for truth is true," being a proposition that may be demonstrated, or rather so evident to any one that understands it that it needs it not; yet of this hypothesis, "That all the articles of our faith were revealed by God," we cannot ordinarily have any rational and acquired certainty, more than moral, founded upon these considerations: first, that the goodness of the precepts of Christianity, and the greatness of the promises of it, shows it, of all other religions, most likely to come from the Fountain of goodness. And then, that a constant, famous, and very general tradition, so credible that no wise man doubts of any other which hath but the fortieth part of the credibility of this; such and so credible a tradition tells us, that God himself hath set his hand and seal to the truth of this doctrine, by doing great and glorious and frequent miracles in confirmation of it."

What exactly, then, is the role of argument and proof in faith? The articles of faith, but also the (disposition of) believing – need evidence – i.e., grounds or an argument. But what constitutes an argument in this context? Chillingworth’s view is that, first, it is not a mathematical or an empirical demonstration; second, it involves natural reason and evidence, but it need not involve much evidence[28]; and, third, evidence may include scripture and “testimony” – but not magisterial authority.[29] Indeed, reason itself, he states, is grounded in faith (RP 8). So while belief (e.g., in the context of Knott’s book, on church and doctrine) ought to be “built upon the rock of evident grounds and reasons” (RP 1), Chillingworth adds that, so far as he is “most apt and most willing to be led by reason to any way, or from it,” he is “always submitting all other reasons to this one – God hath said so, therefore it is true” (RP 2).

Thus, while reason and evidence are important to faith, faith or religious discourse is not based on a reason and proof independent of religion**;** one should not see Chillingworth as doing philosophy. And, significantly, Chillingworth writes that discourse is “right reason grounded on Divine revelation and common notions written by God in the hearts of all men, and deducing according to the never-failing rules of logic, consequent deductions from them” (RP 8). It is not “*discourse* not guiding itself by Scripture, but only by principles of nature, or perhaps by prejudices and popular errors, and drawing consequences not by rule, but chance” (RP 8). Reason ultimately rests on religion. Thus, though Chillingworth does draw on the role of reason in deciding such matters, as noted earlier, he rejects the accusation of Socianism (RP 6-7, 10-11) – indeed, he accuses Knott of it! – i.e., that all such belief must be deduced from reason.

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[28] Chillingworth writes: “as Opinion, so Faith, is always built upon less Evidence than that of Sense or Science” (RP 65). But, he adds, Protestants can have “as much certainty as is required to faith of an object not so evident as to beget science” (RP 458).

[29] Chillingworth objects, as noted above, that to say that questions of faith need to be decided by a magisterial authority, is problematic. He writes against Knott: “this doctrine of yours, which you would fain have true, that there might be some necessity of your church's infallibility, [is] indeed plainly repugnant not only to truth, but even to all religion and piety, and fit for nothing, but to make men negligent of making any progress in faith or charity” (RP 414).

2.2.4 Summary

Chillingworth is confronted with contesting views on the legitimacy of Protestantism and, specifically, on which Christian religious beliefs are true and should be assented to.

According to Chillingworth, tradition is not reliable (and is partisan), and scriptural revelation is not sufficient by itself. Thus, he turns to reason. For Chillingworth, Christians – i.e., people of faith – need reason, not only to be reasonable about what they believe, but to know what, as Christians, they ought to believe. On Chillingworth's account, then, not only can faith or religious belief be reasonable, but Christianity as a whole is reasonable, basic Christian beliefs are true, and people can have evidence and be certain of them.

As we have seen, for Chillingworth, the term 'faith' can be used in different senses – to describe one's assent, but also to describe that to which one assents (e.g., articles of Christian faith). Chillingworth is not, admittedly, entirely clear what specific beliefs the Christian faith or salvation requires. Moreover, as noted above, he holds that matters of religion and religious controversy are not always the same as matters of faith – so some matters need not be believed because they are not articles of faith.

For Chillingworth, faith (in the sense of historical faith and articles of faith) is, at least in part, descriptive, conceptual, and cognitive. So it is propositional. On some matters (of the propositional meaning of Scripture) the meaning is perfectly evident, and about which there can be no reasonable dispute. But on some other matters – e.g., claims about the Catholic Church, its magisterial role, and its doctrines (e.g., purgatory and the canon of scriptures) – it is unclear whether these claims are true or whether they overstep what one can know.[30]

Faith also seems to be a trust.

On Chillingworth's view, faith has, or ought to have, grounds. Thus, reason is useful, if not necessary, in discerning what ought to be believed, though it is unclear what is an appropriate ground and what amount of reason and evidence (and what kind of evidence) makes faith ‘morally certain.’ We have to take into account, however, the nature of the subject to determine what those grounds should look like, and how far one is to believe. Moreover, reason can help to distinguish what is a matter of faith, what is not, and what is just a proposition about religion. Further, reason can be said to allow one to avoid inconsistency and contradiction, and, thereby, allows us to ‘exclude’ some putative beliefs.

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[30] Chillingworth also suggests that since certain claims of faith are not strictly knowable, and one cannot absolutely reject the contrary claims either.

Still, while faith needs a ground, and needs to be logically coherent, it is unclear whether one needs to have reasons for belief, and what such reasons would look like. Chillingworth says that we can have moral certainty, and more,[31] about matters of faith. And, to the extent that one does, this certainty is based upon evidence (i.e., evidence for the propositions and for the dispositions involved), and this evidence and the method of arriving at a conclusion – Chillingworth uses the example of judicial reasoning – are relative to the subject matter. Yet, faith is not science, and so is not subject to the criteria for science.

Interestingly, however, Chillingworth holds that while reason is important and can be used to judge belief and faith, reason is supported by religion. In other words, while reason can be a way of determining what faith is (e.g., Chillingworth believes that doctrines such as purgatory are not supported by scripture or reason and, so, need not be believed) and whether one ought to hold certain beliefs, reason itself has a relation to, and may be grounded on revelation.

Thus, in the exchanges between Catholics and Protestants, Chillingworth insists that reason has an important role: in identifying what faith and its content is, in distinguishing it from other issues of religion or scripture, in locating inconsistency, in identifying areas in which doubt is possible (e.g., whether there is insufficient evidence or disagreement), and that it is important to be reasonable[32] – without challenging Christian faith or an individual's faith overall.

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[31] See, for example, RP 465: “I shall believe nothing which reason will not convince that I ought to believe it; for reason will convince any man, unless he be of a perverse mind, that the Scripture is the word of God: and then no reason can be greater than this; God says so, therefore it is true.”

All this discussion of faith and the place of reason in faith, then, occurs within the ambit of the Christian faith. This is not natural theology, but philosophical theology. What remains, however, is, Is this account of faith and of the role of reason in determining faith correct?

For this we turn to Tillotson.

2.3 John Tillotson[33]

John Tillotson (1630-94) was born into a Calvinist Protestant family. He studied at Cambridge University (1647-50), graduating BA in 1650 (M.A. 1654; D.D. 1666). Shortly after graduation, he became a fellow of Clare College; the Master of Clare at the time was the theologian and philosopher Ralph Cudworth (1617-88). Tillotson read the work of Chillingworth while at Cambridge (Birch 1820: 1, iv), was, according to Reedy, trained in logic (Reedy 1993: 95) and, like Chillingworth, held that reason was a useful tool in determining to which religious beliefs one must adhere. Tillotson lost his fellowship, however, in 1661, despite having been ordained (1660) by a Bishop of the Church of Scotland, because of his sympathies to the Reformed/Presbyterian traditions.

On the passing of the Act of Uniformity (1662) under Charles II, Tillotson made a formal adherence to the Church of England. While some of his writings were responses to Catholic apologists (e.g., his *The Rule of Faith* (1666)), most of his work is in the form of sermons, which were highly regarded by those of his time. Throughout, Tillotson emphasized the use of reason in religion. At times, he was accused of being a Socinian, and was generally regarded as a Latitudinarian in religion, though he denied that reason was the sole arbiter of religious truth (Clifford 1990: 41-42). Tillotson rose gradually through church offices, was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (1672[34]), and was a friend of John Locke. After the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, Tillotson became a favourite of William III, and he accepted, albeit reluctantly, appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1691.[35] He died, three years later, in 1694, in London.

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[32] There is, it seems, a subjective element in this, for what is "evident" (e.g., knowing that a proposition is a revelation) to one person may not be to another. Moreover, at times, Chillingworth seems to suggest that something may be reasonable only on its own account, not reasonable for all, or as such.

[33] For biographical information, see Gordon (1898), *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (1927), Carey (2000), Facer (2000), Hill (2001), Kim (2003), Blosser (2011). Locke (1954) is an uneven treatment. Selo (1970) focuses on Tillotson as part of a larger claim about the "liberal theology" of the age, but is historical and not theological in his discussion.

The majority of Tillotson's published writings are sermons; there are some 254 of them, in addition to his book, *The Rule of Faith*.[36] While the range of the topics covered in his sermons is broad, there is a coherence and consistency among them largely because, towards the end of his life, Tillotson revised them for publication together. In general, Tillotson wrote for an audience of faithful Anglicans, though his *The Rule of Faith* directly engaged religious controversy.

The Rule of Faith was directed against a volume by a Catholic priest, John Sergeant[37], entitled *Sure-footing in Christianity, or rational discourses on the rule of faith*. Tillotson states that Sergeant's book claims to offer "the newest and most exact fashion of writing controversy, as being all along demonstrative, and built upon self-evident principles" (RF 226), and continues the 'rule of faith' debate concerning "what matters we are to assent to, as revealed to us by God" (RF 231) specifically arguing for the Catholic cause. In response, like Chillingworth, Tillotson held that reason had an important role to play in determining one's proper religious belief, but that it is not in the sense that Sergeant suggests.[38] Tillotson's primary interest, then, was not apologetic in the broad sense (e.g., to prove the existence of God – though he believed that there was such a proof (III, 557-8)[39] – or to provide evidence for the truth of Christianity – though, again, he delivered several sermons on this topic).[40] It was, in part (e.g., in *The Rule of Faith*), a vindication of Protestantism against Catholicism, but also, in part (e.g., in his sermons) to confirm the Anglican faithful, perhaps given the growing philosophical scepticism.

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[34] The DNB gives the date as 1672, but the *Alumni Cantabrigiensis* gives it as 1671.

[35] Reedy (1993) challenges some of the standard interpretations of Tillotson as a 'moralistic rationalist,' arguing that the order of his 'edition' and publication of his sermons reveals that Tillotson wished to emphasise "the unity of reason and revelation."

[36] The references that follow (unless otherwise indicated) are to ***The Works of Dr. John Tillotson,*** **With the Life of the Author by Thomas Birch. 10 volumes. London: Printed by J. F. Dove, for R. Priestley, 1820, indicating volume number followed by page.** ***The Rule of Faith*** **(abbreviated as RF) appears in Volume 10.**

[37] For context, see Henry (2015) and Levitin (2010).

[38] Sergeant's view is: "that in matters of Religion a man cannot be reasonably satisfied with any thing less than that infallible assurance which is wrought by Demonstration…" See RF 306 (cf. RF 315).

2.3.1 Reason and reasonability

Tillotson held that, in general, evidence, argument, and reason were relevant in determining what one might believe or claim to know, and in determining the reasonability of believing.

Of the things of which one could be certain, some certainty was the product of "supernatural assistance" (Van Leeuwen 1970: 36). Other things were 'self evident'; they were matters of which one had "a clear perception" (IX, 217). (These matters were based on two kinds of evidence, that of sense and that of mathematical demonstration.) About other matters still, one could have knowledge or certainty of the highest degree.[41] But Tillotson acknowledged, however, that there were many other matters still on which one might rightly have a reasonable belief without these kinds of evidence; these matters rested, instead, on such arguments "as the nature of the thing is capable of" (Sermon 186, VIII, 206).[42] These are matters of what he calls 'moral certainty'; by moral certainty, here, he means: a "firm and undoubted assent to a thing upon such grounds as are fit fully to satisfy a prudent man" (I, ccciv). [43]

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[39] Sermon CXI ["The Danger of All Known Sin"] deals with the creation of the world and is directed against the Socinians (V, 449) and (V, 453-6) discusses our natural knowledge of God. Tillotson also writes, for example, that: "one of the chief Arguments for the Being of God, is taken from those visible Effects of Wisdom, and Power, and Goodness, which we see in the frame of the world"; see (VIII, 334).

[40] See Tillotson, *Works* (1728: II, 527, 538).

[41] Tillotson writes: "in reason it is evident enough, that there can be no more gods than one" (III, 412); cf van Leeuwen (1970: 36).

[42] See similar remarks elsewhere by Tillotson: "Every man hath reason to be assured of a thing which is capable of sufficient evidence, when he hath as much evidence for it as the nature of that thing will bear, and as the capacity he is in will permit him to have" (RF 283), and "Secondly, Nor do we say, that that certainty and assurance which we have, that these Books are the same that were written by the Apostles is a first and self evident Principle; but only that it is a truth capable of evidence sufficient, and as much as we can have for a thing of that nature." (RF 259).

Depending on the amount and kind of evidence available, and by means of reason and argument, then, one can have a corresponding degree of moral certainty. In this regard, Tillotson's view seems close to Aristotle's, that the level of certainty one may hold about a matter is determined by the object to which one refers, and is proportionate to it.[44] But this is not an inferior kind of proof, for no 'higher' proof is possible.

There is, then, no single or particular method or means by which one can be certain of or know[45] something. Some things are 'known' immediately or directly. Direct evidence of the senses seems to have a fundamental and overriding authority. For example, Tillotson writes that if a proposition is inconsistent with sense, it should be abandoned; e.g., "No Doctrine which is contrary to Sense, is capable of being confirmed…" (IX, 398). But, other things – "almost all Human Affairs" (Sermon 173, VII, 533) – are not immediately known. One had to wait on "such Evidence[46] as a prudent considering Man, who is not credulous on the one hand, and on the other is not prejudiced by any Interest against it, would rest satisfied in" (VII, 534, cf. van Leeuwen 1970: 37). In such cases, the standard of this is "that which every Man may give evidence in, *for it requires nothing but common Sense and Understanding"* (IX, 468). On such matters, the principal source of evidence is testimony. Tillotson proposes and insists on, then, a kind of empiricism, where belief requires 'sufficient evidence' (RF 283, 231).

2.3.2 Faith

Faith, Tillotson recognised, is an ambiguous term. It can mean the content of what is believed, as in the "Divine Faith" (RF 231; IX, 198-199); it can mean "civil and human faith”[47]; or any “persuasion” to believe something, presumably within religion or not; or ‘the argument which persuades’ (Sermon 218, IX, 183; see RF 231).

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[43] See also van Leeuwen (1970: 37).

[44] Similarly, Tillotson writes "Doth not Aristotle say, that things of a moral and civil nature, and matters of Fact done long ago, are incapable of Demonstration; and that it is madness to expect it for things of this Nature?" (RF 303). See also van Leeuwen (1970: 38-39).

[45] I use the term 'know' loosely here, for reasons that will be evident below.

[46] Given his comments about proof, it does not seem that Tillotson can consistently call this 'evidence.' Tillotson was not always careful or consistent in his terminology.

When Tillotson speaks of “Divine Faith,” he has in mind “an assent [i.e., a persuasion] to a thing upon the testimony or Authority of God; or, which is all one, an Assent to a Truth upon Divine Revelation” (RF 231)[48] – or, perhaps more broadly, “assenting and submitting to the Revelation of the Gospel” (Sermon 226, IX, 314) – and it includes “the belief of a God and the principles of religion” (Sermon 206, VIII, 559). Specifically, he writes:

> “a religious and Divine faith, comprehends three things under it, which are distinctly to be considered.
>
> 1. A persuasion of the principles of natural religion, which are known by the light of nature; as, the existence of a God, the immortality of the soul, and a future state.
>
> 2. A persuasion of things supernatural and revealed. [or “the persuasion of all things that are supernaturally revealed, that is, of all things contained in the Holy Scriptures”]
>
> 3. A persuasion of supernatural revelation.”[49]

Articles or propositions of faith, then, are those ‘truths’ of which one is persuaded, or to which one assents.

In a second, and, in what seems to be Tillotson’s broadest sense, he writes that faith is “a persuasion or assent of the mind to *anything* wrought in us by any kind of argument” (RF 231, emphasis mine) – “a persuasion of the mind concerning any thing; concerning the truth of any Proposition, concerning the existence, or futurition [future existence], or lawfulness, or convenience, or possibility, or goodness of any thing, or the contrary;

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[47] That is, “of such things as do not immediately concern God and religion” (Sermon 219, IX, 198).

[48] Compare, here, Locke: “*Faith*, on the other side, is the assent to any proposition, not thus made out by the deductions of reason, but upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God,” *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* IV 18 2.

[49] Sermon 219, IX, 189; see also Sermon 220, IX, 210.

or concerning the credit of a person, or the contrary,” [50] e.g., that “such a proposition is true or false” (Sermon 218, IX, 182) – or that an action is lawful, or that a doctrine is true. And, Tillotson says, “The opposites to faith [in this sense] are unbelief and creduility” (Sermon 218, IX, 184). Faith, in this sense, is a persuasion [assent] or disposition, rather than a matter of content.

In a third sense of faith, faith can also mean “the argument whereby … persuasion [to believe] is wrought in us.”[51] What is the cause or “the argument whereby it [i.e., this faith] is wrought”? Tillotson lists four possible causes: direct sense experience, experience in a broader sense, reason ‘drawn from the thing’, and authority or testimony (Sermon 218, IX, 185).[52] In all cases, then, faith is something – an assent – for which evidence and argument are appropriate.

In at least these latter two senses there are ‘degrees of faith,’ just as there are degrees of moral certainty. It seems, however, as though the strength of faith does not depend solely on the strength of the argument, but also on something prior about the state of the mind of the believer; the degrees of faith do not seem to rest primarily on the kind or the amount of evidence available. For Tillotson notes that the effectiveness and efficacy of faith – of “the things we may believe or be persuaded of” – either

> “are such as do not concern me; and then the mind rests in a naked and simple belief of them, and a faith or persuasion of such things has no effect upon me; […]or else, 2. The thing I believe or am persuaded of doth concern me; and then it hath several effects according to the nature of the thing I am persuaded of, or the degree of the persuasion, or the capacity of the person that believes or is

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[50] Locke writes: “faith is frequently used for the persuasion of the truth of a doctrine, or of the veracity of God or Christ” (Sermon 218, IX, 182).

[51] Building on the above, Tillotson writes that faith “signifies that particular kind of assent which is wrought in us by testimony or authority: so that Divine faith, which we are now speaking of, is an assent to a thing upon the testimony or authority of God; or, which is all one, an assent to a truth upon Divine revelation” (RF 231).

[52] Tillotson writes: “all the arguments whereby faith may be wrought in us, that is, a persuasion of any thing, will, I think, fall under one of these four heads; sense, experience, reasons drawn from the thing, or the authority and testimony of some person.” (Sermon 185, IX, 185). Cf. Sermon 219 (IX, 192).

> persuaded. If the thing believed be of great moment, the effect of the faith is proportionable, ceteris paribus…" (Sermon 218, IX, 187-88)

Moreover, for Tillotson, in these latter two senses faith involves not just assent, but 'the production of action', and so faith entails something that *ought to be* effective. Thus, he writes, "an article or proposition of faith is an idle thing, if it do not produce such actions as the belief of such a proposition doth require" (Sermon 203, VIII, 508). It seems, then, as though faith has a dispositional character.

Finally, faith is also something cognitive; Tillotson writes the "seat or subject of faith is the mind" (Sermon 218, IX, 184). Indeed, "Knowledge is necessary to Religion" (Sermon 30, II, 519). Thus, in saying that faith is an assent, Tillotson also means that it is "an act of the understanding and does necessarily suppose some knowledge and apprehension of what we believe" (Sermon 30, II, 519) – presumably, propositions about the divine. Tillotson, then, is against any kind of fideism, though, as we shall see, what it means to have 'knowledge' here is unclear.

In short, the strength of faith depends not just on reason and evidence, but on the prior habits of the mind. And, further, for faith to be authentic or genuine, it seems to be not just something cognitive, but must involve action.[53]

2.3.3 Proof and the reasonableness of religious belief

What, specifically, is the relation of proof or evidence to divine faith and to articles of faith? How is faith or believing *reasonable*? This is important for Tillotson's view of 'the rule of faith' – i.e., the standard of all and only those things that one must believe for salvation.

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[53] On the issue of faith involving action, Tillotson writes: "we must not rest here, in the belief of a God and the principles of religion; for this faith is not required of us for itself, *but in order to some farther end*, which if it be not attained by us, the mere belief of the principles of religion is to no purpose, neither acceptable to God, nor useful and beneficial to ourselves" (Sermon 206, VIII, 559. emphasis mine)

First, some religious propositions or claims that are revealed, as noted above, are (self) evident; we have “a clear and vigorous perception” of them, and they are not contradictory or contrary to sense. Tillotson writes:

> “Supposing the thing revealed do not contradict the essential Notions of our Minds, no good and holy Man hath reason to doubt of any thing, whether it be a Revelation from God or not, of which he hath a clear and vigorous perception, and full satisfaction in his own Mind that it is such. *For if a Man may have reason to doubt of any thing, whereof he hath a clear Perception, then no Man can be certain of any thing*. Now that there is such a thing as Certainty, is now supposed, and not to be proved. I say, a good and holy Man can have no reason to doubt: for a wicked Man (I grant) may, by a sinful rejection of, and disobedience to the Truth, so far provoke God, as to give him up to strong Delusions to believe Lies[54]; and he may be as confident of a Lie, as any good Man is of the Truth (Sermon 220 IX, 218, emphasis mine).[55]

Some religious doctrines (e.g., transubstantiation) are, however, Tillotson believes, “contrary to Sense” (Sermon 230, IX, 398), and so cannot and ought not be believed. His explanation is that:

> “God never persuades a man of anything that contradicts the natural and essential notions of his mind and understanding. For this would be to destroy His own workmanship, and to impose that upon the understanding of a man which, whilst it retains it's [sic] own nature, and remains what it is, it cannot possibly admit.” (Sermon 220, IX, 216)

So, people do, therefore, have reason *not* to believe in things that are incompatible with their experience.

Second, Tillotson seems to allow that some articles of faith are simply rationally obvious – “reason drawn from the thing”; he notes that “in the first ages of the world,” we “had the evidence of natural light" (RF 250, cf. 73) or natural reason that provided evidence for some 'articles of religion' or 'precepts.'[56]

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[54] See 2 Thessalonians 2:11

[55] Cf. van Leeuwen (1970: 43).

Third, as noted above, Tillotson believes that we can provide proofs or arguments for a number of religious claims – e.g., that the world was created, the immortality of the soul (Sermon 249, X, 73), of God's existence[57], that God is a spirit (Sermon 153, VII, 171-175), evidence of Christianity as a whole, and even of the 'truth' or reliability of another's revelation.[58] What a person believes in such cases may be reasonable, and the person can be 'morally certain' of it, though what the person believes is not demonstrated and not absolutely certain.

What are these proofs like? As we have seen, the kind of argument is "drawn from things" (IX, 193) relative or proportionate to the subject matter of faith. Thus, one might expect an inductive (or abductive) argument.[59] Moreover, as we have seen, the standard of (sufficient) evidence to which Tillotson appeals is that of the 'prudent' or 'common' human being.

Specifically, to begin with, arguments from authority and scripture are legitimate. Tillotson writes of the cause or argument "whereby it [i.e., faith] is wrought" (IX, 185), and of "assenting and submitting to the revelation of the gospel" (Sermon 226, IX, 314), such as the case in John 20:8 when the disciple entered the sepulchre "and believed."

Further, arguments from testimony are also reliable – certainly divine testimony is (IX, 186) – though Tillotson acknowledges that human testimony of divine things can be problematic (e.g., IX, 207).

Further still, Tillotson allows that miracles may provide proof, though under restrictive conditions. He writes:

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[56] In fact, Tillotson wrote a series of sermons on 'natural religion' – e.g., Sermons 101 and 102, Volume V.

[57] See Sermon 1, I, 370. Tillotson's argument for the existence of God is very brief – of what could not be the case if there were no God – but much of his reasoning is a *reductio*.

[58] There can be a proof; Tillotson writes: "there are some Means whereby a Man may be assured of another's Revelation that it is Divine" (Sermon 220, IX, 219).

[59] See Tillotson's comment: "By way of instance, or induction of particulars" (Sermon 156, VII, 214).

> "miracles are the principal external proof and confirmation of the divinity of a doctrine. I told you before, that some doctrines are so absurd, that a miracle is not a sufficient proof of them: but if a doctrine be such as is no ways unworthy of God, nor contrary to those notions which we have of him, miracles are the highest testimony that can be given to it, and have always been owned by mankind for an evidence of inspiration" (Sermon 228, IX, 359)

Nevertheless, arguments concerning miracles may not be conclusive because things such as "mysteries and miracles" are not "easily to be admitted without necessity" (Sermon 46, III, 359), and Tillotson is firm that some things cannot be miracles, e.g., transubstantiation, because he finds it inconsistent with sense.[60]

Tillotson also holds that arguments can be given, not just for particular articles of faith, but for faith as a whole. Thus, there is argument, *based on evidence* (i.e., consequences), for the truth of Christianity; Tillotson writes that

> "we have, beyond comparison, the best and most reasonable religion in the world; a religion which carries along with it the greatest evidence of its truth, which contains the best rules and directions for a good life, which offers the most powerful assistance to the obedience of its laws, and gives the greatest encouragements thereto" (Sermon 229, IX, 370).

and

> "The precepts likewise of this religion are highly reasonable, and such as plainly *tend to the perfection and happiness of human nature*; and the arguments to enforce these precepts, are not only very powerful in themselves, but very suitable to the natural hopes and fears of men." (Sermon 228, IX, 357)

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[60] See also Sermon 197, VIII, 413: "unless a Man can renounce his Senses at the same time that he relies upon them. For a Man cannot believe a Miracle without relying upon Sense, nor Transubstantiation without renouncing it." See, here, the discussion by Reedy (1993: 92). Tillotson putatively influenced Hume here – the argument against transubstantiation, Hume writes, could also be levied against miracles. Some have noted, however, that Hume's 'version' of Tillotson's argument in the *Enquiry* is not, in fact, one Tillotson used (for example, Levine [1988]).

Thus, by looking at the consequences or effects of Christianity – that it tends to happiness and to assisting in the achievement of a good life – Tillotson infers that Christianity itself is good and true. The arguments here are not piecemeal, doctrine by doctrine, but of the Christian religion or religious belief as a whole.

But the argument for Christianity is not based simply on its consequences. Tillotson writes:

> "that we do not found our belief of Christianity upon any one argument taken by itself; *but upon the whole evidence which we are able to produce for it*, in which there is nothing wanting that is proper and reasonable to prove any religion to be from God" (Sermon 228, IX, 359).

There is, then, a cumulative argument for Christianity: "That the entire proof of the Christian doctrine or religion, consisting of many considerations, when taken together, make up a full demonstration of the truth of it, when perhaps no one of them, taken singly and by itself, is a convincing and undeniable proof" (Sermon 228, IX, 357).

Nevertheless, while Tillotson does claim that arguments can be given for beliefs and faith, he does not insist that many particular articles of faith have a proof for them. Tillotson is concerned to remind his reader of which beliefs are inconsistent with what they know, but is also somewhat hesitant to indicate which particular beliefs have argument or evidence, and how far this evidence goes.

First, note that by 'argument' here, Tillotson does not always mean a set of propositions used to support a conclusion, but rather something that we would call today 'grounds' – e.g., where "sense" can be an "argument" (Sermon 218, IX, 186).

Second, in some cases, it seems as though 'arguments' or evidences' are no longer needed on some issues. Tillotson notes that, although they have served as a proof in the past, "miracles are now ceased among Christians, our religion being sufficiently established by those [miracles] that were wrought at first" (Sermon 229, IX, 369).

Third, interestingly, these proofs on matters of faith or religion do not necessarily, or even commonly, provide knowledge. Recall Tillotson's view, described above, that:

> "*The knowledge which we have of things* is **but in part, but outward and superficial;** our knowledge glides upon the superficies of things, but doth not penetrate into the intimate nature of them, it seldom *reacheth further than the skin and outward* appearance of things; we do not know things in their *realities, but as they appear and are* represented to us with all their masks and disguises" (Sermon 134, VI, 338-339, bold emphasis mine).[61]

If knowledge is the comprehension of the nature of a thing (see van Leeuwen 1970: 34), then, it seems that we do *not* have it, not just on matters of faith, but on any matter.

What one can have, then, as a result of evidence and arguments is not 'knowledge' but 'moral certainty' or 'firm assurance' (Sermon 227, IX, 320) about how things seem, which, as with Chillingworth, exists at the level of opinion. Thus Tillotson writes: "In the next life We shall then likewise have a certain *Knowledge* of God, free from all Doubts concerning him. There may be a Certainty in Faith; **but not** that high Degree of Evidence and Assurance which is in Sight" (Sermon 184, VIII, 159, bold emphasis mine). It seems, then, that one may have more evidence for, and certainty of, the truth of what one sees, than of his or her religious beliefs.

Finally, it may even be the case that believers do not fully understand some of what they believe. Tillotson writes "*We are satisfied* of many *things*, the manner whereof *we* do not know; *we* believe the union of the soul and body, tho' no man can explain how a spirit can be united to matter" (Sermon 184, VI, 382). This raises the question, then, whether such 'satisfaction' and belief are reasonable when the belief is not thoroughly understood.

So, how far do the arguments concerning matters of faith go? First, while there are arguments and proofs in matters of faith, they are clearly not demonstrative; Tillotson reserves the word 'demonstrative' for matters of mathematical certainty. Second, some arguments provide reason or evidence to make some beliefs reasonable. And, as we have seen, the amount of evidence required is not excessive. Thus, such arguments have persuasive (and, presumably, probative) value, proportionate to the object or proposition that a 'common man' would or could reasonably assent to[62] – i.e., the standard of moral certainty. Thus, given this standard, people can have "firm assurance" of faith in general, and faith has a ground. And this can assist in articulating a 'rule of faith.' But how far that 'rule' goes or extends is unclear.

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[61] Cf Sermon 30, II, 519.

What we see, then, is that, for Tillotson, reason is compatible with faith, and can help to discern and be certain of what the Christian ought to be persuaded of. Reason, argument, and proof are appropriate, especially in determining the coherence of religious beliefs. But these are not strictly necessary to faith, and there are many beliefs which, while they are not inconsistent with reason, are also not provable by reason. While Tillotson holds that faith must not be unreasonable, neither does he insist that all articles of faith must be demonstrable in order to be reasonable,[63] so that his defenders conclude that the accusation of Socinianism is not justified.

2.3.4 Summary

For Tillotson, like Chillingworth, reason has an important role in belief – in discerning what one should not believe but also, at least to some extent, what one can believe. Some articles of faith can be 'proven,' though not by demonstration, but by using the epistemic standard of the prudent or reasonable person. Evidence for religious belief in such proofs or arguments is the same as for any belief, i.e., empirical, given that the meaning of such beliefs appears to be largely descriptive. But what exactly that proof looks like, and how much evidence is required for moral certainty, are not specified. To the question of whether proof is *necessary* for one to be (morally) certain, to be reasonable in believing, Tillotson's answer seems to be in the negative. Still, this is not to say that evidence and argument are not appropriate to belief.

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[62] By way of illustration, consider the following remark by Tillotson:

> "We have sufficient assurance of these things [e.g., of "another state"], and such as may beget in us a well-grounded confidence, and frees us from all doubts of the contrary, and persuade a reasonable man to venture his greatest interests in this world upon the security that he hath of another." (Sermon 1, I, 378).

[63] It is reasonable, then, to believe in the books of scripture despite having no "demonstration." Tillotson writes: "We have no demonstration for these things, and we expect none; because we know the things are not capable of it. We are not infallibly certain, that any Book is so ancient as it pretends to be, or that it was written by him whose name it bears, or that this is the sense of such passages in it, it is possible all this may be otherwise; that is, it implies no contradiction: But we are very well assured that it is not; nor hath any prudent man any just cause to make the least doubt of it" (RF 305).

Tillotson does not seek to defend many of the traditional articles of faith, and takes certain beliefs as true and evident. While he holds that there is a rule of faith appropriate to religious belief, he also allows room for disagreement and even for scepticism. Nevertheless, he is firm about rejecting doctrines or beliefs for which one has contrary evidence, and he holds that unbelief is "unreasonable" (VI, 471-2)

What faith amounts to, on Tillotson's account, is, however, somewhat unclear. What articles of faith one must subscribe to seems to depend largely on the prior knowledge and intellectual capacities of the person and on the object under consideration – and what truths one is able to recognise also depend on such characteristics as the sinfulness of the person. Some beliefs, such as belief in transubstantiation, are, Tillotson writes, incoherent because they are inconsistent with what we know by sense and, therefore, cannot be part of faith. Nevertheless, articles of faith are propositions and, as propositions, are either true or false. It is also difficult to see how 'action' follows on such a view of faith.

The absence of clear criteria for proof, his view that not all beliefs coming from scripture are articles of faith, and so on, may frustrate one seeking a plausible account of the reasonableness of believing. But perhaps one should not expect too much here, for Tillotson is working *within* the Christian religion; there are basic articles of faith that likely both Catholics and Protestants would adopt. The question for Tillotson was simply which of the beliefs that a reasonable person or a person of common sense may be confronted with, should be assented to – i.e., of which one should be persuaded. And his answer, presumably, but perhaps not helpfully, is those which are reasonable and of which one can be certain.

The purpose of the present discussion, however, is not to assess the plausibility of Tillotson's account but, rather, to see what it offers as an account of the standard of reasonableness within faith, and the role of reason in religion.

2.4 Conclusion: Chillingworth and Tillotson

As noted in Chapter 1, evidentialism is the view that “theistic belief is rationally acceptable only if there is sufficient evidence for it,” and that “[i]t is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.” And it is clear that this issue of reasonable belief and sufficient evidence were important to the English theologians of the seventeenth century. While the term ‘evidentialism’ is anachronistic, it is clear that, for Chillingworth and Tillotson, religious belief was reasonable, that the beliefs they held were descriptive and propositional, and that one’s assent to them, or persuasion of them, could depend on argument and evidence.

The aim of this chapter has been to present the some of the view that evidence, argument, and proof have a central role in religious belief – by showing how the issue of the reasonability of faith arose in Anglo-American theology in the seventeenth century - and also by showing how some of the principal theologians of the period understood the reasonableness of faith, the nature of ‘faith’ and ‘reason,’ and the relations between the two within the context of the Christian religion.

My objective has not been to assess the quality of their arguments. Rather, I have wished to show how these debates in the Anglo-American traditions initially occurred *within* theology and within religion. Writing at a time of religious turmoil and controversy about what Christians must believe, Anglican ‘divines,’ like Chillingworth and Tillotson, were concerned with the rule of faith – with revelation and scripture, and what was necessary to faith.

Their work was, then, not – at least, not primarily – apologetical; the issue on which they focused was not whether religious belief in general is reasonable, for both they and their interlocutors assumed the truth of scripture. Neither was primarily interested in proof of religious belief as such. Rather, in these areas of religious faith where the content of the Christian faith was controverted, the focus of their work was how one can know or be certain of religious claims, and whether, specifically, certain religious claims – i.e., those of Catholics – were reasonable.

For Chillingworth and Tillotson, faith is an assent to truths that are evident or revealed in scripture, or for which one had moral certainty. Such truths, then, are, at least in part, propositional – and faith itself is, at least in part, cognitive. Faith needs a ground, though that ground not only is not, but cannot be, demonstrative.

But faith is also more than an assent. It seems to be dispositional, and it involves acting on it.

For both Chillingworth and Tillotson, reason is a tool for settling disputes – in reading scripture, in interpreting what follows from scripture. If a belief or an article of faith it is not in scriptural revelation or cannot be reasonably inferred from it (e.g., if it is only in 'tradition'), there is no good reason to insist that it is part of faith.

Thus, for both Chillingworth and Tillotson, natural reason, and the expectation of argument and proof, has a place in religion – though it has been argued that Tillotson relies more carefully than Chillingworth on reason and argument (Sykes 1955).

But what exactly is this capability called 'reason'? What are the criteria for evidence and proof, and how, exactly, are they relevant to faith – historical faith or even personal faith? And how far can reason go? Can it interrogate scripture (which is supposed to be foundational)? Are there limits to it? Chillingworth and Tilloston did not address these issues as clearly as they might have. But, arguably, that was not their primary concern. Their view was that, while demonstration was not appropriate, one could nevertheless have a standard of moral certainty. And although this standard of certainty, and reason, were grounded in religion, the nature and kind of evidence that one might draw on for religious belief was, in large part, the same for as for any kind of belief.

Faith, then, was reasonable, and one could be reasonable in believing. But Chillingworth and Tillotson were careful not to press this claim very far. While they held that reason clearly has a place in faith, they sought to avoid, at least overtly, Socianism. Moreover, on any matter where reason was not clear, or where legitimate doubt is possible, there was 'latitude,' and room for theological difference.

Chillingworth, then, sets up criteria for reasonable believing in that he identifies different senses of certainty and of reason, and notes that argument and proof are proportional to the subject matter. Thus while, on the one hand, he insists that argument and evidence have a role in determining moral certainty *within* faith, this standard for moral certainty is not so high that religious belief or believing can never be reasonable, and he seems to leave a good amount of latitude in what Christians must believe. Indeed, reason itself seems to be, somehow, dependent upon religion. Chillingworth's account of faith seems to be that it is fundamentally propositional; articles of faith, for example, are on a par with all statements that are true. Yet he also seems to hold that faith is not just propositional, it is dispositional. It is a trust. In light of this, one may ask whether articles of faith are as fallibilistic as other beliefs.

Tillotson builds on and develops some of Chillingworth's views. In part, Tillotson confirms Chillingworth's arguments concerning the role of argument and evidence within faith, but he develops the notion of faith itself. Again, while reason is not strictly necessary for belief, it has an important role in determining what one can, and cannot, reasonably believe.

Chillingworth and Tillotson addressed the issue of whether believing Christians could know or be certain about particular religious beliefs – principally vis-à-vis the competing claims of Catholics and non-Catholic Christians. Yet in so doing they also paved the way for a larger issue – whether these debates within religion can or should be extended to religious belief or faith as a whole. The issue for philosophical theology becomes, then, how much, if any, of received religious belief *as a whole* is true or certain, whether religion of faith as such is reasonable, and on what basis one might be reasonable in believing – matters concerning which neither Chillingworth and Tillotson were concerned.

To engage this latter issue, then, we need to move to Locke and Hume.

Chapter 3

The Formative Phase II: Locke

3.1 Introduction

Chillingworth and Tillotson had argued that reason was not just a useful but a key tool in theology – e.g., concerning what religious dogmas can be known or of which one can be rightly certain. Their primary objective was to show that a Christian could properly and rightly demur from or reject certain principles of Catholic dogma because they were not reasonable. While they allowed that reason could provide some confirmation, if not proof, for articles of faith or particular religious beliefs, the issue of the reasonableness of believing was, for them, one within theology.

The question of the relation of reason and faith was taken up by a number of the contemporaries of Chillingworth and Tillotson.[1] Others also addressed how and how far reason could be used to determine the truth or certainty of religious doctrines. And others still raised more far-reaching questions.

One such issue concerned the relation of the state to religion and faith. For Catholics, but also for (English) Protestants, a major debate concerned whether and how far a political authority could have jurisdiction over religion. This issue was felt very strongly in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Within the Christian tradition, authority ultimately derives from God. Thus, in the sixteenth century, for example, the Pope, as vicar (or earthly representative) of Christ, claimed the power to remove the obligation to obey a monarch; no temporal sovereign was absolute. In England, however, The Act of Supremacy of 1534, along with later such acts, rejected this, declaring the monarch as having supremacy over the Church in England. One justification for such a unity of temporal and ecclesiastical power within a realm, as Thomas Hobbes argued in his *Leviathan* (1651), was that, should there be more than one 'sovereign' to which an individual owed obedience, subjects would have divided loyalties, which would lead to a state of war and chaos – which no one would desire. Civil and ecclesiastical authority, therefore, had to be unified. Catholics, however, rejected this, particularly the ecclesiastical authority of the King, and so were perceived to be a threat to political stability – and, at times, clearly were (e.g., the Gunpowder Plot, 1605). This view of the unity of temporal and ecclesiastical authority was feared also by other Christians who dissented from the established Church of England. Hence, in England, laws were passed, not just against Catholics, but against "dissenters" (e.g., the Act of Uniformity [1662]; the Test Acts).[2] In light of such actions, it was important to determine whether and where the state might need to take a stand on matters of (or related to) religion or faith and the exercise of faith.

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[1] Contemporaries of Chillingworth and Tillotson were, besides Locke, figures such as the Catholic priest John Sergeant (1623-1707) and the Anglican Bishop John Wilkins (1614-72). For discussions of this question and, more specifically, on issues bearing on the 'Rule of Faith' controversy, see Wilkins (1710), Henry (2014), Levitin (2010), Kraye (2002), and Clifford (1990) (especially Pt. 3: 'Faith and Justification'). Edward Gibbon (1737-94), in his *Memoirs*, also comments on the religious debates and, in passing, on Chillingworth's rationalist analysis of religious belief (Gibbon 1891: 78-79).

Another issue that arose, however, was about the nature of knowledge and certainty, and the limits of knowledge – i.e., questions of epistemology. This was, in part, connected with new views on scientific knowledge, challenges to tradition and to the still-influential Aristotelianism, and the role to be played by empirical method – and was reflected in the founding of the Royal Society in 1660. Scientific investigation of reality required a clear answer to the question of the nature of knowledge and the standard of justification or proof – which had a bearing on religious 'knowledge' –, but also an awareness of what was not properly an object of scientific investigation.[3] This issue was also connected with the revival of scepticism in the seventeenth century. Scepticism was never far from discussions in the philosophy of the time (e.g., in Michel de Montaigne (1533-92) and Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) in France and, in England, in John Wilkins (1614-72) and Joseph Glanvill (1636-80)) and, thus, questions of whether and how one could know became matters of debate. By the seventeenth century, then, one finds the beginnings of the 'modern turn' from metaphysics to epistemology and, therefore, from a focus on reality as a whole – in which human subjectivity plays a part – to human subjectivity as central (e.g., not just a concern with what is true, but what is known to be true by us) and as a key criterion of knowledge.

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[2] For example, according to the Test Acts of 1673 ("An act for preventing dangers which may happen from popish recusants" 25 Car. II. c. 2) and 1678 ("An Act for the more effectuall preserving the Kings Person and Government by disableing Papists from sitting in either House of Parlyament" 30 Car. II, stat. 2, c.1; see *Statutes of the Realm 1628–80* (1819: V, 894–96)), attendance at mass of the Church of England, or adherence to it, were conditions for holding any government office or a seat in Parliament. The Toleration Act 1688 allowed an exception for some, but not all dissenters, and not for Catholics.

[3] How the emphasis on the empirical approach to knowledge was still relatively new is suggested by an anecdote about Charles II, who founded the Royal Society, and a request that he made of that Society. This perhaps apocryphal story, recounted by John Henry Newman (in *On the Present Position of Catholics in England* [1851]) and by Richard Whately (in his *Elements of Logic* (Whately 1859: Book III, sec 9), to name a

It is in this context, with a focus on this latter question of epistemology, that reflection on the theme of the reasonableness of religious believing and religious belief, and also of the meaning and truth of religious beliefs, entered a new stage.

The aim of this chapter is to look at the first of two figures who extended the earlier discussion of the relation of faith and reason, who sought *primarily* to articulate criteria for reasonableness and sufficient evidence, and who applied these criteria not just to theology but to religion in general: John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume (1711-1776).

Locke, while perhaps best known as a political thinker and a philosopher, had an extensive interest in theology throughout his life.[4] He had read, and was broadly sympathetic to the views of Chillingworth concerning matters of faith and knowledge[5], and was an associate of

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few, was "When the Royal Society … was first established, Charles the Second sent them a question for their discussion: "Why a dead fish weighed more than a living one." Many ingenious [a priori] arguments were adduced, for and against; and, after furious disputes, it occurred to the F. R. S. to try the experiment, when the dead and the live fish were found precisely alike in weight." [see *Mechanic's Magazine* (1831-32:395)]. The story appears also in *After Virtue*, by Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre (2007: 108) writes: "Charles II once invited the members of the Royal Society to explain to him why a dead fish weighs more than the same fish alive; a number of subtle explanations were offered to him. He then pointed out that it does not."

[4] It is worth noting that much of Locke's personal library consisted of works of theology, which he had thoroughly annotated, that much of his own philosophical work is rooted in matters of religion, and that his theological views are particularly evident in his works on the reasonableness of Christianity and his writings on (religious) toleration. See Parker 2020 and 2004.

[5] For example, Locke writes that: "I crave leave to say with Mr Chillingworth 'that I do heartily acknowledge and believe the articles of our faith to be in themselves truths as certain and infallible, as the very common principles of Geometry and Metaphysics'" (Locke 1823: 4, 275-76)**.** See also Forster (2011); and Stanton (2006). Stuart-Buttle (2019: 157, n. 46) notes: "Locke similarly recommended Chillingworth's defence of his

Tillotson, whom Locke regarded as a mentor.[6] In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, but also in a number of works on toleration and on the reasonableness of Christianity, Locke addressed the general questions of the nature of reasonability and rationality (and, more precisely, of what is required to hold a belief rationally) and of the limits of human knowledge – but also, and specifically, of whether it is rational or reasonable to hold certain beliefs (e.g., belief in God).

In this and the subsequent chapters, then, the reader will see that Locke and Hume have broadly compatible views on proof – with Hume extending the views found in Locke, though to a more sceptical conclusion concerning religious belief. What both offer is an *empiricist* account, a broadly Enlightenment account (though Locke slightly antedates the Enlightenment), and the beginnings of an evidentialist account of faith and reason and their relation. Their views have been, moreover, quite influential on later 18th, 19th, and even 20th century discussions of the reasonability of religious belief. Interestingly, as one considers these two authors, one will note that the key question is not so much whether one can prove certain religious beliefs, but whether such proofs are within the power of human beings and, if so, how far these proofs can go – which bears on the question of the reasonability of religious believing.

3.2 John Locke

John Locke (1632-1704) was the son of a legal clerk/country lawyer who had served in the cavalry of the Parliamentary forces during the English Civil War.[7] Through family

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confessional manoeuvrings in the Religion of Protestants as the model of right reasoning"; Stuart-Buttle then cites Locke: 'The constant reading of Chillingworth,… by his example will teach both perspicuity, and the way of Right Reasoning better than any Book I know'" Locke (1989: 320-1). See also Worcester (1889: 110-112).

[6] See Sell (1997: 203). Of his relationship to Tillotson, Locke (1979: 5:237-238) writes: "Now that that great and candid searcher after truth, to say nothing of his other virtues, has been taken from us, I have scarcely anyone whom I can freely consult about theological uncertainties. … I have assuredly lost, to my very great hurt and grief, a friend of many years, steadfast, candid, and sincere."

[7] A summary of key biographical details is found in *Alumni Oxonienses* 1500-1714 (1891). For a recent, extensive account, see, for example, Woolhouse (2009). See also Ayers (1998).

connections, he attended Westminister School and then Christ Church, Oxford (1652-56; BA 1685, MA, 1658), where he became dissatisfied with the ‘Aristotelianism’ of his teachers, and was attracted to the ‘experimental philosophy’ of John Wilkins (1614-72), Robert Boyle (1627-91) and, later, Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727). Locke remained in Oxford – through the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660 – until about 1666. After lecturing at Oxford on Greek literature and, later, rhetoric, he briefly studied law at Gray’s Inn, all the while maintaining his connections with the study of the empirical sciences. He also engaged in the informal study of medicine from about 1658[8], and in 1666 was invited to serve as the physician to Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper, later, the 1st Earl of Shaftesbury. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1668. From 1675 to 1679 he lived in France and, because of his association with Shaftesbury, went into exile in Holland, from 1683 until the installation of King William and Queen Mary in 1689 (following the overthrow of James II in 1688).

Throughout his life, Locke was interested in theology[9] and his interest appears in early essays from his years at Oxford[10], through essays and letters on religious toleration[11] and his critique of Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha* in the *First Treatise of Justice* (1689), to his 1695 *A Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity* and 1697 *A Second Vindication*, and his posthumously published *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul* (1705-07), at which he was at work at his death. Locke’s theological interests and Christian assumptions permeated not only his political philosophy[12], but some of his other work as well.[13] Indeed, Locke's putative inspiration for writing the *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689/90, though early drafts date from 1671) was because of doubts on the grounds for morality and religion (Nuovo 2017: 4). How far his work overall was influenced by theological matters, however, is a matter of debate.[14]

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[8] See Ayers (1998: 666). Locke received his medical degree (B.Med.) only in 1675.

[9] See, for example, Locke (2002). See also Parker (2020) and (2004).

[10] One of the earliest examples of Locke’s writing on the issue is an essay, written in 1661-62, entitled “An necesse sit dari in Ecclesia infallibilem Sacro Sanctae Scripturae interpretem?, Non” [“Is it necessary that an infallible interpreter of Holy Scripture be granted in the Church? No.”]

[11] Locke’s views on toleration evolved: In 1660-62, his focus was on individual conscience and religious authority, arguing that the church was not needed as an infallible interpreter of scripture [see Ayers (1998: 666)]. In 1667, in his *Essay Concerning Toleration*, he argued for general religious toleration, except for Roman Catholics and atheists, if there was no positive moral or religious danger. In 1685-6, 1690, and 1692, Locke published a number of *Letters Concerning Toleration*. The theme of religious toleration also appears in his 1695 *A Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity* and in his second *Vindication* (1697), in which he responded to attacks by the Calvinist cleric John Edwards (1637–1716). Finally, in his posthumously-published (1705-07) *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*, we find a focus on what one might call Biblical hermeneutics.

Locke's views on religion, then, engaged not only contemporary theology and scripture scholarship, but philosophy and politics. In general, his interpretation of scripture, and his theological conclusions, were latitudinarian – though he was not particularly tolerant of atheists, Muslims, and Catholics.[15] Locke spent much time examining scripture, engaging in what we might today call hermeneutics, but he was also interested in matters of knowledge and proof. And Locke saw how these distinct interests could come together – for example, how epistemological concerns and political philosophy both could bear on arguments for toleration and the relation between politics and civil unity.

Not surprisingly, then, the reasonability of religious belief and of religious believing – and, particularly, the question of whether, when, and how religious beliefs or doctrines can be established – involved broader questions about knowledge and epistemology. To see how Locke shows this, one must turn to Locke's views on reason and proof and Locke's account of faith or religious belief[16], before one can provide an account of the relation of the reasonableness of faith to issues of proof.

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[12] For example, near the beginning of the *First Treatise* of his *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke sets out to argue against Sir Robert Filmer's system in which "all government is absolute monarchy" and that "no man is born free."[12] To do so, Locke attacks the scriptural basis of Filmer's position, namely, the notion of "the sovereignty of Adam" (I, 11). For confirmation of the religious character of Locke's work, John Dunn, for example, writes that "the Two Treatises [are] saturated with Christian assumptions"; see Dunn (1969: 99).

[13] For other studies on the religious character of Locke's work, see Wolterstorff (1994a) and (1996). See also Mitchell (1990).

[14] On this religious influence in Locke's work, in addition to the texts referred to above, see Wolterstorff (1994b: 174ff).

[15] See Lorenzo (2003: 250). Though Locke was particularly critical of atheists and Catholics, some remarks suggest that he extended his criticisms to Muslims: "It is ridiculous for any one to profess himself to be a Mahometan only in religion, but in every thing else a faithful subject to a Christian magistrate, whilst at the same time he acknowledges himself bound to yield blind obedience to the mufti of Constantinople" (in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* [Locke 1823: 6, 46]).

3.3 Reason, reasonableness, and proof

Though it was, apparently, motivated by a concern to find grounds for morality and religion, Locke's project in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*[17] was much larger: "to discover what kind of things God has fitted us to know" (Honderich 2006: 527) and, more specifically, "to inquire into the original, certainty, and extent of human knowledge, together with the grounds and degrees of belief, opinion, and assent" (I. 1. §2), – in short, what the limits of human knowledge may be, and "that portion of truth which [lies] within the reach of their [i.e,. humanity's] natural faculties" (IV. 19. §4).

Locke held that knowledge is ultimately based on our senses, and that there is no innate knowledge; this is 'empiricism.' Ideas – what our knowledge concerns – then, come from experience (sensation and reflection). Thus, Locke defines knowledge as "the perception of the connexion and agreement or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our Ideas" (IV. 1. §1).

First, from this definition it is clear that knowledge is not obviously simply "justified true belief," as it is in some classical thinkers.[18] Indeed, justification may not be necessary. But if knowledge is simply about the relation of ideas, Locke realized, this may be a problem for, as he writes, "of what use is all this fine knowledge of men's own imaginations to a man that inquires after the reality of things? It matters not what men's fancies are, it is the knowledge of things that is only to be prized" (IV. 4. §1). But, despite these challenges to knowledge, Locke rejects scepticism.[19]

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[16] Locke does not use the locution 'religious belief.'

[17] **Unless otherwise indicated, references to Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* will be made to Locke (1975), indicating Book, Chapter, and section.**

[18] For Locke, knowledge must, however, at least be true: "Knowledge being to be had only of visible and certain truth, errour is not a fault of our knowledge, but a mistake of our judgment, giving assent to that which is not true." (IV. 20. §1)

Second, as one reads through Locke's account, it seems that there are different kinds of knowledge: there is an individual's knowledge that she/he exists; this is an example of "intuitive knowledge"[20] and has the highest degree of certainty. There is also knowledge of mathematics and knowledge of the existence of God (the second highest degree of certainty), which involves reasoning. And there is what Locke calls the "sensitive knowledge" of the existence of external things we *currently* perceive"[21] (IV. 2. §14; IV. 3. §5, §21). By it, "we are provided with an evidence, that puts us past doubting" (IV. 2. §14). It seems that knowledge of external objects as such (e.g., of objects that we are not currently perceiving) is a different matter; Locke admits that there is, strictly speaking, no knowledge here (because we can see no necessary connexion of ideas here). Any claim is, rather, a belief based on a probability, and "the highest probability amounts not to certainty, without which there can be no true knowledge" (IV. 3. §14).[22]

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[19] Locke writes: "But yet if [one who argues that a dream may produce the same idea] be resolved to appear so sceptical as to maintain, that what I call being actually in the fire is nothing but a dream; and that we cannot thereby certainly know, that any such thing as fire actually exists without us: I answer, That we certainly finding that pleasure or pain follows upon the application of certain objects to us, whose existence we perceive, or dream that we perceive, by our senses; this certainty is as great as our happiness or misery, beyond which we have no concernment to know or to be" (IV. 2. §14).

[20] But not, of course, 'innate' knowledge, as it is not based on our senses.

[21] For a discussion of Locke and the notion of knowledge as 'justified true belief,' see Dutant (2015: 95).

[22] On this, Locke asks "Whence has it [the mind] all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, From experience: In that, all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation, employed either about external, sensible objects; or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that, which supplies our understanding with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the *ideas* we have, or can naturally have, do spring." (II. 1. §2). Here, we find a basis for the view that Locke holds *foundationalism* as a criterion for sufficient evidence – that, to form a belief, or to claim knowledge, there has to be a 'foundation in experience – ideas – and, specifically in some proposition or claim that is self-evident or incorrigible and can be applied to all knowledge.' Wolterstorff defends this view of Locke (1996: xi). Nuovo (1997: 335-6) rejects this, arguing that while Locke is a foundationalist with regard to knowledge, he is not when it comes to matters of belief; there, he is a reliabilist. Overall, however, Locke's view is widely regarded as foundationalist.

The main part of acquiring knowledge – or, more precisely, truth –, but also understanding the limits of knowledge, is carried out by reason. Locke defines reason as [the process of]

> “the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths, which the mind arrives at by deduction made from such ideas, which it has got by the use of its natural faculties; viz, by the use of sensation or reflection.” (IV. 18. § 2)

What kind of reasoning is involved in reaching such propositions or truths? Locke writes that, on some matters (e.g., mathematics), there is demonstrative, deductive reasoning. There is also what Locke calls “probable reasoning.”[23] So the kinds of reasoning are distinguished by the subject matter; knowledge of mathematical truth requires demonstrative reasoning, whereas claims concerning matters of fact require another kind of argument.

Reason and reasonableness are about ‘loving the truth’.[24] In Book IV, ch. 19, Locke describes 'one who loves the truth' as one who does

> not entertain[] any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant. Whoever goes beyond this measure of assent, it is plain receives not the truth in the love of it; loves not truth for truths sake, but for some other bye end. For the evidence that any proposition is true (except such as are self-evident) lying only in the proofs a man has of it, whatsoever degrees of assent he affords it beyond the degrees of that evidence, it is plain that all the surplusage of assurance is owing to some other affection, and not to the love of truth (IV. 19. §1)

This text reflects what will be later called the ‘principle of evidentialism’, serving as a standard for legitimate belief and assent[25] – though Locke does not use the term himself.

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[23] See the section heading of IV. 17. §16.

[24] In the next few pages, I draw directly on my (Sweet 1999b: section II).

[25] This suggests that Locke holds that people can choose to give their assent. In a way, Locke would hold that one can – but one must be careful here. In *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke writes: “to believe this or that to be true does not depend upon our will” (1823: 6, 39). Similarly, Locke writes: “assent is no more in our power than knowledge. When the agreement of any two ideas appears to our minds, whether immediately,

This text is also important because it tells us something about truth and the relation of truth, argument, and proof.

First, 'truth' is a property of propositions alone – Locke says that truth is “the right joining or separating of Signs, as the things signified by them, do agree or disagree with one another” (IV. 5. §2) – and, hence, when one says that a belief-proposition is 'true,' it is the sort of thing for which propositional evidence is normally appropriate.

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or by the assistance of reason, I can no more refuse to perceive, no more avoid knowing it, than I can avoid seeing those objects which I turn my eyes to, and look on in day-light: And what upon full examination I find the most probable, I cannot deny my assent to.” He continues, however, “But though we cannot hinder our knowledge, where the agreement is once perceived, nor our assent, where the probability manifestly appears upon due consideration of all the measures of it: Yet *we can hinder* both knowledge and assent, by stopping our inquiry, and not employing our faculties in the search of any truth. If it were not so, ignorance, errour, or infidelity could not in any case be a fault. Thus in some cases we can prevent or suspend our assent; but can a man, versed in modern or ancient history, doubt whether there is such a place as Rome, or whether there was such a man as Julius Caesar?” (IV. 20. §16, emphasis mine)

For a discussion of Locke’s view that belief is sometimes ‘involuntary’ but, at other times, voluntary, see, for example, Green (2020).

This bears on what has been called ‘the ethics of belief’ in Locke, i.e., not just whether one can choose or decide to believe a proposition, but whether what one does makes one liable to *moral* censure. See Passmore (1986). Passmore suggests that one may be liable, even if one cannot ‘decide,’ but he also argues that there are inconsistencies in Locke’s account of belief. Wolterstorff (1996) disagrees with Passmore’s account of belief (1996: xxi). Green (2020) takes up Passmore’s discussion, as well as that of Moore (1977). Garrett (2007) argues that according to Locke, faith is “a special type of assent.” Similarly, on Wolterstorff’s view, we do not “decide” to believe anything. Wolterstorff writes:

> “Locke ... regarded belief and assent as formed by some faculty or faculties and not by the will. We do not *decide* to believe or assent to things – not often, anyway. Breaking decisively with almost all his philosophical predecessors, Locke repudiates one of the traditional distinctions between knowledge and opinion; namely, that in knowledge one’s belief and assent are compelled by the presence of the object itself” (Wolterstorff 1996: 61).

There is, nevertheless, an ‘ethics of belief.’ Wolterstorff adds

> “The obligation in question pertains not just to our believings, disbelievings, and withholdings, but to the *degree of firmness* of our believings and disbelievings – to the *levels of confidence* we place in propositions. Each of us is obligated, for certain propositions, to try to do our epistemic best – that is, to try our best to find out whether the proposition is true or false, and upon completion of the procedure required for that, to place a level of confidence in the proposition” (1996: 62).

(Note that Wolterstorff himself distinguishes between the firmness of a belief, which is a matter of proportioning belief to evidence and proof, and the tenacity with which one holds a belief, and which may go beyond or in spite of, the evidence (Wolterstorff 1996: 82).)

Locke’s view is explicitly challenged, as we shall see, by Newman. See Price (1969) on Newman’s criticisms of

Second, it is also clear from this that, on Locke's view, claims to knowledge and assertions of belief as true almost always require some proof (i.e., an argument). To the extent that one has no proof or argument (save in those cases where something is known intuitively), or that proof or argument does *not* establish the conclusion held, one cannot be considered a ‘lover of truth'.

Reasonable belief (and assent), then, require evidence, argument, and proof – i.e., evidence that is “enough to induce the mind to judge the proposition to be true or false, rather than the contrary” (IV. 15. §1).[26] Yet should there be claims to the truth of propositions about some non-natural things that are beyond such evidences, Locke seems to allow that they, too, can indeed be truths.

But what constitutes a proof? As noted earlier, while some might be tempted to understand this in a strict sense, i.e., as a deductive proof, this is not how Locke understands it (see IV. 19. §11). According to Locke, ‘proof' is simply an ‘intervening idea serving to show the agreement of any two other ideas' (IV. 2. §3).

Given Locke’s comments above (IV. 19. §1), apart from instances of intuitive knowledge, where no proof is obviously involved or appropriate, we can say that a proposition is 'proven' when it is assented to with a degree of conviction or confidence *proportional* to the nature and amount of evidence available (IV. 15. §2, §4).[27] What exactly this proportion is –

Locke.

[26] Locke does call reason “natural Revelation” and revelation “natural Reason enlarged” (IV. 19. §4). We might see a similarity with Chillingworth here (who writes that discourse is “right *reason grounded on Divine revelation*”, see Ch 2 of the present study, above), though – as we shall see – Locke is clearly of the view that the role of reason is fundamental.

[27] This point is taken up by Hume, as we shall see in the next chapter, in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*: “A wise man [...] proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experiences as a full *proof* of the future existence of that event. In other cases, he proceeds with more caution; he weights the opposite experiments; he considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments: To that side he inclines, with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgment the evidence exceeds not what we properly call *probability*.” (ECHU X/1, 4)

This point is also taken up by Newman who, however, denies that there are degrees of assent. See Chapter 7, below.

how to determine how much evidence warrants how much assent – is far from clear (a point that I will return to below).

As we have seen above, for Locke, ‘proof' can legitimately be demonstrative *or probabilistic*, and (therefore) deductive or inductive in form. Where the proof is demonstrative, we can speak of knowledge (though the reverse is not true).[28] For some matters of fact, i.e., concerning ‘the existence of other things', e.g., material objects, Locke writes that there can be knowledge (IV. 11. §3-§9) – though not demonstrative knowledge, because no demonstration is possible (IV. 11. §10). What about those cases where a proposition is not known but is 'highly probable' or 'probable’? (Locke allows that it may be that, even if we do not *know* a proposition, we can give proper assent to it.) Locke is of the view that it is reasonable to believe or assent to it if the degree of assent is in proportion to the evidence we have. All claims to knowledge, other than those based on intuition[29], and all assertions of rational belief, must ultimately be judged by this standard of ‘proper proportion,’ in light of what reason determines to count as ‘sufficient evidence’.

Admittedly, even here Locke is cautious: the degree of assent that we give to a belief must, in some way (though Locke is not clear in what way), correspond to the amount and kind of evidence available. ‘Giving’ our assent, then, should normally be based on the results of an investigative process. Locke warns us, however, of a further issue: that assent should not be given before such an investigation is complete: “[A]s the conformity of our Knowledge, as the certainty of Observations, as the frequency and constancy of Experience, and the number and credibility of Testimonies, do more or less agree, or disagree with it, so is any Proposition in it self, more or less probable” (IV. 15. §6). Thus, Locke writes that the mind “*ought to examine all the grounds of Probability* [...] *for or against* any probable Proposition, before it assents to or dissents from it” (IV. 15. §5).

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[28] There is, admittedly, some vagueness here on Locke’s part. In IV. 15. §5, Locke says that certain experiences of direct perception that are in accord with all past experience are ‘past probability’ and constitute knowledge – though in IV. 16. §6 (p. 662, lines 10-15) he appears to shy from this conclusion.

[29] Though the term intuition is vague, Locke understands it to be the most certain knowledge, a direct mental insight. For a discussion of the many senses of intuition, see Sweet (2019).

What are the "grounds of probability"? The grounds of probability are either the conformity of a thing with our own knowledge, observation and experience *or* the testimony of others (see IV, 15 on probability and 16, §§ 5-14 on testimony and analogy). Testimony would seem to be essential to most human knowledge, and Locke instructs his reader to consider a number of features in drawing on any testimony:

> 1. The number [of witnesses]. 2. The integrity. 3. The skill of the witnesses. 4. The design of the author, where it is a testimony out of a book cited. 5. The consistency of the parts, and circumstances of the relation. 6. Contrary testimonies. (IV. 15. §4).

Locke, however, seems somewhat ambivalent about the place of testimony. Though it does not carry weight just by itself, Locke writes that "our senses assist one another's testimony of the existence of outward things" (IV. 11. §7). Testimony clearly has value.[30] And while he states that "the discovery of rational and contemplative knowledge" is not possible through testimony, the "knowledge of others [- and not the opinion of others-] is a proper ground for assent" (Shieber 2009: 34). And Tillotson – Locke's mentor – had included human testimony as one of the 'causes of faith.'[31]

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[30] Locke writes, in *Philosophical Shorthand Writings: Faith and Reason*: "since our senses reach but a few of the matters of fact that pass, when our senses fail, faith grounded upon the testimony of another comes unto our information" (Locke 1954: 279).

[31] While Chillingworth, too, had referred to 'testimony" (e.g., in *The Religion of Protestants*), it was almost always in reference to either the testimony of the Church or the testimony of God; once he speaks of testimony given by tradition, and once of the testimony of a man. There is no emphasis on human testimony as a way of establishing a claim.

In Tillotson, however, human testimony does have a role: "the authority and testimony of some credible person" is one of the 'causes' of faith, or, more precisely, the 'argument whereby it is wrought' in us [see "Of the Nature of Faith in General," Sermon 218, IX, 185], and he indicates the criteria for accepting such testimony at p. 186 (i.e., "ability and integrity") and, again, in Sermon 235 "The Evidences of the Truth of the Christian Religion" IX, 465 [i.e., considerations which "give strength and advantage to this testimony" – i.e., credibility, agreement of witnesses, and steadfastness], which allows him to argue for the credibility of testimony of the resurrection. Tillotson also refers to miracles as 'confirming' testimony (e.g., Sermon 241 ["On the Evidences of Christianity"], IX, 548).

Recall, however, that, for Tillotson, faith is not uniquely tied to religious matters, but also to "things human and civil" and "divine" things "known by the light of nature" (Sermon 218, IX, 188-189).

Still, Locke raises a number of concerns that one should bear in mind when one evaluates testimony – about (the reliability of) the "testimony of men" (IV. 15. §6)[32] – and he notes in IV. 15. §6 that "there cannot be a more dangerous thing to rely on, nor more likely to mislead one [than "the opinion of others"]; since there is much more falsehood and error among men than truth and knowledge." Moreover, there are difficulties where "testimonies contradict common experience, and the reports of history and witnesses clash with the ordinary course of nature or with one another" (IV. 16. §9). It may seem odd to use 'tradition' or 'custom' or 'common experience' to challenge testimony about certain events, for it would seem that tradition, custom, and common experience themselves are all based on testimony. But there is reason to hold that Locke may well argue that the proofs of 'the ordinary course of nature' are based on something stronger than testimony.[33]

So, despite these reserves, Locke did think that testimony sometimes can be used as "a source of evidence in argument" (Shieber 2009: 29), and he does think that some claims, when supported by the like testimony of everyone, can provide "assurance" (IV. 18. §§4-5, cf Garrett 2007). And while there may be difficulties with testimony when it "concern[s] matters of fact", when it comes to probabilities about other things, such as "spirits, angels", since they are "not falling under the reaches of our senses," testimony seems to have significant value. Indeed, Locke says that there is "one case where contrary experience lessens not the testimony" (IV. 16. §13) – "where such supernatural events are suitable to ends aimed at by [God]" (IV. 16. §13) – and this concerns "miracles, which, well attested, do not only find credit themselves, but give it also to other truths, which need such confirmation" (IV. 16. §13). Indeed, in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (as I discuss below), Locke holds that Christ's testimony, and the testimonies of others concerning Christ, constitute a sufficient ground for believing (1823: VII, 49, 68).

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[32] For the discussion of testimony, see Shieber (2009) and de Jong & van Woudenberg (1997).

[33] Whether Locke is consistent or correct, here, however, lies beyond the purview of this Chapter, whose objective is to present Locke's view, not refute or defend it.

It is important to recognise, then, that, for Locke, 'proof' can be probabilistic, and while 'reasonability' requires 'sufficient evidence,' the standard of this evidence is not unduly high. It can include observation, experience, and testimony, and what concretely this amounts to is not obviously the same as that proposed by 'foundationalism.'

Still, in the end, reason is the guide, and beliefs are always open to correction and change (and, therefore, toleration). In general, then, we may rationally assent to propositions about alleged matters of fact – though as ‘uncertain,' ‘probable,' or ‘highly probable', depending on the nature of available proof. And there are degrees of knowledge and probability (starting with certainty and demonstration) that correspond to degrees of assent (starting with full assurance and confidence) (see IV. 15. § 2).

If, however, a proposition is not known or shown to be probable or confirmed by reason, it cannot be said to be held rationally, nor can it be reasonable for us to hold it. Thus, reasonability is a judgement, based on a probability – a preponderance of evidence. Moreover, Locke’s criteria for reasonable belief are universal, and so they apply to religious belief as much as belief about empirical scientific matters.

3.4 Faith and religious belief

How do matters of faith and religious belief ‘fit’ into this account of reason, reasonability, and proof? Is religious belief reasonable? Is religious believing reasonable? To answer these questions, one must first consider how Locke understands the notions of ‘belief' and ‘faith'.

On Locke's view, to believe is to “admit or receive a proposition for true, on arguments or proofs that are found to persuade us to receive it as true, without certain knowledge that it is so” (IV. 15, §3). Moreover, belief deals with matters of fact (see IV. 15, §5), which are matters about which there can be no demonstrative proof[34] and, presumably, no certain knowledge.

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[34] See *A Third Letter for Toleration* [*Works*] (1824: V: 144, 424).

Faith, interestingly, is not the same as belief. Locke writes that it is “an assent founded on the highest reason” (IV, 16. § 14).[35] Indeed, “Faith [is] founded on the Testimony of GOD (who cannot lie)” (IV. 16. § 5). So it seems for Locke that, at times, to have faith is not (merely) ‘to believe' but can, in some circumstances and on some subjects, *practically* constitute knowledge.[36] Like knowledge and belief, faith concerns propositions[37] – but, here, propositions “divinely revealed” (IV. 18. § 6) and “beyond the discovery of our natural faculties, and above reason” (IV. 18. § 7).[38] He does not construe it as an assent to a person (assuming that this notion makes sense). Thus, faith, strictly speaking, is not about matters of fact.

Locke does not confuse the epistemic attitude of having faith with any particular system of religion or creed, but it appears that he would say that, whichever system one chooses, its creeds are (at least) largely propositional. Moreover, if assent is an assent to a proposition, then one must have “Reason” to regulate our assent to that particular religion or creed (see IV. 17. § 2).‘Faith' or religious belief as a whole seems to be (simply) one's assenting to a number of articles of faith or religious beliefs.

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[35] Though Locke also says: “Faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind which cannot be opposite to Reason” See IV. 17. §24.

[36] See *Mr. Locke’s Second Reply to Edward, Bishop of Worcester* [1824, 4, 273]. Locke’s views do not seem settled on this point. For example, Locke writes that though ‘faith’ is not knowledge (see note 43, below), “traditional revelation may make us *know* propositions knowable also by reason” (IV. 18. §4) Yet, see Locke (1823: 4, 275-76), cited earlier**:** “by certainty I meant knowledge, and by faith the act of believing; … I crave leave to say with Mr. Chillingworth, “that I do heartily acknowledge and believe the articles of our faith to be in themselves truths as certain and infallible, as the very common principles of geometry or metaphysics. But that there is not required of us a knowledge of them, and an adherence to them, as certain as that of sense or science:” and that for this reason (amongst others given both by Mr. Chillingworth and Mr. Hooker) viz. “that faith is not knowledge, no more than three is four, but eminently contained in it: so that he that knows, believes, and something more; but he that believes, many times does not know; nay, if he doth barely and merely believe, he doth never “know.””

[37] In *A Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke writes: “for nothing can be an article of faith, but some proposition; and *then it will remain to be proved*, that these articles are necessary to be believed to salvation” (1824: VI, 168, emphasis mine).

[38] Again, note, Locke says, “faith is not opposed to reason” (IV. 18. §4).

Yet faith is not independent of reason and experience – e.g., “faith can never convince us of anything that contradicts our knowledge” (IV. 18. §5) – and even knowing that something is faith comes from an inference involving divine revelation.

Locke says relatively little about particular articles of faith or individual religious beliefs as such. Yet faith and articles of faith are very close. Moreover, it seems that Locke would not distinguish a particular religious belief from any other kind of belief, except in those cases that concern its relation to how it could be known – i.e., by reason or by revelation (see IV, 18, §7-8). Thus, there is nothing distinctive about religious belief, of ‘believing' religious claims, as such.

In short, the consequence of Locke’s comments is clear. While faith is not knowledge, it can be an appropriate assent, and it is expressed in propositions. Articles of faith or religious beliefs, then, are propositional in form and cognitive in content – i.e., are propositions expressing ideas about religion.

3.5 Reasonability and proof in religious beliefs

How does Locke’s account of reason or proof apply to faith and religious belief? How can we know whether faith – religious belief (as a whole) – is true? And what does it mean to say that particular articles of faith or religious beliefs are true?

For Locke, proof is as germane in religious belief, qua particular belief, as it would be concerning any belief – e.g., he talks in his “Second Reply to Edward, Bishop of Worcester,“ about “belief of particular propositions or articles of faith” (1824: 4, 346).

How, then, would one be able to judge whether she or he was reasonable in holding a *religious* belief? How would one say that a religious belief was true ('probably' or 'certainly')? As indicated above, to know something to be a truth, Locke writes one “must know it to be so, either by its own self-evidence to natural reason, or by the rational proofs that make it out to be so” (IV. 19. §11).

Specifically, then, Locke says first that some religious beliefs can be demonstrated – there can, Locke writes, be demonstrative knowledge of God's existence (cf IV. §10) – though one must be careful.[39] Locke writes:

> "But though this be the most obvious truth that reason discovers; and though its evidence be (if I mistake not) *equal to mathematical certainty*: Yet it requires thought and attention, and the mind must apply itself to a regular deduction of it from some part of our intuitive knowledge, or else we shall be as uncertain and ignorant of this as of other propositions, which are in themselves capable of clear demonstration. To show therefore that we are capable of knowing, i.e. being certain that there is a God, and how we may come by this certainty, *I think we need go no farther than ourselves*, and that undoubted knowledge we have of our own existence." [IV. 10. §1, emphasis mine][40]

Moreover, presumably, some religious beliefs, just like some propositions of morality, are capable of demonstration[41] – i.e., so far as the ideas involved in the belief are 'close to' or have a stronger connection to one another' (cf IV. 3. §20). For other religious beliefs (e.g., concerning the existence of supernatural beings), we may be able to express a high degree of assent – perhaps the highest – as such 'beliefs' are based on the testimony of God (see IV. 11. §12). (Here, admittedly, our degree of assent is conditioned by the degree by which our reason can confirm that the testimony on which we rely is, in fact, God's testimony).

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[39] Whether the claim that 'God exists' is, by itself, a religious belief is a matter of some debate (see, for example, Malcolm 1964). For present purposes, however, this question need not be discussed.

[40] Locke writes: "he hath spread before all the world such legible characters of his works and providence, and given all mankind *so sufficient a light of reason*, that they to whom this written word never came, could not (whenever they set themselves to search) either doubt of the being of a God, or of the obedience due to him" (III. 9. §23, emphasis mine).

[41] Locke writes that "Morality is capable of Demonstration, as well as Mathematicks: Since the precise real Essence of the Things moral Words stand for, may be perfectly known; and so the Congruity, or Incongruity of the Things themselves, be certainly discovered, in which consists perfect Knowledge" (III. 11. §16).

What about other beliefs? What about the way in which many believers claim they know certain statements about God – i.e., revelation? Locke brings the issue together in an interesting way. Locke writes:

> "where the principles of reason have not evidenced a proposition to be certainly true or false, there *clear revelation* [presumably, what Locke calls "original revelation,[42] not traditional revelation], *as another principle of truth*, and ground of assent, may determine; and so it may be matter of faith, *and be also above reason*. Because reason, in that particular matter, being able to reach no higher than probability, faith gave the determination where reason came short; and revelation discovered on which side the truth lay."(IV. 18, §9, emphasis mine).

Thus, for those religious beliefs which do not treat of observable or easily observable phenomena (e.g., of the existence of angels, spirits, and demons [IV, 16, §12], or of their origins and activities [IV, 18, §7]), the sole evidence would be, according to the case, analogy or revelation. If it is original revelation, coming directly from God, then it is not doubtful (subject to the conditions, below). Traditional revelation, however, would be problematic; as we have seen in the discussion of testimony, Locke's view is that the further we are removed from the source or original revelation, the more likely that misunderstanding and error will enter into the revelation (IV. 18. §3).[43] So, Locke writes, if believers "say they know it [a statement] to be true because it is a revelation from God, the reason is good" (IV. 19. § 11).

How does this fit with Locke's claim that, to know a truth, it must be self-evident or the product of rational proofs? Is Locke being inconsistent? No. Locke is not saying that faith or revelation is something which goes beyond proof, but that revelation can provide evidence.

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[42] Original revelation is "that first impression, which is made immediately by God, on the mind of any man" (IV. 18. §3).

[43] Yet, as seen above, Locke does allow that traditional revelation can produce knowledge ["traditional revelation may make us *know* propositions knowable also by reason" (IV 18. §4)]. Moreover, paradoxically, see Locke on testimony about a supernatural event (IV. 16. §13), where he seems to suggest that the fact of its unusual character, perhaps inconsistent with past experience, supports the claim that it is true.

Locke writes, “Revelation is natural reason *enlarged* by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately, which reason vouches the truth of, by the testimony and proofs it gives, that they come from God” (IV. 19. § 4, emphasis mine). In other words, revelation is evidence – good evidence.

Of course, the obvious question, which Locke himself raises, is: “But then it will be demanded how they know it to be a revelation from God” (IV. 19. § 11). Locke’s response is that, to be sure that something is a revelation, and therefore to be assured that a belief supported by a putative revelation is true, reason needs to establish that that revelation itself is genuine. He writes:

> “we see the holy Men of old, who had *revelations* from GOD, had something else besides that internal Light of assurance in their own Minds, to testify to them that it was from GOD. They were not left to their own Perswasions alone, that those Perswasions were from GOD; **but had outward Signs** to convince them of the Author of those Revelations.” (IV. 19. §15, bold emphasis mine)

In other words, where the articles of faith that one holds do not come from reason, there must be an external confirmation of (the reliability of) the source of these ‘articles’. Once one can be sure that the revelation is genuine – i.e., once it is vouched for by reason – the proposition can be known to be true, and we can hold it rationally and with full assurance.

What are these ‘outward signs’? How can reason say whether a putative revelation is genuine?

First, Locke offers a kind of negative ‘test’, i.e., when a revelation conflicts with what is naturally evident, it is not a genuine revelation (see IV. 18. §§7, 11). Indeed, “whatsoever truth we come to the clear discovery of, *from the knowledge and contemplation of our own ideas*, will always be certainer to us than those which are conveyed to us by traditional revelation.“ (IV. 18. §4).

Second, one could look to see what the consequences of the revelation might be. Here, consider some of Locke’s comments in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*.

Locke admits that there is a wide range of things written in scripture. Need one consider all of these as 'signs,' that could serve to prove the authenticity of the putative revelation? Locke's response is in the negative.[44] Locke warns his reader:

> "We must not cull out, as best suits our system, here and there a period or verse; as if they were all distinct and independent aphorisms; and *make these the fundamental articles of the Christian faith*, and necessary to salvation; unless God has made them so. There be many truths in the Bible, which a good Christian may be wholly ignorant of; and so not believe; which, perhaps, some lay great stress on and call fundamental articles, because they are the distinguishing points of their communion. The epistles … were writ to those who were in the faith, and true Christians already: and so could not be designed to teach them the fundamental articles and points necessary to salvation." (1824: VII, 152, emphasis mine).

Moreover, given that a person may not be able to interpret scripture correctly or completely, what that person understands may not be true. Indeed, it is because of this fallibility in interpretation that Locke seems to hold that much of that written in scripture may not be necessary to being a Christian.

Still, there are, Locke allows, truths[45] of faith contained within or inferred from scripture, specifically, Christ's teaching. Thus, in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke writes:

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[44] Thus, in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke writes: "it is not in the epistles we are to learn what are the fundamental *articles of faith*, where they are *promiscuously and without distinction mixed with other truths*, in discourses that were (though for edification, indeed, yet) only occasional." [1824: VII, 153; emphasis mine].

[45] For example, Locke holds that, while there is a natural (moral) law, because there are some who cannot work it out for themselves, the New Testament articulates that natural (moral) law. Locke writes:

> "Thus the sentence which everyone passes on himself testifies that there is a law of nature. For if there were no law of nature which reason declares we must show ourselves obedient to, how does it come to pass that the conscience of people who recognize the precepts of no other law whereby they are either guided or bound in duty, nevertheless passes judgement upon their life and conduct and either acquits or declares guilty, seeing that without some law no judgement can be pronounced? This law, then, is not written, but innate, i.e. natural." [Essay 1, Essays on the Law of Nature] (Locke 1954: 117).

> "It may be seasonable therefore, now, to add to those sermons we have formerly seen of St. Paul, (wherein he preached no other article of faith, but that "Jesus was the Messiah," the King, who, being risen from the dead, now reigneth, and shall more publicly manifest his kingdom, in judging the world at the last day) what farther is left upon record of his preaching."[46]

Because this teaching is 'truth, simplicity, and reasonableness,' Locke concludes that, in this, people have evidence that Jesus is the Messiah – but this is the New Testament's only revealed truth.[47]

It may seem that another 'outward sign' would be miracles. In *A Discourse of Miracles,* Locke writes that miracles are "the basis on which divine mission is always established, and consequently that foundation on which the believers of any divine revelation must ultimately bottom their faith" (Locke 1824: VIII, 262). In this sense, the performance of a miracle testifies to the authority of the one who performs it, and to the truth or reliability of what that person reveals. The record of such events in Christianity are the Scriptures. Since Scripture is testimony, so some articles of faith or religious beliefs would seem to be based ultimately on testimony. Yet Locke seems to draw back from seeing miracles as outward signs that confirm revelation. First, Locke's definition of miracle is "a sensible operation, which, being above the comprehension of the spectator, and in his opinion contrary to the established course of nature, is taken by him to be divine" – which refers to the subjective state of the witness and, by itself, does not guarantee the source or origin of the event. And, second, we have seen how Locke calls attention to problems in the interpretation of

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[46] Locke 1824: VII, 100. Further, in *A Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke writes: "for nothing can be an article of faith, but some proposition; and *then it will remain to be proved*, that these articles are necessary to be believed to salvation." Locke 1824: VII, 168, emphasis mine.

[47] In both *Vindications*, Locke writes: "make them but see the *truth, simplicity, and reasonableness,* of what [Christ] himself taught, and required to be believed by his followers; and you need not doubt but, being once fully persuaded of his doctrine, and the advantages which all Christians agree are received by him, such converts will not lay by the Scriptures, but by a constant reading and study of them get all the light they can from this divine revelation, and nourish themselves up in the words of faith, and of good doctrine, as St. Paul speaks to Timothy" [Locke (2012: 11, 124) emphasis mine]

Scripture and, by extension, on the reliability of the testimony. The issue here is not the limitations of testimony itself, but on the accuracy of the account of the event testified.

A further possible 'outward sign' is that this putative revelation is confirmable by our (natural) knowledge and reason. In such cases, the degree of assent that may rationally be given is determined by the degree to which we have confirmation or evidence that the supposed revelation is genuine, for "we cannot have an assurance of the truth of its being a divine revelation, greater than our own knowledge"[48] (IV. 18. § 5; cf. §1 0). Indeed, Locke holds, faith's 'knowledge' is weaker than a person's direct knowledge.

It seems that, for Locke, our claims to knowledge and our legitimately-held religious beliefs must be able to be established by something more, i.e., rational argument. He writes that "if reason finds it to be revealed from God, reason then declares for it, as much as for any other truth, and makes it one of her dictates" (IV. 19. § 14). Locke is not saying that all knowledge and legitimate beliefs must come from reason; rather, he is saying something different: that "Reason must be our last judge and guide in every thing" (IV. 19. § 14).

This further sign – that a putative revelation can be established by our natural reason – is not simply that reason has the role of establishing the truth or plausibility of propositions, but that it is also the means by which one interprets scripture.[49] Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, for example, attests to his view that one could establish some religious truth through a careful “hermeneutical” reading of scripture. But, again, such a reading depends more on what reason by itself can confirm than the claims made in the text. Locke fears that, without the assurances provided by reason, there will be a **“**crying up of faith, in opposition to reason” and the kind of “absurdities that fill almost all the religions which possess and divide mankind” (IV. 18. § 11),

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[48] Locke's argument here is that: "Since the whole strength of the certainty depends upon our knowledge that God revealed it, which in this case, where the proposition supposed revealed contradicts our knowledge or reason, will always have this objection hanging to it, viz. that we cannot tell how to conceive that to come from God, the bountiful Author of our being, which, if received for true, must overturn all the principles and foundations of knowledge he has given us; render all our faculties useless; wholly destroy the most excellent part of his workmanship, our understandings; and put a man in a condition, wherein he will have less light, less conduct than the beast that perisheth. For if the mind of man can never have a clearer (and perhaps not so clear) evidence of any thing to be a divine revelation, as it has of the principles of its own reason, *it can never have a ground to quit the clear evidence of its reason, to give a place to a proposition, whose revelation has not a greater evidence than those principles have"* (See Locke's *Philosophical Shorthand Writings: Faith and Reason* in Locke 1954: 275, emphasis mine).

[49] I owe this reminder to Victor Nuovo. Note Locke's comments about "revealed truths" that, given that they "are conveyed to us by books and languages, are liable to the common and natural obscurities and difficulties incident to words" (III. 9. 23).

In short, then, despite the fact that, for Locke, faith is not, by definition, based on evidence, the ultimate standard of proof in religion, and of what faith states and requires, seems to be ‘reason.’ And while this reason can draw on, on matters religious, instances of testimony, even this seems subject to a more thoroughgoing dependence upon one’s own rational capacities.

3.6. Summary

What we find in the preceding account of Locke is that, though faith is distinct from reason, the Christian faith and at least some articles of faith are reasonable. Locke also provides his readers with a careful account of the nature of proof and how, and how far, one can have a proof of religious beliefs or articles of faith. Locke seems to hold that in addition to the ‘probable reasoning’ that can provide support for some beliefs, one may have a very high degree of certainty about faith, because faith is something that, strictly speaking, can come only from God.

There are important similarities in the views of Locke, Chillingworth, and Tillotson (Worcester 1889: 110-112). This should be of no surprise given Locke’s references to Chillingworth in his work and his relations with Tillotson. And it should also be of no surprise that Locke’s views on religious belief, like those of Chillingworth and Tillotson, met with criticism, not only in Britain but in the United States, where new denominational colleges and seminaries were being established. Locke was accused of Deism and Socianism (Wallace

1984), and his latitudinarianism and his empiricism were regarded by some as "unacceptable."[50]

We find, however, that despite the similarities in conclusions, Locke's approach to the relation between faith and reason is different from those of Chillingworth and Tillotson (Worcester 1889:110-112). Most significantly, what was missing in Chillingworth and Tillotson was a careful account of key concepts (e.g., faith, belief, knowledge) and, particularly, what counted as a proof (though this was not, of course, the principal objective of their work). Locke's account here, then, is more careful and precise. But this was not the only difference.

Locke's primary concerns, in some respects, are larger than those of Tillotson or Chillingworth. In the *Essay*, for example, Locke takes a standpoint that seeks to be independent of explicit religious commitment, and his remarks bear not just on the Christian faith but on religious belief as a whole. Moreover, Locke's interest is not just in religious truth but in the nature and limits of knowledge and, by extension, the nature of reasonability. Hence, we see Locke's endeavour in the *Essay* in providing a 'psychological' account of the foundations of knowledge.

Yet, in certain respects, Locke's account of faith and religious belief are also narrower than those of Chillingworth or Tillotson. For example, we find in Locke a narrower conception of faith. Locke argues that faith is just an assent to a divine revelation, and faith is effectively only a set of "articles of faith"[51] (or what we might call particular religious beliefs). Further, to have faith is simply to assent to a proposition; there is nothing dispositional about it, such as a trust,[52] that we find suggested in some of his predecessors.

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[50] See Fiering (1981: 332). Fiering writes that Locke was "unacceptable in New England," for example, because of his rejection of an innate idea of God. For other reactions to Locke's epistemology and religion in the Americas, see Yolton (1956).

[51] Locke refers to "articles of faith, or any other truth." (Locke 1824: 3, 140).

[52] Locke maintained that a Christian person of faith had, as a condition of salvation, to believe and to act on what she or he believed (see Perry 2012). This does *not* say, however, that he held that an article of faith

There are other differences as well. Locke does not seem to use the term 'moral certainty' to apply to beliefs that satisfy appropriate standards of evidence, writing instead of degrees of probability with corresponding degrees of assent. And, on matters of belief, Locke appears to hold that one cannot 'choose' to believe; rather that one's belief is determined by the corresponding evidence.

Despite Locke's efforts to be precise in his terminology, there is some vagueness concerning what Locke means by the term 'articles of faith.' For example, Locke is not clear what makes an article of faith an article *of faith*. Is it its content? Or how it is known (e.g., revelation)? or that it comes from revelation (i.e., Scripture)?

Are articles of faith "matters of fact" – i.e., something that can be true, but is not necessarily true, and about which one could be mistaken? It may seem that, since articles of faith are found in Scripture, they are examples of 'divine testimony,'[53] must be true, and, therefore, are not matters of fact. Yet Locke, as we have seen, rejects this view. For if it were true, then any statement in scripture could be a putative article of faith.[54] Moreover, it seems too broad to claim that no such articles of faith are matters of fact, for some seem to be making descriptive, factual claims.

If, however, articles of faith are about 'matters of fact,'[55] or are like other knowledge claims or beliefs, then these 'articles' are subject to rational assessment – e.g., in the way that we

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itself entailed what it was that one must do. In Locke, articles of faith - individual religious beliefs - are just propositions, there is nothing intentional about them.

[53] Locke refers to "the infallible truth of the scripture," (IV. 20. §11) and, in *A Third Letter for Toleration* [Chapter 7. Of your bringing Men to the true Religion], he states that there are: "a great many truths contained in Scripture" (Locke 1824: 6, 327).

[54] In his *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke says that to hold that "every Proposition in the new Testament is a Fundamental Article of Faith" which must be believed by anyone wishing to be considered a Christian, is "unreasonable." See Locke (1824: 7, 320).

[55] Again, in *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*, Locke insists that much of what we read in scripture are *not* articles of faith to be believed, but *facts*. He writes: "St. Peter preached here to those who knew the death and crucifixion of Jesus as well as he: and therefore these could *not* be proposed to them, as *new articles of faith* to be believed; *but* those *matters of fact* being what the Jews knew already, were a good argument, joined with his resurrection, to convince them of that truth" (Locke 1824: 7, 322, emphasis mine).

assess ordinary truth claims. As noted above, on Locke's view, some religious truths may be known by intuition or by demonstration, but there are very few of them. There are, however, other religious claims or beliefs (which are not, strictly speaking, "known"). They can be assented to or believed, but only in proportion to the evidence, and only once they have been investigated fully. (Recall that Locke has said that to be reasonable in assenting to a proposition, one must have some evidence or proof, and, given that an article of faith is propositional, it seems that such a standard must apply there as well.) Evidence or proof, then, is required in order to be reasonable in believing, no matter what the subject matter is, and the stronger the evidence, the stronger the assent we can give. Evidence, in short, points us to the conclusion to which our rational assent should go.

If this is, indeed, Locke's view – that articles of faith are, or are like, matters of fact – then it seems to follow that the criteria for proof for at least many articles of faith are the same as those for any proposition; that (unlike Chillingworth and Tillotson) Locke holds that there is, therefore, nothing inherently distinctive about religious beliefs; that, given Locke's criteria for knowledge and reasonable assent, there are rather few articles of faith that are reasonable to believe; that, like all beliefs, religious beliefs should be open to change and correction; and that faith itself must yield to reason.

Such a view of articles of faith has important implications for the reasonableness of religious belief. For example, as we have seen above, Locke holds that, in those cases where reason conflicts with (apparent) revelation, revelation must yield. Moreover, many articles of faith may not command one's assent. Locke writes: "Though all divine revelation requires the obedience of faith, yet every truth of inspired Scriptures is not one of those, that by the law of faith is required to be explicitly believed to justification" (Locke 1824: 7, 156, emphasis mine).[56] Further, because many articles of faith are based on Scripture, they are ultimately based on testimony – of the author of the texts and the witnesses to the events – and, as we have seen, Locke is somewhat ambivalent about the reliability of testimony. Admittedly, Locke does allow that testimony can provide some basis for reasonable belief, but this is not a preferred source of information. As we have seen, there are different interpretations of how far testimony is reliable, and it seems to provide only a fragile support.

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[56] As we have seen above (note 36), Locke says that he agrees with Chillingworth that 'articles of faith' may not be, strictly speaking, known by us, are not as certain as the evidence of our senses, and, therefore, do not require "adherence."

In general, then, while Locke does provide a clearer standard for proof and reasonable belief than his predecessors, it seems as if a number of articles of faith or beliefs cannot be said with confidence to meet that standard.[57] At best, then, it seems better to say that most religious beliefs or articles of faith are not unreasonable, rather than reasonable to believe.

Such concerns about how far religious beliefs can be proven fit well with Locke's view that we cannot insist strongly on the necessity of many 'articles of faith' as essential parts of 'faith.' An advantage of this is that it allows Locke to be very 'latitudinarian' – that there is little on which one can criticize or disprove about faith. A disadvantage, however, is that, since not much needs to be believed or is certain to be a part of faith, it is not clear what, exactly, having faith substantively amounts to. Hence, as Locke asserts consistently, other than the claim that Jesus is the Messiah, little else – e.g., belief in the Trinity, etc. – seems to be a required part of the Christian faith.

In short, while it may look initially as though Locke is offering simply a slightly more rigorous account of the reasonableness of religious belief than that offered by Chillingworth and Tillotson, in fact there are important differences. Faith, in its strictest sense, seems entirely subject to reason. And, moreover, if the ultimate judge is reason, and the canons for evaluating the truth of articles of faith are ultimately the same as for all propositions, then to say that religious belief is true means that reason sees that the things involved (signified by the ideas or signs we employ) 'agree with' one another. Thus, such assertions of religious belief are simply either known intuitively or by demonstration, *or* assented to or believed based on their probability.

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[57] Locke does not raise directly the question of whether beliefs must be 'meaningful,' but one finds the suggestion that, if there is no way of knowing whether a belief is true, then one cannot rest much on that claim.

That being said, while Locke’s standard for reasonableness of religious belief might at first seem to be high (e.g., that of which one is certain needs to be proven, and that for anything for which we mean to assert a claim requires evidence), given that what a believer must believe is so small, the demand for evidence in religious belief may not be that onerous. Given Locke’s conception of faith and ‘articles of faith’ (or particular religious beliefs), the standard of reasonability may not be all that high after all. But it is at quite a cost for theologies with substantial numbers of dogmas.

Hume will take Locke’s ‘reduction’ of what is necessary to faith one step further and, by expanding Locke’s accounts of reason and proof, but also of the meaningfulness of propositions, will suggest that many of the articles of faith may not only be unwarranted and unreasonable, but not even meaningful. To see his arguments, we now turn to Hume.

Chapter 4

The Formative Phase III: Hume

4.1 Introduction

By the time of Locke’s death in 1704, one finds increasing divisions in religious practice in Britain on the one hand, and a sustained growth in empirical ‘natural philosophy’ on the other, that led to increasing challenges to religious belief. Divisions and disruptions were to characterize the rest of the century.

The eighteenth century was a time of conflict and war in the Anglo-American world. The death of Queen Anne in 1714, and the assumption to the British throne of the German, the Prince-Elector George, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, led to protests in England and to Jacobite uprisings in Scotland in 1715 and 1745, pitting the supporters of the predominantly Catholic House of Stuart against those of the Protestant House of Hanover. Military, particularly naval activities by Britain led to expanded trade, but also a number of wars and conflicts, notably, the Seven Years War of 1756-63 – arguably, the first war fought across the globe – and the American War of Independence (1775-83), which led to the loss of Britain’s American colonies.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century, studies of nature by Isaac Newton (1642–1727), Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), David Hartley (1705-57) and Edmund Halley (1656-1742), promoted the development of the empirical sciences and the understanding of the regularities of nature, which challenged existing explanations of the cosmos. These developments, together with greater contact with other cultures through trade, led some to wonder not only of the truth of religion, but whether and how human beings who lacked Christian revelation could come to a knowledge of the divine and its purposes. Drawing on the maxim of ‘the book of Scripture and the book of Nature,’ figures, such as Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) and Matthew Tindal (1657-1733), argued that nature, independent of scripture, could provide a basis for religious belief – that “God's will is so clearly and fully manifested in the book of nature, that he who runs may read it."[1] This became the foundation for a natural theology that developed alongside natural philosophy.[2]

Eighteenth-century Britain also saw shifts in the religious sphere. While religious controversies in Britain continued, the character was changing. The (English) Bill of Rights of 1689 had prohibited Roman Catholics from succeeding to the throne of England[3]; this was confirmed by the Act of Settlement of 1701.[4] The so-called "Popery Act" of 1698 – "An Act for the further preventing the Growth of Popery" (11 Will. III, c. 4) – extended restrictions on Roman Catholics and the practice of Roman Catholicism in England. The 1706 Treaty of Union between England and Scotland, and the Acts of Union of 1707, united the parliaments of the two countries on 1 May 1707, but also confirmed the exclusion of Catholics to the united throne. But, by the early 1700s, the controversies between Catholic and Anglican apologists shifted to debate among Anglicans and other Protestants (usually members of the reformed traditions). The focus was now primarily on practice and on individual piety, and not the meaning or truth of doctrine. There was also an increase in 'dissenting' or 'non-conforming,' evangelical, and reform movements within the Church of England, such as Methodism, and a religious revival in England and the British colonies in New England – called the 'First Great Awakening.'

At the same time, the eighteenth century also saw the growth and flourishing of Enlightenment ideas. Writers on religion increasingly took a lead from Locke, and sought to remove reason from its place within faith. And the rationalism, scepticism, and humanism of Europe found a place in Scotland, more perhaps than in England, in the writings of such men as Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), Adam Smith (1723-90), and David Hume (1711-1776). Hume in particular came to offer an extended and highly controversial response to the question of the reasonableness of religious belief – an approach that built on Locke, but which also challenged many of Locke's positive views. In this chapter, I want to look at the underlying principles of Hume's views and, particularly, the challenges that he brought to the understanding of the reasonableness of religious belief.

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[1] Tindal (1730: 1, 28). For more on Tindal, see Hudson (2009).

[2] See Mandelbrote (2013) and Force and Popkin (1990).

[3] See 1688 c. 2 (Regnal. 1 Will and Mar Sess 2) "An Act Declaring the Rights and Liberties of the Subject and Settling the Succession of the Crown," in Key and Bucholz (2009: 248). Among the concerns noted in the Preamble was: "it hath been found by experience that it is inconsistent with the safety and welfare of this Protestant kingdom to be governed by a papist prince."

[4] See William III, 1700 & 1701: An Act for the further Limitation of the Crown and better securing the Rights and Liberties of the Subject [Chapter II. Rot. Parl. 12 & 13 Gul. III. p. 1. n. 2], in *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 7, 1695-1701* (1820: 636-638).

4.2 David Hume[5]

Though not a theologian, many of David Hume's writings bore on religion, and his work influenced theologians and philosophers, not only of his time, but of succeeding generations.

Hume was born in Edinburgh in 1711, the son of a landed gentleman and advocate. Hume's father died when Hume was two, and Hume was raised and educated by his mother. His family background was Scots Calvinist (i.e., Presbyterian), though Hume read works by Anglican divines in his youth.[6] At the precocious age of 11 (or 12), Hume went up to the University of Edinburgh. It was at this time, it seems, that Hume began to abandon his Presbyterian faith, largely, as he related to James Boswell, as a result of reading Locke and Samuel Clarke.[7] While at university, Hume also read the work of Newton, Grotius, and

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[5] For basic biographical information, one may consult: Stephen (1891). The classic early 20th century study is Kemp Smith (1941); an extensive account, from a broadly cultural and literary perspective, is Mossner (1954; second edition 1980). Other major intellectual biographies of Hume are: Noxon (1973); Garrett (2015); Harris (2015). Of course, one may also consult Hume's own autobiographical statements: one made early in his career, the other very shortly before his death. See "Appendix: Hume's Autobiographies" in Norton and Taylor (2009: 515-530).

[6] Hume was, for example, familiar with the writings of Tillotson. See White (1988: 150-153). See also Levine (1988).

[7] In his "An Account of My Last Interview with David Hume, Esq.," Boswell writes: "he never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke" (Boswell 1931: 76); reprinted in *Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Hume 1947: 76-79). For Hume's *Works*, see: *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, 4 vols., ed. TH Green and TH Grose (1875-82). The most recent edition is *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume* (1998-ongoing).

Shaftesbury. Hume left university in 1725 or 1726[8], though he did not take a degree, studied law (1726-29) (Vanderburgh 2019: 85), and worked briefly in a Merchant's office, but then proceeded to engage in a lengthy period of reading and self education.

In 1734, at the age of 23, Hume moved to France, where he could live inexpensively, settling near La Flèche, which was famous for the Jesuit college that had educated Descartes. He read Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) and Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715), and Enlightenment figures such as Bernard de Mandeville (1670-1733) and Voltaire (1694–1778) (Harris 2015: 85). It was here that he began writing his *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Hume returned to England in 1737, and Books I and II of the *Treatise* appeared (anonymously) in 1739, with Book III following in 1740; the topics covered led some to regard the author as a sceptic and an atheist. Hume applied for Chairs in Philosophy at Edinburgh (1745) and at Glasgow (1751), though he was turned down, presumably because of allegations of his "heresy, deism, skepticism, and atheism" (Stephen 1891: 217).[9] From 1746 to 1749, Hume served intermittently as a secretary to General James St Clair, spending time in Austria and Italy in 1748-49. Later, he was Secretary and, subsequently, chargé d'affaires at the British embassy in Paris (1763-65).

Throughout this time, Hume wrote assiduously. Though he had made no special study of theology[10], Hume was interested in religion throughout his life, and several of his books

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In this chapter, I refer to the following works by Hume: *The History of England*, 6 vols. (1778/1995); *Essays: Moral, Political, Literary* (1777/1985); *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40/1975), *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748/1999); *The Letters of David Hume* (1932), *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779/1947; the 1947 edition contains a landmark introduction); *A Dissertation on the Passions* (1757/2007); *The Natural History of Religion* (1757/2007); and *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh* (1745).

References to *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, and the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* are included in the text. For the *Enquiry*, references are to ECHU followed by Book, Part (if applicable), and paragraph. For the *Treatise*, references are to T followed by Book, Part, Chapter, and paragraph. For the *Dialogues*, references are to *Dialogues*, Part, and paragraph.

[8] The date is uncertain. See Mossner (2000: 52).

[9] Whether Hume was an atheist, or whether he held, for example, that religious language (and religion) were meaningless or whether he was a kind of deist or whether he had a 'natural belief' are debated issues. See the discussion below.

[10] Hume had, however, at least a casual interest in theology and in the sectarian debates of the preceding

"had considerable theological significance."[11] Aside from the *Treatise*, his other works that dealt with 'natural religion' – i.e., 'religion based on principles of human reason and experience, and independent of revelation or religious dogma'[12] – were the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* with its famous essay *On Miracles,* which appeared in 1748*;* his 'essay' "The Natural History of Religion*,*" dealing with the 'origin in nature' of religion, written about 1751 (and published in 1757[13]), and the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, where one finds a discussion of major claims that bear on religion (e.g., the possibility of proofs for God's existence, the nature and character of a divine being, and the problem of evil), written beginning in 1752; this latter work was not published until after his death – and, initially, anonymously – in 1779.[14] Hume's writings challenged not only the reasonability of believing religious or theological claims and the possibility of reasoning about these matters, but even what it is to be reasonable.

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centuries. He refers, in *The History of England*, to "Chillingworth, an acute disputant against the papists" (Hume 1995: VI, Ch. 62. p. 154), and he mentions Tillotson twice: once to refer to Tillotson's argument against the real presence (ECHU, X/1, 1), and once to allude to Tillotson's view that "That the Being of a God is not capable of Demonstration, but of moral Evidence" (*A Letter From A Gentleman To His Friend In Edinburgh* [Hume 1745: 22]). There, he writes: "Bishop *Tillotson* has used a Degree of Freedom on this Head, which I would not willingly allow myself; 'tis in his excellent Sermon *concerning the Wisdom of being religious,* where he says, *That the Being of a God is not capable of Demonstration, but of moral Evidence.* I hope none will pretend that that pious Prelate intended by these Assertions to weaken the Evidences for a Divine Existence, but only to distinguish accurately its Species of Evidence."

[11] Paul Russell notes, for example, that "Hume's skepticism regarding the powers of demonstrative reason" runs "throughout the Treatise", and "that both Hume and his contemporaries recognized that these important skeptical arguments were aimed primarily against the dogmatic Christian rationalism of John Locke and above all Samuel Clarke"; see Russell (1988: 247). As detailed below, Hume also had criticisms of Catholic teachings along with challenges to the testimony of scripture, miracles, and knowledge of the divine attributes.

[12] For Hume, "dogmas [were] invented on purpose to tame and subdue the rebellious reason of mankind" (ECHU XII/2, 2).

[13] While some scholars dismiss the importance of this essay, P. J. E. Kail argues that it helps to refute the claim that religion can be reasonable (see Kail 2007). Moreover, in the *Treatise*, Hume argues, for example, that religious belief depends on devotional exercises, "the good effect of those external motives … inlivining" (see T I.3.8.4), and monotheism, as he writes in *The Natural History of Religion*, depends on hypocrisy and self-deception (See Penelhum [1983: 173]).

[14] Some authors – Wiseman (2009); Huberman (2007); and Schaeffer (2009) – refer to an alleged early essay of Hume, entitled "Of Superstition and Religion." But there is no evidence in Hume's *Works* of the existence of an essay with that title. There is, however, an essay entitled "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," in the first

Hume sought to avoid public controversy about matters of religion.[15] Still, he was widely regarded as a sceptic and an atheist and, in 1756, a Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland proposed that Hume's writings be investigated for attacks upon Christianity, "if not establishing direct atheism" (Stephen 1891: 220). It is said that some argued that Hume could not be charged with heresy by the Church, as he was an atheist and did not belong to the Church; in any event, the General Assembly did not pursue the charges.[16] What Hume's religious views were, exactly, and whether he was in religious, and other, matters a pyrrhonistic or a mitigated sceptic are also matters of some debate.[17]

Hume's views build on those of Locke. Like Locke,[18] he adopts an empiricist approach, is interested in the extent and limits of human knowledge, and argues that the reasonableness of believing depends upon evidence; in this way, like Locke, he anticipates evidentialism. But he goes beyond Locke's views in significant ways and, in doing so, challenges a number of Locke's claims, such as his defence of Christianity.

On his return to Britain in 1766, Hume worked briefly as 'Under Secretary of State for the Northern Department (i.e., for northern Europe), but returned to Edinburgh in 1769. In 1775 he was diagnosed with abdominal cancer, and died the following year.

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collection of Hume's *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, first published in 1741.

[15] While Hume seems to have been somewhat timorous in seeking anonymity in publication, it is worth noting that blasphemy was still, according to the Scottish *Act Against Blasphemy* 1661 and *Act Against Blasphemy* 1695, a capital offense. The last execution for blasphemy – that of Thomas Aikenhead – took place in Scotland in 1697. One understands why, then, Hume was very circumspect in publishing, during his lifetime, on matters of religion. (The penalty for blasphemy in Scotland was reduced to a fine or imprisonment only in 1825, and the last prosecution was only in 1843.) For an official record of the trial and prosecution of Aikenhead, see Howell (1816: 13, 917-935).

[16] This was not a small matter, but neither does it seem to have been particularly exceptional. For example, other academics – such as the Professor of Moral Philosophy, Francis Hutcheson (in 1738), and the theologian and Professor of Divinity, William Leechman (in 1744), were charged with, though acquitted of, heresy (see Stewart 2014: 13).

[17] For example, Gaskin (1988: 113-119) argues that Hume was a deist; Bailey and O'Brien (2014), however, defend that view that he was an atheist.

[18] According to Frederick Copleston, "Hume's plan is to extend to philosophy in general the methodological limitations of Newtonian physics"; see Copleston (2003: 406).

Aside from engaging, sometimes indirectly, some of the religious views of his time[19], Hume's writings had an influence on a range of later theologians and philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant, Johann Joachim Spalding[20], William Clifford[21], and Søren Kierkegaard[22]. While Hume's empiricism is an elaboration and extension of insights and principles in Locke, to many it provided an acid test that a reasonable religion could not pass, and it continues to this day to have a strong influence on discussions on fundamental questions in religion, such as arguments for the existence of a first cause and of a designer, and the problem of evil.

4.3 Knowledge, evidence, and proof

Hume's views on the reasonableness of religious belief reflect his general views on reasonability and the nature of human reason and understanding. Like Locke, Hume insists on "the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding" (ECHU XII/3, 2), noting, as Locke had with regard to 'enthusiasm,' the tendency for human beings to wander from what can be known: "the *imagination* of man is naturally sublime, delighted with whatever is remote and extraordinary, and running, without control, into the most distant parts of space and time in order to avoid the objects, which custom has rendered too familiar to it" (ECHU XII/3, 2).

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[19] Hume notes that, in response to the *Treatise*, "Answers *by Reverends, and Right Reverends, came out two or three in a year*; and I found, by Dr. Warburton's railing, that the books were beginning to be esteemed in good company" (see his 'My Own Life', in Norton and Taylor (2009: 525), emphasis mine).

[20] Hume is said to have influenced, for example, the German theologian of the Enlightenment, Johann Spalding (1714-1804). Spalding had translated Joseph Butler's "The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature," and, in his *The Usefulness of the Ministry in Preaching and its Improvement* [2002], took on Hume's critiques of Christian clergy and his "general equation of religion with superstition." For Spalding, religion was necessary for "social virtue," and that the role of the preacher was to promote the common good. See Graf (2003).

[21] See Chapter 8 of the present study, below.

[22] See, for example, Popkin (1941: 276-8) and Miles (2009). Kierkegaard took Hume's corrosive critique of religion as establishing the need for a non-rational, fideist approach to religion, so that, in a sense, Christianity is "against understanding" and contrary to reason.

Hume insists, then, not only that one should "never be tempted to go beyond common life" in what one claims to know, but that human knowledge and understanding are even more limited than Locke had considered.

What can human beings 'know'? First, in a way apparently similar to Locke, Hume notes that human beings have 'impressions' – the result of sense perception. These impressions are "all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will." These impressions give rise to ideas (e.g., the contents of memory, causal judgements, etc.), which are also more or less 'lively.' Our understanding, then, is a matter of the association of ideas. Human beings have the capacity to combine ideas – and this gives rise to knowledge and belief.

Hume writes that human beings can 'know' only two kinds of things: 'matters of abstract reason' and 'matters of fact,' and that these are "all the objects of human reason or enquiry" (ECHU, IV/1, 1). Matters of reason are matters of the "abstract sciences" – mathematics, logic, and so on; they are matters of which we can be certain because they do not deal with empirical matters or experience. Matters of fact deal with what exists or can be observed, and so on, but which are not necessarily or always true. Morality and other value judgements (e.g., aesthetic judgements), Hume says, are not objects of understanding, but of taste and sentiment. Further, general principles, such as the principle of cause and effect, are, again, not strictly objects of knowledge but, rather, are held based on custom or habit.[23]

What we claim we know or reasonably believe must be based on either demonstration or evidence. Here, Hume, again, develops Locke. Locke spoke of there being, basically, two ways in which one can hold a claim rationally or reasonably: as a result of demonstration and as a result of probabilities. Hume, however, explains the ways in which we can know or hold a claim reasonably, as falling into three categories – explicitly developing Locke. Hume argues that if, as Locke holds, there were only demonstrations and probabilities, then matters for which there is no room for doubt, but which could not be demonstrated – such as ‘all men must die’ or that ‘the sun must rise tomorrow’ – would be only “probabilities,” which seems clearly too weak a claim. To make our conceptual categories consistent with “common life” and common use, Hume proposes that we add the category of “proofs.”

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[23] Even general claims, such as that stones fall and that fires burn, are claims for which, Hume says, one cannot "give a satisfactory reason" (ECHU XII/3, 2).

Thus, to say that one holds a claim reasonably, one must be able to show that one has a demonstration or a proof, or that what one is claiming is probable. A demonstration, Hume writes, is the “more perfect species of knowledge” (ECHU XII/3, 4), and is so rigorous that when a proposition is said to be demonstrated, to deny it is to be involved in a contradiction. On this view, no proposition expressing a matter of fact or matter of existence can be demonstrated.[24] For propositions expressing matters of fact – and anything based on experience – we have either “proof” or “probabilities” (ECHU, X/1, 6). As we have just seen, the former deals with those matters for which there is no room for doubt – by which Hume presumably means no room for psychological doubt – and is something about which one cannot raise any reasonable question (T I.3.4.1). The latter (i.e., probabilities) concern those cases where there is some evidence on either side, but that there is a “superiority of chances for one side over another”; as this superiority increases, it “begets ... a higher degree of belief or assent.” Thus, what is reasonable – i.e., provable or, as the case may be, probable – is proportionate to the evidence. Thus, in ECHU Section X, Hume writes that

> “A wise man [...] proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experiences as a full *proof* of the future existence of that event. In other cases, he proceeds with more caution; he weights the opposite

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[24] Compare this view with that found in Locke’s essay “Faith and Reason” (26 Aug 1676). Locke writes: “There needed no faith to persuade beholders that it was fire that the three children [in Daniel 3] were put into; they knew it, they saw it, there was no need to believe; faith would not have given them so great an assurance. *The thing to be believed was a proper object of faith and not of sense, a mental proposition*, viz. that the God of the three children *was the true God*. So in the matter of transubstantiation: the question is not a matter of faith but of philosophy. It is a thing we exercise our senses and knowledge on and not our faith, and so clear that there is not room to doubt” (Locke 1954: 277, emphasis mine).

> experiments; he considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments: To that side he inclines, with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgment the evidence exceeds not what we properly call *probability*." (ECHU X/1, 4).

What is 'evidence,' and what can count as evidence? By 'evidence,' here, Hume means either a direct sense impression of something, or an idea which is the product of such an impression or impressions, or something that can be logically inferred from these ideas.[25]

Now, one source of most of what people claim they believe or know is testimony.[26] As in Locke and Tillotson, testimony does seem to have a place in proof and probability in Hume; Hume writes "some human testimony has the utmost force and authority in some cases" (ECHU, X/2, 15), such as when it relates historical events (e.g., that "Caesar was killed in the senate-house on the ides of March" [T I.3.4.2]), though it is far from always being reliable. So, Hume continues, for testimony to contribute to our stock of information, what is to be testified to should be "attested by a sufficient number of men," and that those who provide the testimony should be "of … unquestioned good sense, education, and learning," of "undoubted integrity," and "of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood." And, finally, that what is being testified to should not be "contrary to custom and experience" (ECHU X/2, 28).

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[25] For Hume, "experience [is to] be the true standard of this, as well as of all other judgments" (T I.3.9.12)

[26] Although much of Antony Flew's influential *Hume's Philosophy of Belief* (1961/2013), is an attempt to take themes from the *Enquiry* to engage contemporary philosophical issues, his Chapter VIII, "Miracles and Methodology," provides a more scholarly discussion of Hume's treatment of testimony, particularly in ECHU X. Flew claims that Hume is being 'defensive' here – presumably, seeking to resist the 'enthusiasm' that Locke, too, had sought to address in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* – that his argument is to be only a "*check* to all kinds of superstitious delusion" (ECHU X/1, 2). This does not accord, however, with Hume's remarks concerning the impossibility of miracles and presumably, therefore, the impossibility that any testimony could establish them. That being said, Flew does recognise that Hume's strictures on arguments from experience, if plausible, not only undercut 'metaphysical superstition' but also many other – for example, historical – beliefs based on testimony.

Hume notes, however, that for testimony to meet this threshold for reliability is a challenge, "by reason of the bigotry, ignorance, cunning, and roguery of a great part of mankind" (ECHU X/2, 13), and because "the knavery and folly of men are such common phenomena" (ECHU X/2, 24). Indeed, the courts themselves have difficulty in establishing what is reasonable (ECHU X/2, 19) – recall that Hume had spent some time at the study of law as a young man. Hume notes the "passion of surprise and wonder" that engages people to give certain testimonies; that "when anything is affirmed utterly absurd and miraculous, it [i.e., the mind] rather the more readily admits of such a fact"; and that people experience "the pleasure of telling a piece of news so interesting, of propagating it, and of being the first reporters of it" (ECHU X/2, 6), regardless of whether they have evidence to believe that it is true. Furthermore, for Hume, even if the testimony does have "authority," this does not necessarily establish the truth of what is testified to, but simply to the reasonability of believing the testimony.

For Hume, then, a "full proof" (ECHU X/1, 4) involves the individual having "infallible" experience or evidence for a conclusion – e.g., one has no evidence of there being a contrary experience. A "probability" is the result of the individual weighing alternatives, and, to the extent that one side has a greater number of "experiments and observations," this "produce[s] a degree of evidence" that allows a person to 'fix' his judgment with the corresponding amount of "probability."

Note that 'fixing one's judgment', for Hume, seems to be a matter of 'custom' – of habit – and not something more. Hume writes:

> "the same reasoning extends to the operations of the mind. Whether we consider the influence of the will in moving our body, or in governing our thought, it may safely be affirmed, that we could never foretel the effect, … without experience. And even after we have experience of these effects, *'tis custom alone, not reason*, which determines us to make it the standard of our future judgments." (T, "Abstract"; emphasis mine)

This categorization of the ways in which a person can reasonably hold a proposition sounds fairly straightforward – though, as we will see presently, it may not have straightforward consequences.

Some have found Hume's categorization of what it is to hold a claim reasonably to be problematic – and this bears on his accounts of belief and religious belief.

First, it is not clear how Hume can consistently hold this account of demonstration, proof, and probability, given his view in the *Treatise* about the basis for belief in general principles such as 'cause and effect' which, he says, is based simply on custom alone, not reason. Again, while Hume asserts that only propositions which are demonstrated are known, it is unclear on what basis he makes this claim. Why cannot intuition count as knowledge? Why can one not say that one knows something relative to what the subject matter allows? These are questions that Hume does not apparently address.

Second, it is worth noting here that proof and probability seem to be individual matters – e.g., what it is reasonable for the person concerned to claim to know or believe. For example, the 'deliberation' concerning matters of probability is subjective; it is the deliberation of a single agent. [27] Thus, the standard of reasonability is not a general, but a relative or subjective one.

Third, how one is to determine probabilities and determine "a superiority of chances for one side over another" is never fully explained. Hume seems to describe this process as just a matter of subtracting[28] the evidence for one side (i.e., the lesser number of experiences) from the other (i.e., the greater), but there is surely more to the process of deliberation than that. For example, one needs to 'weigh' each piece of evidence, hold each piece up to evaluation, before weighing it against the other evidence. The closest model of what determining probabilities might look like is the kind of process that one might find in a jury.[29]

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[27] In a letter to the Rev. Hugh Blair (Letter 188), Hume writes, "No man can have any other experience but his own. The experience of others becomes his only by the credit which he gives to their testimony; which proceeds from his own experience of human nature" (Hume 1932: 1, 349).

[28] Hume writes: "we have nothing to do but *subtract* the one from the other, and embrace an opinion, either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises *from the remainder*" (ECHU, X/2, 22, emphasis mine).

Hume's conditions for reasonable belief have led him to be called – and perhaps led him to call himself – a sceptic. What kind of scepticism that might be – pyrrhonian or mitigated – is unclear, and Hume himself recognises that radical scepticism collapses in on itself, and "nature is always too strong for [such] principle" (ECHU XII/2, 7). We will return to the issue of whether this standard of reasonability leads to scepticism later in this chapter.

4.4 Belief

Much has been written on Hume's concept of belief. [30] In fact, Hume seems to have several different understandings of 'belief,' and one can readily identify two, if not three, senses in his work. While I cannot enter into the debate about whether these senses are indeed distinct, the importance of seeing the possible impact of these different senses on the reasonability of religious belief is evident.

In Section X of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, belief is presented as something voluntary or, at least, as within the control of the believer. Recall Hume's remark, cited above, about "A wise man [...] proportion[ing] his belief to the evidence." His view seems to be that, depending on the nature and kind of one's experience and evidence, and one's consideration or reflection about whether a claim or its negation is supported by more evidence, the individual decides – i.e., 'fixes his judgment' (ECHU, X/1, 4) – about whether to believe or assent to the claim. (Hume seems to take belief and assent to be the same: in general, he holds that "to believe something is to assent to it as true" (Owen 2003:

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[29] Recall Hume's training in law, cf earlier.

[30] See, for example, Hodges and Lachs (1976) – replied to by Gorman (1993); Kamooneh (2003); Owen (2003); and Smalligan Marušić (2010).

16; see also Owen 1999: 189) and, in the *Treatise*, he takes them to be synonymous, referring to “*belief* or *assent*.” (T I.3.5.8; I.3.8.6; I.3.9.8).)

As we have seen, if the evidence that one has is universal and constant, we have, Hume says, a proof. If, however, the experience is not constant – if it varies, or if one is aware of countervailing experiences – we have probability. Thus, “according as the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable” (ECHU X/1, 6), we “incline” towards ‘proof’ as it is constant, and ‘probability’ as it is variable.

Here, then, belief is presented as being based on evidence and experience. And since one presumably adjudicates the relative influence or weight of that experience before fixing one’s judgment, it is the individual’s responsibility what he or she believes. (Again, it is worth noting that this process describes the means of determining the reasonableness of the belief – or, to be more precise, the reasonableness of one believing – not of the truth or falsity of the belief.) On this view, then, beliefs are claims for which one can give reasons or evidence, and for which one has responsibility for believing them.

Hume, however, gives a different, or at least a distinct, account of belief in the *Treatise* and in Section VI of the ECHU. There, belief is *not* something voluntary, or, at least, is not something that seems to be within one’s control. Hume writes that “belief… is nothing but *a more vivid and intense conception of any idea*” (T I.3.10.3). It is the result of a “concurrence of several views in one particular event” that “*imprints the idea* more strongly on the imagination; [and] gives it *superior* force and vigour” (ECHU, VI, 3, emphasis mine). Belief, then, seems to be the effect of a mental process, not evidence. Hume states that “by an inexplicable *contrivance of nature*”, this ‘superiority’ of force and vigour, “begets immediately… the *sentiment* of belief” (ECHU, VI, 3, emphasis mine). Some examples of such belief would be: (now) my belief that I am in a room, surrounded by my books; that the floor under my feet is solid, that I see snow outside my window, and so on – ideas that are, now, vivid and lively. What distinguishes such beliefs from one’s other ideas, then, is that a belief is "a firmer and stronger conception of an object than that which attends mere fictions of the imagination" (ECHU, VI, 3).[31]

Here, then, belief is naturalistic; it seems to be something caused or 'triggered' in us, and not the result of evidence.[32] Belief seems to be a "feeling" or a naturally caused mental state, and there seems to be no room for giving or withholding assent. Belief, then, is the result of a natural, causal process; there is no process of judgement involving reason.

There is, arguably, a third sense in which Hume uses the term 'belief' – to refer specifically to certain kinds of belief. Here, belief is not just the product of a mental process, but something "natural." Hume gives illustrations of this in the *Treatise* and in *The Natural History of Religion.* For example, he writes that:

> "The sceptic . . . must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, though he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity. *Nature has not left this to his choice*, and has doubtless esteemed it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask, What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body? but 'tis vain to ask, Whether there be body or not? That is a point which we must take for granted in all our reasonings." (T I.4.2.1, emphasis mine)

Such beliefs of "naïve common sense," according to JCA Gaskin (1974: 286; see also Gaskin 1988: 113-119): are "non-rational" (Butler 1960: 78) – we cannot give arguments for them; are not founded on sense experience or reason; are "unavoidable" (Butler 1960: 78) or "inevitable" (Kemp Smith 1941b: 87) (and so, presumably, involuntary); and are necessary as a precondition of reasoning and action.

One might well ask whether these three senses of belief are consistent, for Hume's understanding of belief clearly bears on the issue of the reasonability of belief.

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[31] Similarly, in the *Treatise*, Hume writes that a "belief is nothing but an idea, that is different from a fiction, not in the nature, or the order of its parts, but in the manner of its being conceived." (see T I.3.7.7).

Consider, first, sense 2: belief as ‘triggered.’ Hume’s account here seems to reflect how he says that knowledge and belief are based on perception: we see something (have an impression of it[33]), then have an idea of it and identify what it is, and – if it is vivid and forceful – react (i.e., have a belief about it). Recall, for example, that, in the *Treatise*, Hume writes that a belief is a particularly vivid idea – i.e., “a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression” (T I.3.7.6), and “a more vivid and intense conception of any idea” (T I.3.10.3). This is not voluntary and is non-rational (e.g., there is no inference), though not ungrounded; there is a cause – beliefs are ‘triggered.’ Moreover, beliefs are subjective; one’s beliefs are (as some say today) ‘true for oneself’; these beliefs, as beliefs, are not true or false, ‘right’ or ‘wrong.’ Second, on this account beliefs are not something rational or based on argument; one does not believe based on reasons. Belief is caused. The belief simply happens. Thus, some beliefs seem to be matters of feeling or sentiment – Hume talks about morality and aesthetics (beliefs concerning beauty) as ‘sentiments’ – and not, therefore, as matters of proof. Indeed, because believing is subjective, non-rational, and not making a claim about a ‘state of affairs’, there seems to be no way of assessing, independently of the believer – the reasonability and unreasonability – of the belief.

Now, normally, when one speaks about beliefs, it seems that we need to be able to judge them, or make a determination of whether we ought to believe them. Yet it is not clear how we could (or would) do this on this understanding of belief, for they are simply triggered in us. But there is another problem with this account. For Hume, “reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions [sentiments], and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (T II.3.3.4).[34] (Thus, Norman Kemp Smith, for example, writes that reason is, therefore, just another kind of belief[35] or an instinct[36].) If Kemp Smith is correct,

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[32] For the distinction between reasons for a belief and the causes of a belief, see Gaskin (1993: xvii).

[33] Recall that, for Hume, impressions are: "all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will" (ECHU II, 3).

[34] Kemp Smith writes that this “has its exact counterpart in [Hume’s] theory of knowledge” (1941a: 156).

[35] Kemp Smith holds that reason is merely “generalised belief” (1941a: 151); see (1941b: 85).

[36] Hume writes: "To consider the matter aright, reason is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in

reason is limited and is in little position to judge authoritatively, for it is simply another 'kind' of belief. In short, if we are to understand beliefs as triggered, then it is difficult to see how one can speak of it being reasonable (or unreasonable) to hold them – unless one distinguishes belief and assent to a belief.

Consider, now, sense 3 of belief, 'natural belief.' For Hume, as we have seen, some belief is 'natural'. Such beliefs do not seem to be triggered by an impression or an idea or group of ideas. But, while not founded on sense experience, and not the product of reasons or argument, they are "unavoidable" and universally held, and we need these beliefs in order to act in the world; indeed, we cannot act without believing them. So, Hume seems to allow, we all have a natural propensity to believe such beliefs as the existence of the self, of "an external universe" (ECHU XII/1, 7), of relations of cause and effect[37], and perhaps more.[38] Given, however, that such beliefs are not based on demonstrations, or proofs, or probabilities, one may well wonder whether such beliefs are 'reasonable.'

When we turn to belief in sense 1 of belief – where to believe is to hold a claim 'voluntarily' – belief is explicitly stated as based on proof and probabilities, and on data from experience. Recall that Hume says that we should believe only when we have evidence, and in proportion to the evidence. What this means is that we ought not believe (either for or against) the existence of anything for which we lack appropriate or sufficient evidence. (This is a prefiguration of what later was called 'evidentialism.'[39])

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our souls." [T 1.3.16.9]; this is discussed in Kemp Smith (1941a: 166).

[37] Hume's discussions in some texts suggest a very different view – e.g., that there is no evidence that human beings are more than a bundle of ideas and impressions, that causality is simply a custom or habit, and so on – that would seem to be at least in tension with this view.

[38] For example, that there is order and, possibly, that there is design. (See Hume's remark that: "The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflexion, *suspend his belief* a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion" [*Natural History of Religion*, Introduction, para. 1]) and, some have argued, to God (see, *Natural History of Religion*, section 4, para. 1).

[39] See the remarks on the origins of the term 'evidentialism,' in Chapter 5, below.

On this view of belief as voluntary, however, what can one be reasonable in believing? It seems that, on Hume's view, strictly speaking, we have no good reason to believe anything that goes beyond (present) evidences – we have no grounds to believe, e.g., general principles (e.g., causality, order, stability), that the future will be like the past, a 'self' (distinct from memories, intellect, will), and so on. For example, concerning the self, Hume asks: "[F]rom what impression could this idea [of a self] be derived?"; Hume answers that:

> "But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is derived; and consequently there is no such idea" (T I.4.6.2)

In other words, Hume replies, evidence and reason for believing in a 'self' is, at best, minimal. Hence, presumably, the need for 'natural belief.'

This level of scepticism, interestingly, does not seem to be carried throughout his writings, for example, concerning those cases where one may claim that one has proven or shown a 'negative' (e.g., that that it is *un*reasonable to believe in, or that there is no, transubstantiation; no miracles, and so on).[40]

For example, Hume gives us an example of:

> "The Indian prince, who refused to believe the first relations concerning the effects of frost, *reasoned justly*; and it naturally required *very strong testimony* to engage his assent to facts, that arose from a state of nature, with which he was unacquainted, and which bore so little analogy to those events, of which he had had

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[40] This kind of reasoning is parallel to that used to defend the view that, for example, certain beings (e.g., ghosts, spirits, unicorns) do *not* exist. "If someone were to assert that there is an elephant on the quad, then the failure to observe an elephant there would be good reason to think that there is no elephant there. [For example] in the absence of evidence rendering the existence of some entity probable, we are justified in believing that it does not exist, provided that (1) it is not something that might leave no traces and (2) we have comprehensively surveyed the area where the evidence would be found if the entity existed." (Moreland and Craig 2009: 157).

> constant and uniform experience. Though they were not contrary to his experience, they were not conformable to it.” (ECHU X/1, 10, emphasis mine).

Here, it seems clear that the Indian Prince was able to form a belief, and later to change it, based on evidence; belief is, in other words, voluntary. In this sense of belief, note again that, even if one has evidence for it, a belief which conforms with the evidence is not necessarily a true belief. Indeed, while the Indian Prince’s belief about the effects of frost was not true, Hume allows that the Prince had a justified or reasonable belief given his experience and given that he had no countervailing evidence.

Some have argued that these different senses of belief are consistent, and that, given Hume’s epistemology, belief is ‘naturalistic’ – i.e., not voluntary. But if this is so, it does not seem consistent with Hume’s extensive discussion of, and sceptical views on religious belief, which – at the very least – suggest that some people could also have reasons or grounds to change their beliefs, or give them up.[41] While some beliefs are, plausibly, ‘naturalistic’ or natural, Hume’s emphasis that belief be proportionate to the evidence, and that there are failures in reasoning, suggests that other beliefs are voluntary – and this is how I take the matter, here. In any event, the purpose of this study is not to resolve this issue of the consistency of these accounts of belief but, in light of these remarks, we can now consider how Hume’s reader is to understand religious belief.

4.4.1 What is religious belief?

What, then, is the connection between religious faith and belief? As we have seen, Hume seems to have several different understandings of ‘belief, and he seems to have different understandings of ‘faith’ as well.

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[41] This is, effectively, Price’s (1969) and Passmore’s (1977) view. Donald McQueen suggests, however, that ‘the proportioning of belief’ is not an ‘act’ and may express, rather, simply the degree of conviction that occurs when a certain amount of evidence is present (see McQueen (1979)). A similar view may be found in Penelhum (1983a).

At times, Hume seems to make a distinction between religious belief and faith; at times, he does not. Though he uses the term ‘religious belief’ rarely**[42]**, he clearly holds that there are ‘beliefs’ of and in religion (e.g., religious doctrines and dogmas, ‘articles of faith,’ and so on).

For Hume, religious beliefs seem to be similar to beliefs in general. Given the preceding account of belief, one would expect that some religious beliefs are, arguably, naturalistic (e.g., a psychological response or psychological state that is triggered); some could be natural, as in the beliefs characteristic of natural religion[43]; and some, arguably, can be held voluntarily and have a foundation in experience.[44] Thus, there appears as if there is nothing distinctive (other than, perhaps, some characteristic about their subject matter, such as the “obscurity” of their object) about religious beliefs; what makes them religious is just that they are beliefs associated with a religious figure, doctrine, or institution.

Hume’s use of the word ‘faith’ is more complicated. Sometimes, ‘faith’ seems to be a synonym for mere 'belief' (see T I.3.9.12[45], I.4.2.56[46], ECHU XII/1, 3). Generally, however,

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[42] In *The Natural History of Religion*, for example, Hume asks “What degree of reason must we expect in the *religious belief* of the vulgar in other nations; when ATHENIANS and AREOPAGITES could entertain such gross misconceptions?” [section 5, para. 8, emphasis mine]. See also, for example, Hume’s remark that: “You propose then, Philo, said Cleanthes, to erect *religious faith* on philosophical scepticism; and you think, that if certainty or evidence be expelled from every other subject of enquiry, it will all retire to these theological doctrines, and there acquire a superior force and authority” (*Dialogues*, I, 5, emphasis mine).

[43] According to Butler (1960), pacē Gaskin (1974).

[44] Locke might say that, if they are problematic, beliefs can be resisted by not acting on them – i.e., one who has these beliefs *need not assent* to them – though, in “Locke and Hume on Belief, Judgment and Assent,” Owen says that Hume does not, and cannot, take this option. See Owen (2003).

[45] In the *Treatise*, Hume writes: “No weakness of human nature is more universal and conspicuous than what we commonly call *credulity,* or a too easy faith in the testimony of others; and this weakness is also very naturally accounted for from the influence of resemblance. When we receive any matter of fact upon human testimony, our faith arises from the very same origin as our inferences from causes to effects, and from effects to causes; nor is there any thing but our *experience* of the governing principles of human nature, which can give us any assurance of the veracity of men.” (T I.3.9.12).

[46] Hume writes: “I begun this subject with premising that we ought to have an implicit faith in our senses” (T I.4.2.56).

Hume seems to take faith and religious belief as distinct – and he uses the word 'faith' in different senses.

Often, he uses 'faith' to refer to a particular creed or system of religious belief, e.g., the Christian or the Catholic faith,[47] and sometimes in a slightly more restricted sense, i.e., the 'rule of faith.'[48] At times, 'faith' seems to be a 'trust,'[49] specifically a trust in a divine being[50] (and so, in this regard, he is not far from Tillotson and Chillingworth) and, at other times, as an 'article of faith.'[51] Sometimes, Hume seems to use faith to mean a disposition to believe something religious – something that moves one to believe or moves one to assent (ECHU X/2, 10)[52] – or a *particular* act of belief (*History*, Vol. 3: 214).

Frequently, however, Hume uses the term 'faith' to describe something *that is the basis for*, or that moves us to adopt religious beliefs. For example, 'faith' is equated with 'divine revelation' and seems to be a kind of source or ground or evidence (but, presumably, not experimental evidence) that is not reason. Thus, Hume writes: "Divinity or Theology...has a foundation in reason, so far as it is supported by experience. But its best and most solid foundation is faith and divine revelation" (ECHU XII/3, 9), and – more directly – that "religion is founded on Faith, not on reason," for this is something that reason is ill-equipped to do[53] (ECHU X/2, 27). And in the *Dialogues*, Philo refers to the "eyes of faith," which allow one to discover certain religious truths.[54]

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[47] See, for example, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (Hume 1902: 343); *Natural History of Religion*, section 6, 2; section 12, 17, etc.. As meaning the Christian, and, even more specifically, the Catholic faith, see Hist*ory of England*, e.g., Vol 1 (Hume 1995: I, 27) and Vol 3 (Hume 1995: III, 136).

[48] For example, in the sense of "the scriptures [as] the sole rule of faith," see *History of England*, Vol 2 (Hume 1995: II, 326) and, in the sense of a standard of faith or true religious belief, see *History of England*, Vol 3 (Hume 1995: III, 242).

[49] For a synonym of trust, see T 3.2.8.9; *History of England*, Vol 1 (Hume 1995: I, 147, 157, 412) and Vol 6 (Hume 1995: VI, 317).

[50] As in the sense of a trust in a divine being, see: *History of England*, Vol 4 (Hume 1995: IV, 249).

[51] 'Faith' can mean 'an article of faith' or a particular religious belief or religious doctrine that may be part of a religious 'confession.' See, for example, *History of England* (Hume 1995): Vol 3 (III, 385) and Vol 5 (V, 10).

[52] In the *Enquiry*, Hume writes, for example, of faith 'moving' a person to assent: "And whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience." (ECHU X/2, 26).

How explicitly faith provides a 'foundation' for religious belief, however, is not clear. Does it offer a kind of evidence – e.g., an impression or an idea arising from divine revelation – or a religious 'experience,' in Hume's sense of the term? Or is faith a kind of reason, as Hume suggests that Locke believes?[55] Again, if one is to take faith as dispositional, Hume does not give us any example of faith as leading to particular activities. Hume's account of religious belief and faith, then, does not seem to be developed, or developed consistently.

In any event, Hume's primary concern does not seem to be with 'faith' as such, as with articles of faith, arising out of scripture or religious tradition, e.g., statements concerning certain miraculous events, or concerning the existence and nature of God. In the discussion that follows, then, I will take 'religious belief' in this latter sense.

In short, then, Hume's presentation of belief is complex, much debated, and does not lend itself to an obvious interpretation. That being said, it does seem possible to identify some features of belief, religious belief, and faith. It seems plausible to see beliefs – specifically, religious beliefs – as 'propositional', i.e., claiming to describe states of affairs, for which empirical evidence is appropriate, and which can be either demonstrated or reasonably-held, based on proofs or probabilities. But while faith may have a 'dispositional' character, on Hume's account 'religious beliefs' do not. Faith, then, can be understood as some kind of source or process that leads one to assent to, or have religious beliefs (e.g., articles of faith,' etc.).

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[53] "it is a sure method of exposing it [i.e., faith] to put it to such a trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure" (ECHU X/2, 25).

[54] Hume writes of the "infinite power and infinite wisdom, which we must discover by the eyes of faith alone." (*Dialogues* X, 37).

[55] Early in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume writes: "Locke seems to have been the first Christian, who ventured openly to assert, that *faith* was nothing but a species of *reason*, that religion was only a branch of philosophy, and that a chain of arguments, similar to that which established any truth in morals,

4.5 Reasonability and Proof in Religious Beliefs

4.5.1 Are faith and/or religious belief reasonable?

We have seen that one who “proportions his belief to the evidence” (ECHU, X/I, 4) is what Hume would call a “reasonable” person.[56] Such a person is not credulous, and not only bases her or his views on evidence (this evidence constituting either a proof or a probability), but can be “*corrected by* experience.”[57]

When it comes to religious belief and ‘articles of faith’, however, there seems to be a significant challenge: Hume says that not only are “the bounds of human understanding” “narrow” (ECHU I, 6),[58] but the subject matter of religion and religious belief is “*obscure* and *uncertain*.*”* Moreover, Hume says that in such matters not only is it the case that not everything can be discussed, but there have not been – and there may never be – conclusive answers, and “reasonable men” may differ.[59] Still, Hume writes, these are

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politics, or physics, was always employed in discovering all the principles of theology, natural and revealed“ (*Dialogues* I, 17).

[56] These individuals are, presumably, “moderate, reasonable , such as men of character” (*History of England*, V: 296). There is some reason to believe that ‘reasonable’ may, however, be a relative term; see Hume’s comment that “the honourable appellations of wise and virtuous, are not annexed to any particular degree of those qualities of *wisdom* and *virtue;* but arise altogether from the comparison we make between one man and another” (*Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, Part 1, Essay 11, para. 7).

[57] In his letter to the Rev. Hugh Blair (who held the Regius Chair of Rhetoric at the University of Edinburgh), Hume writes: “As to the youthful propensity to believe, which is corrected by experience; it seems obvious, that children adopt blindfold all the opinions, principles, sentiments, and passions, of their elders, as well as credit their testimony; nor is this more strange, than that a hammer should make an impression on clay” (Hume 1932: 1, 349).

[58] In ECHU, I, 6, Hume writes: “Man is a *reasonable* being; and as such, receives from science his proper food and nourishment: *But so narrow are the bounds of human understanding,* that little satisfaction can be hoped for in this particular, either from the extent or security of his acquisitions.” Emphasis mine.

[59] Hume suggests that, in such a situation, the appropriate mode is dialogue: “Any question of philosophy, on the other hand, which is so *obscure* and *uncertain*, that human reason can reach no fixed determination with regard to it; if it should be treated at all, seems to lead us naturally into the style of dialogue and conversation. *Reasonable men* may be allowed to differ, where no one can reasonably be positive” (*Dialogues* [Introduction: Pamphilus to Hermippus], 4, emphasis mine). See also *Dialogues* (II, 3), where Hume’s Philo suggests – ironically? – that some matters may be straightforward, i.e., “where reasonable men treat these subjects, the question can never be concerning the *Being,* but only the *Nature,* of the Deity”.

matters that nevertheless are worth pursuing.[60] Hume recognises that there are those who have religious beliefs and faith – and, indeed, there may be a propensity for all human beings to have religious belief – which makes it worth asking whether these beliefs can be sustained, or should be changed or abandoned. So, to answer whether religious beliefs are reasonable, we need to ask if they are provable – but also, Hume seems to suggest, whether they are meaningful.

Hume holds that there can be no demonstration of religious belief. A demonstration, recall, is a 'relation of abstract ideas' and "must imply the absolute impossibility of any contrary supposition" (T I.3.9.10) – and religious beliefs are not simply expressions of abstract ideas, and can be intelligibly disputed. So, if religious beliefs are to be reasonable, they must be the result of either proofs or probabilities. A proof would mean, as we have seen, that the matter is one where one's "conclusions … are founded on an infallible experience" and where one "expects the event with the last degree of assurance"; a probability would be one where there is evidence for and against, or evidence for different views, and the individual "weights the opposite experiments…, [and] considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments" – though there may still be some "doubt and hesitation" (ECHU X/1, 4).

To see whether religious belief can be proven or shown to be probable, let us consider briefly two texts where Hume discusses religion and religious beliefs: the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*[61] and the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.

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[60] In the *Dialogues*, Hume's Pamphilus suggests that this is an irresistible inclination, though possibly a fruitless endeavour. He asks**:** "what obscure questions occur concerning the nature of that Divine Being, his attributes, his decrees, his plan of providence? These have been always subjected to the disputations of men; concerning these *human reason has not reached any certain determination*. But these are topics so interesting, that we cannot restrain our restless enquiry with regard to them; though nothing but doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction, have as yet been the result of our most accurate researches." (Introduction, 5, emphasis mine).

[61] The *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* offers three options or perspectives to explain the relation of faith and reason (or evidence). The figure of Demea offers allegedly *a priori* demonstrative arguments; Cleanthes, *a posteriori* proofs; and Philo is one who whittles away at the arguments of both so that religion is at best a matter of probability. The reader will note that, when it comes to specific arguments - such as Cleanthes' cosmological arguments or his teleological argument - Philo presents alternatives that are, presumably, at least as, if not more, probable than Cleanthes' views. Thus, even the claim that religious belief

The *Dialogues* is an extended reflection on what has been called the argument from design – an argument that there is an intelligent designer of the universe. Here, given that there is order in and of the universe[62] – this is an assumption that, at times, all seem to accept – what can reasonably be inferred from this?

One answer is given through the person of Cleanthes, a theist who professes to provide arguments from experience. Cleanthes rejects the view that the intricacies and order of the universe need no explanation. Moreover, we know, Cleanthes says, that (i) human contrivances (e.g., machines) exhibit intricacies and order, and that they have intelligent designers, and (ii) that the kind of order in the universe resembles the kind of order in these contrivances (e.g., regularity, predictability, etc.). Thus, (iii), on this evidence we can infer – given the principle of analogy that 'similar effects have similar causes' – that there is an intelligent designer of the universe.

Hume has the other interlocutors reflect on Cleanthes' argument. Statement 1 seems to be evident; we all have direct experience of the orderliness of human contrivances and know that they are the creation of intelligent beings. Thus, it is, presumably, a claim that Hume would say is 'proven.' But, some of the interlocutors hold that there are problems in statement 2, and in the inference that follows. Do we have evidence that there is order in the universe, and that the kind of order exhibited in machines is the same as, or similar to, the kind of order in the universe? Cleanthes' interlocutors note, for example, that we know little of the universe, and there seem to be cases where parts of the universe seem disordered (e.g., natural disasters, arbitrary and violent death). This challenges Cleanthes' assertion of a close similarity between the orderliness of the universe and the order in a

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is probable - that it is at least probably true – seems to be undercut. How far this is Hume's intention has been a matter of some debate; see the following note.

[62] In the *Dialogues*, "Philo" seems to allow, at least periodically, that there is a fundamental order; see *Dialogues* XII, 33. While many have identified Hume's own view with that of 'Philo' in the *Dialogues*, as Tweyman (1986) points out, such a claim has been contested, and maintaining it requires 'rethinking' what the text itself claims is going on in the *Dialogues*. Tweyman believes that, Philo – and perhaps Hume – non-ironically abandons Pyrrhonistic scepticism for a more moderate, academic scepticism, and is willing to allow that there are certain natural beliefs, such as in the existence of a deity and, in the present context, an order in the universe.

human contrivance. So the second statement cannot be said to be ‘proven.’ Moreover, even if we grant that the universe is orderly, it seems that we cannot say that it is orderly in the way in which a machine is orderly; there is no firm evidence that there is such a similarity between them. Statement 2, then, is not ‘proven’ but is, at best, a ‘probability’ and, given the evidence of ‘disorderliness,’ more likely a weak probability.

The inference to statement 3, and statement 3 itself, are, equally problematic. Can we reasonably say that the respective ‘effects’ – the universe and a human contrivance – are similar? And even if we admit that there is an intelligible order in the universe, is an *intelligent* ‘designer’ the only explanation of that order? Through the person of Philo, Hume points out that we do not know how the ‘causing’ of (the design of) a universe could take place; there was only one instance of this, in remote history, and it cannot be replicated, so that we can say nothing with certainty about the ‘designing’ process.[63] In fact, Hume notes, not all order requires intelligence; our experience with animal, and even vegetative reproduction shows that order (in the effect, e.g., in the production of subsequent generations) can arise from an ‘unintelligent’ source. Again, even if we assume that the effects are similar and that appropriate signs of order are found in the universe, given our lack of knowledge of the universe, and given that there could be other explanations of order than intelligent design, Cleanthes’ argument – his weighing of “the opposite experiments” – cannot show that his conclusion to an intelligent designer – his “side” – “is supported by the greater number of experiments.” The result, then, is that there is insufficient evidence for affirming that there is an intelligent designer – and, *a fortiori*, for related religious beliefs.

So, when it comes to basic religious beliefs, such as there being an intelligent designer, Hume’s position seems to be that we do not have sufficient evidence or reason to make such claims. Because of the limits of human knowledge – that we cannot know what the universe as a whole is like, and because we cannot know divine attributes (having had no direct experience of something that, in any event, surpasses our capacity of understanding), – and because we have no way to select among the alternative explanations or weigh the 'possibilities' that might enable us to select one explanation over another, such religious beliefs cannot be proven and may not even be provable or probable. Moreover, given that there is no clear evidence for such a belief, and no significant 'probability' of the truth of such a claim, Hume can be taken to conclude, in the *Dialogues*, that it would be *unreasonable* to believe such beliefs.

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[63] Further, Hume has elsewhere argued, in the *Treatise* and the ECHU, against there being any reason to hold that one thing causes another; causality is just a habitual way of seeing things, based on contiguity, temporal priority, and custom. Hume suggests that this customary way of seeing things works, such that “*instances, of which we have had no experience, must resemble those, of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues always uniformly the same*” (T 1.3.6.4).

Believers, however, might point to other religious beliefs – the beliefs that are found, as testified to, in Scripture – for example, miracle reports. These reports would include raising people from the dead, curing people of apparently incurable illnesses, feeding thousands of people from a small portion of food, and so on. This Hume discusses in Section X of the *Enquiry*, 'On Miracles.'

Hume begins with a clever rhetorical device**.** He claims to draw on Tillotson's critique of transubstantiation (though there are, in fact, some significant differences between Tillotson's arguments, and his own),[64] where Tillotson argues, for example, that 'reason' and direct experience both challenge the reasonableness of belief in transubstantiation (e.g., because the weight of any claim or assertion of the dogma of transubstantiation can never be greater than the weight of the evidence of direct sense). Hume states that he has constructed an argument "of like nature", to challenge all the 'marvelous and miraculous' reports in Scripture.[65]

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[64] Despite Hume's claims of a 'similarity' to Tillotson, it is clear that there are many differences. See, for example, Stewart (1995: 184-185) and Wootton (1990: 207), who writes: "Where Tillotson's argument is primarily an epistemological defense of the primacy of sense experience, Hume's, like Arnauld's, is an argument about the conflict between our own experience of nature and the claims of other people". See also Levine (1988: 125-160) and Levine (1989), Chapter 8.

[65] See, for example, Scarre (1992). See also Garrett (2002), especially the articles cited in the footnotes on p. 302.

As noted above, Hume begins with the reminder that experience – "experience and observation" – is our only and "ultimate" guide when it comes to what we can reasonably claim or believe. But experience is not infallible, and we may find conflicting evidence concerning certain matters of fact. The wise person, therefore, 'proportions his or her belief to the evidence', such that while 100 experiences one way and 50 experiences of the opposite can lead only to a 'possible' conclusion, 100 experiences one way with only a few experiences to the contrary would lead to a 'probability.'

Now, something is "proven" if "founded on an infallible experience" and where one "expects the event with the last degree of assurance" (X/1, 4); "a uniform experience amounts to a proof" (ECHU X/1, 12). Thus, the laws of nature are proven: they are established by "a firm and unalterable experience." A miracle, however, is, by definition, Hume asserts, "a violation of the laws of nature" – i.e., a violation of something that is proven – and presumably is not at all an infallible or uniform experience.

Suppose, Hume says, there is a miracle report – e.g., that a dead person was restored to life – and that that report was made by someone whom we regarded as being of utmost veracity. Let us also suppose that we have strong evidence – a "proof" – of that person's intelligence, perspicacity, and reliability. Yet it seems to go against what seems to be a natural law – that someone cannot be restored to life after dying. So, is it reasonable to believe the report?

If proofs were, in themselves, decisive, it seems that we can make no progress on the matter. We would be stymied, as each side claims a 'proof.' But Hume allows that 'a weaker proof' can be "overcome" by a stronger.[66] So, what one must do is weigh one's experience or proof of the reliability and veracity of the reporter – i.e., that it would be a 'miracle' if the reporter were mistaken – against one's experience of the reliability and constancy of the law of nature. Whichever is generally more likely – "according to the superiority" – should determine one's decision. Thus, Hume says, one rejects "the greater miracle" – i.e., the testimony that the law of nature had been violated or was wrong. In other words, it would be more of a miracle that the reporter was correct than that the putative law of nature was not a law at all (i.e., had been violated). (One need not enter into a discussion of the plausibility of this argument, here; I simply wish to outline what Hume's argument is, and what it tells us about Hume's views about reasonability of religious belief.)

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[66] Recall the letter to the Rev. Hugh Blair, cited above: "The proof against a miracle, *as it is founded on invariable experience*, is of that *species* or *kind* of proof, which is full and certain when taken alone, because it implies no doubt, as is the case with all probabilities; but there are degrees of this species, and *when a weaker proof is opposed to a stronger*, it is overcome" (Hume 1932: 1, 350, emphasis mine).

Most miracle reports, however, are not ones which require deciding between comparative proofs, and Hume states that the reports that one gets from Scripture are not, in fact, reports of people of absolute veracity. The experiences of those whose testimonies are recorded in scripture are just experiences – and, as such, no more reliable than our own, individual experience. Moreover, there is good reason to believe that the strength of the testimony for extraordinary events diminishes over time – a claim that, Hume notes, Tillotson also makes, i.e., that in the passing on of testimony over time, its truth may be compromised. But, further, Hume says that many of those testifying to miracles, as recorded in scripture or in tradition, were arguably self interested, or uneducated, and so on, which makes their testimony less than plausible. In other words, the conditions for reliable testimony, cited earlier, are not met, and there are features of those who testify, and of the testimony, that render such testimony weak. For example: individuals may testify to an 'event' even when they know it to be false, because they believe that it promotes 'a holy cause', or simply because of the pleasure that they get in telling the story, or because it appeals to one's "vanity" to be the source of such information; there is a "propensity of mankind towards the marvelous"[67]; that (many of) these reports/testimonials in the past have come from those without "good-sense, education, and learning," and who come from "ignorant, barbarous nations"; and "violations of truth are more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that concerning any other matter of fact" (ECHU X/2,

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[67] See Earman (2000). Vanderburgh (2019) disagrees, and argues that Hume putatively adopts a legal standard (from Roman Law) of reasonability and probability.

25). Because of these features in such testimony, and given that such testimonies have "been opposed by an infinite number of witnesses" (i.e., natural laws), Hume concludes that "that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof"[68] and, further, that "no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion" (ECHU X/2, 22).

Thus, given the fact that miracle reports (and other claims from Scripture) seem to be less probable than statements about the constancy and regularity of nature; that there are good reasons to believe that such testimony is, in fact, defective; and that testimony must always yield to one's own direct experience, then not only are such religious beliefs not credible, but probability is against them – there is, in other words, a "proof *against* a miracle" (Hume 1932: 1, 350, Emphasis mine). Indeed, no religious belief (i.e., belief based on or believed because of scripture) is likely to be true, because none reach Hume's putative standard of 'probability.' And again, because of the inability to provide sufficient evidence for a proof or probability, it is not reasonable for one to believe.

By the end of the *Enquiry*, in Section XII, Hume suggests that the claim that religious beliefs might be reasonable is even more unlikely.

Throughout the *Enquiry*, Hume has argued that "the existence of anything can only be proved a posteriori", that is "by arguments from its cause or its effect." Hume therefore surmises that "Divinity or Theology, as it proves the existence of a Deity ... has a foundation in *reason*, so far as it is supported by experience" (ECHU XII/3, 9), and traditional natural theology holds that at least some religious belief (e.g., doctrines, dogmas) may be established in this way as well. But no sooner does Hume suppose reason and 'experience' as foundations for religious belief, than he seems to exclude them from being so – for he says that "its best and most solid foundation is *faith* and divine revelation" – i.e., not in

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[68] The full remark by Hume is: "Upon the whole, then, it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof; and that, even supposing it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof; derived from the very nature of the fact, which it would endeavour to establish" (ECHU X/2, 22).

"experiential reasoning." Divinity or theology, then, literally is not something based on reason.

There may, however, appear to be another option available to the believer. Religious beliefs sometimes seem to be on a par with "morals." Perhaps, then, religious belief is like ethical belief, and equally reasonable. But here, too, there is a problem, for, Hume writes, "morals and criticism are not properly objects of the understanding as of taste and sentiment" (ECHU XII/3, 10). Thus, should religious beliefs be akin to moral or aesthetic beliefs, they are not cognitive – they are not a matter of understanding – but a matter of sentiment or feeling.[69] Religion, then, is at best a matter of feeling, and not something about which there is any cognitivity.

Hume does not leave things there. For, then, Hume poses the question of what we should do with a volume of divinity, theology, or metaphysics. He asks: "Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?" Hume answers," No." (Theology is not a relation of abstract ideas alone.) Well, "Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact or existence?" If it does, then fine – but Hume has just said that the "best and most solid foundation [of religious belief and theology] is faith and divine revelation" – that is, its foundation is something that is *not* a matter of experimental reasoning.[70] But if it does not deal with either abstract or experimental reasoning, what should we do with such a book (and its conclusions)? Hume's response is "Commit it then to the flames. For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" (ECHU XII/3, 11). So, so far as religious belief is not based on – or so far as faith does not employ – "experimental or abstract reasoning," it is to be thoroughly rejected.

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[69] In any event, Hume rejects such an option. In "Of Parties in General," Essay 8 in *Essays: Moral, Political, Literary,* Hume notes "But the controversy about an *article of faith*, which is utterly absurd and unintelligible, *is not a difference in sentiment*, but in a few phrases and expressions, which one party accepts of, without understanding them; and the other refuses in the same manner." (Hume 1985: 59, emphasis mine).

[70] One might ask, in such circumstances, whether Hume could allow that someone could determine whether such beliefs are true or false. As noted in Chapter 3, above, Locke allowed for revealed truths, but one could know them to be true only if one could know that it was God who had revealed them. This option is not obviously open to Hume. As I note shortly, there is even a question of whether such beliefs are meaningful.

This conclusion is even more radical than the earlier conclusion, that there is no proof for, or even “proof against,” religious belief. This latter conclusion suggests that such beliefs may not even be intelligible – that they are “illusion” and meaningless – and a meaningless proposition can never reasonably be held.

To see this latter point more clearly, it seems that Hume holds that statements (including statements of religious belief) of religious belief must fall into one of three general categories: cognitive propositions (i.e., either relations of ideas of quantity or number, or matters of fact); expressions of sentiment; and “sophistries and illusions.” Now, first, while Hume does not explicitly say that religious beliefs cannot be matters of fact, we have seen that those which he discusses are not the result of proofs or probabilities. Thus, it is not only unreasonable to assert them, it is more reasonable to assert their negation. Next, second, if, pace Hume, a religious belief could be a matter of taste, this would exclude altogether the possibility that religious beliefs could be true – or false. So there seems, then, to be only one other option – that theology (though not, perhaps, certain naïve ‘natural beliefs’ that one may acquire ‘naturally’ and without justification) expresses a number of senseless (and, therefore, unreasonable) utterances; is, largely, a matter of “sophistry”; and, because of this, books of theology should be “consigned to the flames.”

On Hume’s account, then, the reasonable course of belief, when it comes to religious belief, would seem to be agnosticism – that reason has failed in establishing even the probability a religious truth – if not atheism.[71] Consequently, to the extent that reason or argument is involved in discussions of religion, it shows that religious belief is not based on reason or evidence, and such belief is unreasonable. In other words, if religious beliefs are propositions like all other beliefs, and if, given Hume’s standards of evidence, they cannot be proven or shown to be probable, it is unreasonable to believe.

The conclusion that Hume leaves for his reader to draw from those texts where he discusses religion, challenges and undermines claims essential to Christianity, and to all religious belief. By circumscribing the reliability of testimony, the contents of both Scripture and tradition are contested. By questioning the extent of the knowledge of the universe, analogical reasoning to a divine cause is also weakened. Other texts by Hume challenge knowledge of causality, which would undermine any argument from effect to cause, and knowledge of the nature of the self, which would affect arguments for immortality. In short, Hume's criteria for reasonable belief are corrosive of most, if not all religious belief claims. It is no surprise, then, that many of his contemporaries – theologians, people of faith, and fellow philosophers – saw Hume's arguments as a threat to religious belief and faith.

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[71] See Bailey and O’Brien (2014), noted above, in which the authors argue that Hume was an atheist.

While there were – and are – those who found Hume's critique persuasive, a number of his contemporaries, and several later authors, found Hume's views, and their presuppositions, unconvincing. The vagueness of Hume's criteria for 'sufficient evidence' in proof and probabilities, his undermining of inductive reasoning, and his view of reason as a 'custom,' led some to ask how and why one should respect or follow 'reason,' and why a wise man should, for example, 'proportion his belief' in the way Hume describes. Hume also only asserts, but does not provide any justification for, subscribing to his standard of reasonableness. Hume's focus seems to be not on attaining truth, but simply on being reasonable – and yet, as Hume himself acknowledges, much of what human beings believe cannot satisfy even this standard. As a result, his account of demonstration, proof, and probability does not seem particularly useful in dealing with matters of belief.

Hume's account of belief is also problematic. As we have seen, commentators have noted that it is not clear whether belief is naturalistic or voluntary (i.e., under one's control), which bears on the issue of the relevance of reason and evidence to belief. And while Hume holds that beliefs are 'correctible' based on, or because of, evidence, it is not clear how one can determine when such a belief can be said to have been corrected. Indeed, it seems that what Hume offers his reader is not an account of belief, but an account of when one might withhold assent.

Despite his interest in religion, Hume's account of religious belief and faith are not very robust. Hume's view, presented in *The Natural History of Religion*, that religion provided, in its early stages, explanatory propositions and/or expressed an emotional response, is, clearly, a somewhat superficial anthropological claim. Hume's account of faith – which, at times, he says is more than a set of 'article of faiths' or 'dogmas' – describes faith as a source of 'belief'. But since faith is decidedly *not* a species or kind of reason, it is not clear what this means.[72] His account of religious belief deviates from that of Chillingworth and Tillotson, suggesting that religious belief is like any other kind of belief, not having a particular influence on one's disposition to act, or having a clear relation to faith or 'religious belief as a whole'.

But while Hume's accounts of reason, belief, and the reasonability of religious belief have long been debated[73], the issue in the present study is not whether Hume's view is correct, but, rather, what he says and supposes about reasonability and meaningfulness of religious belief, and how this contributes in the development of Anglo-American philosophical theology on these issues. We see that, while his account of reasonability acknowledges a place for testimony, testimony does not have a significant role in establishing religious belief. Hume also seems to reduce religious belief to propositional belief, but suggests that empirical evidence cannot serve to establish them.[74] There is even a suggestion that religious belief may not even be intelligible.

4.6 Summary

Hume offers an extended response to the question of the reasonableness of religious belief, building on Locke, but challenges many of Locke's positive views. Hume offers a distinction that seems important to the issue of reasonableness, that between demonstration, proof, and probability. Moreover, Hume insists that one should proportion the strength of one’s knowledge claim or belief to the evidence available, and asserts that such a standard applies to all beliefs, thereby contributing to clarifying, somewhat, what reasonableness requires. Yet many of our beliefs, including our most basic beliefs, apparently do not satisfy this standard.

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[72] Recall Hume's comment that "Our most holy religion is founded on faith, not on reason" (ECHU X/2, 27). It is unclear, however, what Hume means by saying that it is "founded on faith."

[73] Fieser (2001), for example, collects a number of early responses to Hume's writings on religion.

[74] In one of his unpublished essays, "Of the Immortality of the Soul," Hume writes: "Nothing could set in a fuller light the infinite obligations which mankind have to *Divine revelation*; since we find, that *no other medium could ascertain this great and important truth* [of the immortality of the soul] (Hume 1985: 598) – suggesting that empirical proof here is not possible.

Hume also offers a novel account of belief, and an account of religious belief that draws on, but expands that of Locke. Yet it is, as we have seen, complex and controversial. ‘Faith’ seems to be a kind of reasoning, though it is not ‘reason.’ Beliefs, including religious beliefs, are cognitive and propositional but also, unlike some of Hume’s predecessors, non-normative. Thus, when Hume turns to examining a number of religious beliefs and the arguments for them, some beliefs are not cognitively meaningful, and the arguments for others fail. Hume’s critiques, then, seem to have been more successful than his own positive views.

Hume, therefore, has solidified the shift from reason within religion, to religion within the limits of reason. He seems to offer, at times, a model of proof taken from judicial proceedings, but, in challenging inferences from effects to causes and in calling into question testimony, Hume effectively undermines it. Hume has also reinforced the view, that has grown gradually more explicit from the mid-seventeenth century, that it is the individual who makes the judgement about reasonability or unreasonability, about truth or falsity of belief – that there is no standard, beyond the individual, who bears ultimate responsibility for determining whether a belief is proven or is probable, and whether one is reasonable or unreasonable in believing it. Hume has also solidified the shift to understanding of belief as primarily, if not exclusively, propositional, and that evidence for beliefs is primarily, if not exclusively, empirical. Hume has, therefore, taken claims and arguments of some of his predecessors, and used them in a way to show, at least indirectly, that religious belief is not reasonable, and that it is unreasonable to believe basic religious doctrines.

4.7 Conclusion

The issue introduced in in Chapter 2, concerning the reasonability of certain religious beliefs within the context of the Christian religion has been extended, in this and the preceding chapters, to the reasonableness of all claims of religious belief. In Chapter 2, we saw how ‘reasonableness’ arises within theology as an instrument for identifying what is necessary to Christian belief; in Chapter 3 and, now, in Chapter 4, we see it extended to religion overall. Locke and Hume take a primarily ‘internal’ theological question (and criterion), of reason and of its role in the acceptability of religious beliefs and dogmas, and extend it to religion and theology overall – and, in the case of Hume, to religious belief as a whole. Thus, ‘reasonableness’ shifts from being a tool of theology within the context of faith, as it was in Chillingworth and Tillotson, to it being a standard for religion and religious faith.

In Chapters 3 and 4, we also saw how Locke and Hume try to give a clearer understanding of what is meant by reason and by proof – i.e., there is a greater focus on epistemology – but they also provide an account of religious belief and the nature of faith. In Chapter 3, we see how Locke seeks to defend the reasonability of many Christian religious beliefs but, before doing so, he is very careful to explain the meanings of ‘faith’ and ‘articles of faith.’ What we find, however, is a much narrower conception than that found in Chillingworth and Tillotson, limiting religious belief effectively to ‘articles of faith.’ Locke is also much more cautious than his predecessors in determining what counts as knowledge, what should command one’s assent and what is necessary to faith, and, in doing so, perhaps is much more generous or latitudinarian about what can be believed.

In the present chapter, we see that, like Locke, Hume seeks to know what it is that one can, indeed, know, but he also insists on the limitation of philosophical enquiry to that area of what human beings can know. After his investigations, however, the sphere of knowledge seems to be even more limited than what we find in Locke. While, in a sense, Hume extends Locke, Hume’s epistemology challenges claims and conclusions that Locke himself would allow – e.g., Christianity’s reasonableness. Hume’s account of what can be demonstrated is, as we have seen, more restrictive than Locke’s – one cannot demonstrate anything except matters of ‘abstract reason’ (so that there can be no demonstration of God’s existence), and proof and probability are so rigorous that the reasonability of many basic beliefs is challenged.

It is clear that when it comes to *religious* belief, Locke and Hume provide a more careful distinction between faith and religious belief and their application than found in Chillingworth and Tillotson. Locke’s interest in doing so was not just a matter of epistemology, but apologetic and political. Still, epistemic issues are central for Locke; distinguishing what we can know from what we cannot (and, therefore, allowing latitude and toleration), but also ensuring that what we claim to know, we do in fact know or have reasonable belief. Hume’s interests go rather farther: his concern is not just about the limits of human knowledge, but about how much (religious) belief, if any, is true or certain, and even whether reason itself can serve as a standard.

As a result, in this and the preceding chapter we find an increasing tendency to limit ‘reasonable belief’ in matters religious; in Locke, only the existence of God can be demonstrated, and, while Christianity as a whole is ‘reasonable,’ there is relatively little in religion or faith of which we can be certain; in Hume, there seem to be no religious beliefs that can be said to be genuinely reasonable. Thus, it is here that we find a move to challenge the compatibility of reason and religion overall. Holding religious beliefs is not just a matter of the justifiability of what is believed, but also the reasonability of the believing.

This has, some might say, positive consequences for societies in which there is religious difference and particularly, religious controversy. For it follows, for Locke and, arguably, Hume, that if such beliefs cannot be known to be true or reasonable, there must be a broad religious toleration concerning religious beliefs and doctrines – with any limitation on them being related to their impact on political stability rather than their truth or falsity.

With Locke and Hume, then, we have a clearer account of what religious belief is: it is propositional but not (normally, if at all) dispositional or involving action. And, when it comes to reasonability, reason and experience putatively constitute the sole and universal standard in matters religious, not ‘the rule of faith’ or scripture. While, in Chillingworth and

Tillotson, scripture and reason served as a standard or a rule, with Hume it is no longer clear that faith is certain, particularly since it cannot be justified. Because of the emphasis on going back to that of which one can be certain on the basis of perceptual experience and reason, there is little room left for tradition or testimony to have any place.

With Locke and Hume, religion needs to be grounded in reason – a somewhat Socinian view – not reason grounded in religion, as it was, for example, with Chillingworth.[75] We have a narrower account of the source of knowledge, where the standard is not normally demonstration, but rather 'probability.' And there is a suggestion that religion can be proven only if it is meaningful; by 'meaningful' here, Hume (and, perhaps, Locke) seem to mean a claim that is capable of being seen to be supported by evidence. Chillingworth and Tillotson did not engage such broad epistemological issues, and it is Locke and Hume who come to set the tone for later discussions of religion, faith, and reasonability.

In this Chapter, with Hume, some aspects of religion and faith have receded from view. Here, we are provided with a 'thinner' account of religious belief and faith, with religious belief as little more than 'articles of faith.' Here, religious beliefs are not dispositional. The role of testimony is more suspect and marginal; in Hume, for example, it is useful only so far as it conforms with what is already generally reasonably believed or known. Moreover, religion and faith must yield to reason and experience; religious belief, if it is to have any reasonableness at all, must be rationally justifiable. Religion is, ultimately, within reason. And since, with Hume, reason itself becomes less authoritative – being, basically, custom or, arguably, just the subjective 'reason' of the individual – it is difficult to see how it can ever be reasonable to believe.

Are the strictures and challenges to faith, belief, and the nature and role of reason – particularly Hume's challenges – decisive? What did later theologians and philosophers of religion make of the account of reason and reasonability? Of the understanding of faith and religious belief? What, if anything, did later authors accept or adopt from Locke and Hume? And how did this affect how people of faith came to see the reasonability of religious belief?

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[75] Recall that, in *The Religion of Protestants*, Chillingworth writes of "right reason *grounded* on Divine revelation and common notions written by God in the hearts of all men" (RP 8, emphasis mine).

Two figures of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who were central in the discussion of the reasonability of religious belief were the Reverend William Paley (1743-1805), Archdeacon of Carlisle, an Anglican priest, theologian, and philosopher, and Archbishop Richard Whately (1787-1863), theologian, logician, sometime Professor of Political Economy at the University of Oxford, and Anglican Archbishop of Dublin. Both were influenced by, but also offered responses to the conclusions of Locke and Hume, and held that religious belief and faith were, indeed, eminently reasonable. I turn, in the next two chapters, to these figures, and outline how they understood reason, reasonability, and religious belief.

Chapter 5

Paley and ‘Evidentialism’

5.1 Introduction

As we saw in Chapter 3, Locke’s theological interests were significant and, while there was an affinity with the conclusions of Chillingworth and Tillotson, he developed an account of reason and faith and the relation between them that was much more precise and, arguably, more developed. Yet the understanding of reasonability and of faith were more narrow. On Locke’s view, one could still claim that religious belief was reasonable, but the standard of reasonability was, at best, ‘moral certainty,’ and many religious doctrines did not meet even that threshold. Faith was distinguished from belief, but there was little cognitive content to faith; beliefs or doctrines putatively had cognitive content, but were propositional and subject to reason.

In Chapter 4, we saw that Hume took Locke’s epistemological principles and extended or (as in the case of belief) revised them, but that he also left Locke’s theologically-friendly conclusions without rational support. Knowledge or reasonable belief had to be based on, or had to supply, empirical evidence; no other forms of, or bases for knowledge, such as intuition, were acceptable. By the latter part of the eighteenth century, then, it was beginning to be no longer religious doubt but faith that bore the burden of proof, and, when faith was brought before the bar of reason, an increasing number of figures deemed it to be wanting.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, in theological matters, there continued to be theological controversy between the established church and dissenting traditions concerning which doctrines had to be affirmed and the latitude within religious faith – and, within Anglicanism, there was a move to “simplify” subscription to the Thirty-nine articles. But, increasingly, debate about to which religious beliefs one had to subscribe was not a theological one. Scepticism and claims of atheism began to take centre stage;

they were no longer issues marginal in public debate.[1] Latitudinarianism had given way to deism, where the role of God was primarily as a creator, but not engaged in that creation, and deism was, for many, a short step from atheism.[2] Enlightenment figures, such as Voltaire, Hume, and Edward Gibbon[3], cast doubt on the truth of even the most fundamental religious beliefs; figures such as Thomas Paine argued for deism rather than theism, and Hermann Reimarus (1694-1768), followed by Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781), Johann Eichhorn (1752-1827), Heinrich Paulus (1761-1851), and David Strauß (1808 -1874), began to consider seriously the question of the historical character of the scriptures and of the figure of Jesus. The consequences of this shift were manifest, on the one hand, in the anti-religion and anti-clericalism of the French revolution and, on the other hand, in the increase in religious sectarianism, manifested in the founding of colonies in what became the United States of America, where religious diversity was tolerated, if not presumed.

Not surprisingly, one finds, in response, a greater interest in apologetics. It is true that the interest in arguments defending religious belief as a whole had been building from very early in the 18th century. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), influenced by Isaac Newton, recognized the need to argue explicitly (as he did in one of his theses during his 1710 defence for the Doctor of Divinity degree at Cambridge) that there is no contradiction between right reason and the Christian faith: “Nullum fidei Christianae dogma, in Sacris Scripturis traditum, est rectae rationi dissentaneum” (“No article of the Christian faith, delivered in the Holy Scriptures, is disagreeable to right reason”). And so, principally after Locke, and directly or indirectly responding to challenges of Enlightenment authors such as Hume, a number of clerics, theologians, and philosophers in Britain took up a defence of the faith, and argued that reason, in a strict sense, together with empirical evidence, could provide "sufficient evidence" for at least the reasonableness of Christianity, if not the rational preference for religion in general. This came to be later called the 'Evidential school' of thought.

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[1] In the 16th and, arguably, 17th centuries, as Tom Lennon notes (following Febvre 1942), atheism was “literally ‘unthinkable’” (Lennon 2006: 277). By the latter part of the 18th century, however, this was no longer the case. When the term ‘atheism’ had been used prior to that time, it was generally used to denote ‘unorthodoxy’, but not the denial of the existence of God, as such.

[2] See Berman (1988) and Coventry (2007).

[3] Some have called Gibbon (1737-1794) “the English giant of the Enlightenment,” though acknowledging that, despite his fame, he “remained an isolated figure in his own country, a solitary figure” (Venturi 1971: 132, cited in Pocock [2004: 108, n. 15]). What exactly Gibbon’s religious views were have been the subject of much debate, but his criticism of Christianity was clear. See, here, for example, Young (1998).

The Evidential or Evidentialist school – as noted earlier, the term 'evidentialist' dates from the mid-19th century, although the movement began in the 18th century – was not a formal group;[4] it is a term used to describe authors largely influenced by and following the empiricism of Locke, who claimed that one can, and should, provide evidence to prove, rationally, Christian religious belief.[5] Because of its association with a number of men from Oriel College, Oxford, it is sometimes referred to as the Oriel Noetics.[6] The term 'evidentialism' derives from reference to 'the Evidences', i.e., the efforts by theologians and philosophers, such as George Campbell, William Paley, and Richard Whately, to provide 'evidences of Christianity' (e.g., Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, and Whately's *Easy* [or *Introductory*] *Lessons on Christian Evidences*). Some also see evidentialism as an effort to defend the existence of miracles,[7] in reaction to the attacks on them made by those, such as Hume, earlier in the 18th century, though the evidentialists clearly had a much larger aim in view – establishing revelation on a rational basis. It is true, as we have seen in earlier chapters, that the concern for the importance of argument and proofs extends back to the beginning of the 17th century. Still, in its fullest form, evidentialism dates from the late eighteenth to the mid 19th century.

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[4] In addition to Paley and Whately, some have included in this group, Nathaniel Lardner (1684-1768), author of the multi-volume *Credibility of the Gospel History*, William Warburton (1698–1779), and Edward Miall (1809-81) (see Lorimer 1865: 81).

[5] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest use of the term 'evidentialism' was in 1863 (*The New Review* 1863: 389), where it was used to describe Archbishop Richard Whately, who had just passed away that October: "He must have arrived at the conclusion that evidentialism and rationalism stand to each other in the relation of antecedent and consequent." The word 'evidentia**list**' appears slightly earlier, in 1851, and is attributed to George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906). Holyoake writes: "Another name, which sufficiently describes us, is that of Evidentialists, which means persons who proceed by evidences, and accept whatever evidence establishes" (see Holyoake 1851: 401). Interestingly, Holyoake was a "secularist," having allegedly coined that term, too, and was one of the last people convicted for blasphemy in England, in 1842. Compare this to the current sense: "What we call evidentialism is the view that the epistemic justification of a belief is determined by the quality of the believer's evidence for the belief" (Conee & Feldman (2004: 83).

How evidentialism has been represented by its critics, however, was somewhat stronger – e.g., as claiming "that it is unreasonable to hold what cannot be absolutely demonstrated" (Juergens 1928: 175). See also Collins (1961: 5). See the general discussion of evidentialism in Forrest (1998).

[6] See Tuckwell (1909). See also Newman (1969: 164).

[7] See Lecky (1870: 1, 189). See also Flanagan (1946: viii).

Rather than fear the emphasis on reason and evidence of religious critics, these authors embraced them.[8] Perhaps the two most prominent figures of this 'school'[9] were the Anglican clergyman, theologian, and moralist, William Paley (1743-1805), and the theologian, logician, and, later, Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately (1787-1863). For example, drawing on arguments made by predecessors, such as the 'dissenting' (Presbyterian) minister and biblical scholar, Nathaniel Lardner (1684-1768)[10]; the Anglican cleric and, after 1775, Master of Pembroke College, Oxford, William Adams (1707-89)[11]; the Scottish Calvinist theological writer and Professor of Divinity, George Campbell (1719-96[12]); and the Scottish scholar and Anglican Bishop of Carlisle and, later, of Salisbury, John Douglas (1721-1807)[13], Paley argued for the reasonability or rational plausibility of the content of New Testament scripture, but also for the existence of God. He is best known for his formulation of an argument for God's existence based on alleged design in nature, and he is frequently contrasted, in this respect, with Hume.[14] Similarly, Whately made a careful study of the principles of reasoning, challenged the sceptical arguments of Hume, and argued for the rational defensibility of Christian religious belief, arguing, too, that there are, and have been since the time of Christ, evidences for Christianity. Whately maintained that many of the arguments of not only non-theists but theists were lacking in logical rigor. Indeed, while he greatly admired Paley's writings and saw them as providing a basis for a solid apologetic, he still took Paley to task on the quality of some of his arguments on the possibility of proving a benevolent designer (Whately 1861: 94) and, to an extent, on the reliability of testimony as a basis for accepting reports of miracles.[15]

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[8] Some, however, have argued that this 'movement' was not actually "occasioned by any demands of controversy" and that it did not engage any "of the scepticism then dormant beneath the surface of society" (Pattison 1860: 261).

[9] For example, John Henry Newman refers to 'the evidential school' of Paley and Whately; see Newman (1969-70: I, 164). Paley would likely not subscribe entirely to the understanding of 'evidentialism' as it is often used today.

[10] See e.g., Lardner (1838).

[11] Paley refers to Adams' *An Essay in answer to Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles* (1752) in NT and in the *Evidences*.

[12] Paley refers to Campbell's *A Dissertation on Miracles: Containing an Examination of the Principles advanced by David Hume, Esq* (1762) in the *Evidences*. For further discussion, see Wertheimer (1985: 189-193).

[13] See, for example, Douglas (1754). Douglas is mentioned several times in Paley's *Evidences*.

[14] See Chapter 3, above, and Hume's discussion in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (*1947), especially Parts II, V, and VI.

When we look at the arguments and views of Paley and Whately, and examine their discussion of reasonable belief and claims to knowledge, Locke's influence is obvious. His criteria (elaborated in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) for 'argument' – and, particularly, his analysis of the nature of testimony – are explicitly referred to and adopted in their work. While Paley and Whately did not adopt Locke's general epistemology, they did accept Locke's insistence on the justification of religious belief.

Paley and Whately were committed Christians, but, unlike those who held that faith required no proof or justification, they held that it was important in holding a religious belief that this belief be based on solid argument. Moreover, scepticism and atheism had to be taken seriously, and were to be met with counter-argument and proof. And Paley and Whately were convinced that Christianity was up to the task.

In the development of Anglo-American philosophical theology, evidentialism had a central place. Even though not recognised as such in its time, it set up the parameters for the discussion of faith and reason that influenced not only the next generation but, arguably, much of the 20th century understanding of the relation of faith and reason, and the reasonability of religious belief. For this reason, it is useful to explore some of their arguments, as well as their overall position, in detail.

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[15] For Whately's discussion of Paley, see his "Dr Paley's Works" (1861: 85, 94-97). Whately writes that Paley "arrives at many right conclusions, though on insufficient grounds" (Whately 1861: 106). But note Whately's *Rhetoric* (Appendix 3, pp 421-427), where Whately provides a syllogistic reformulation of Paley's arguments for the evidences of Christianity.

5.2 William Paley[16]

William Paley was born in Peterborough, England, in July 1743. He was the only son of the Reverend William Paley, and the younger William was educated in part by his father. Paley matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1759, and graduated as Senior Wrangler – the top student in the mathematical tripos,[17] sometimes called "the greatest intellectual achievement attainable in Britain"– in 1763. While at Cambridge, Paley periodically travelled to London, to observe court trials – a practice that influenced his theological writing (Alexander 1918). In 1767, at the age of 24, he was ordained an Anglican priest but, in 1768, became tutor at Christ's College where, in addition to teaching metaphysics, morals and, occasionally, mathematics, he gave two lectures weekly on the Greek New Testament (including a series of lectures on Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*).[18] While at Cambridge, Paley became a friend of John Law, the son of Edmund Law (1703-1787, who was Master of Peterhouse (College), Knightbridge Professor of Moral Theology and, later, Bishop of Carlisle). Paley gave up his position as fellow at Cambridge in 1776 and, after a number of minor clerical postings, his close acquaintanceship with the Law family led him to be appointed Archdeacon of Carlisle in 1782. In 1785, at the encouragement of his friend, John Law (by now, Church of Ireland bishop of Clonfert and Kilmacduagh), Paley took his Cambridge lectures on ethics of 1766-76, and used them as the basis for his *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*. Here, Paley took a utilitarian approach, arguing that God's interest was in promoting the greatest happiness. Paley continued to write: in 1790, he wrote a volume on the truth of Pauline epistles (*Horae Paulinae, or the Truth of the Scripture History of St Paul*); in 1794, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*; and, in

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[16] For summary biographical information, see also: Stephen (1895); Sweet (2004); and Crimmins (2004) and (2013). Relevant book-length studies are: LeMahieu (1976); Clarke (1974); and Hitchin (2001).

[17] According to D. O. Forfar, "During the one hundred and fifty seven years (1753-1909) in which the results of the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos were published in order of merit … [the] securing of the top position as Senior Wrangler was regarded, at the time, as the greatest intellectual achievement attainable in Britain" (Forfar 1996: 1). Similarly, Leonard Roth refers to the tripos as "the most difficult mathematical test that the world has ever known" (Roth 1971: 228).

[18] James Crimmins reports that "For first-year metaphysics he used Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, then went on to Clarke's *On the Being and Attributes of God* and Butler's *Analogy of Religion*. All undergraduates at Christ's were required to attend Paley's Greek Testament lectures twice a week, for which he drew substantially on Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*" (Crimmins 2004).

1802, the work for which he is likely best known, *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*. Though Paley drew, sometimes, extensively, on other authors[19], his work was known for its persuasiveness and style,[20] and was quite popular. Paley's *Evidences* became a standard text at British universities, and was required reading at Cambridge University until the twentieth century (Fyfe 1997 and Snyder (2011: 196)). (Interestingly, Charles Darwin had to read Paley while studying for his BA at Cambridge, and, at the time, wrote that he "was charmed and convinced by the long line of argumentation" [Jones (2008: 188)].) Paley's final years were spent as Rector of a parish in Durham (where he also took on a minor magistrate's position) and as subdean of Lincoln Cathedral. He died, after a lengthy illness, on May 25, 1805.

Paley's writings cover the range of forms that one expects from a cleric – sermons, letters, lectures, as well as apologetic works.[21] While Paley did not write specifically on matters of epistemology and logic, the importance of proof and argument is central to much of his work. Indeed, his three major volumes dealing with religion: the *Horae Paulinae*, the *Evidences of Christianity*, and *Natural Theology* – are concerned precisely with providing argument and evidence for basic claims of the Christian religion.[22] This insistence on evidence, Paley's insistence that the truth of Christianity rested on evidence, and his refusal to rely on intuition or ungrounded faith, led him later to be considered to be one of the founders, or the founder, of the Evidential school.[23]

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[19] See the references to Adams, Campbell, and Douglas, above. In 1859, the radical writer and, later, professor of logic and metaphysics at Queen's College, Belfast, Robert Blakey, argued that Paley's 'watchmaker argument' had been, in part, plagiarized from one given by the Dutch author, Bernard Niewentyt (1654-1718), whose *The Religious Philosopher, or the right use of contemplating the works of the Creator* appeared English in 1718 (see Jantzen [2014: 69-70; 168-169]). Jantzen concludes "... I will take it as a given that, in fact, Paley passed off as his own (or, more charitably, 'reworked') an argument that he took from Niewentyt."

Whether Paley was engaged in any deceitful enterprise is far from obvious; his aim in all his works was to compile and refine existing arguments. Paley himself acknowledged that he borrowed extensively from other authors, and Richard Whately notes that "Paley's longer Work on the *Evidences* is in a great measure compiled from Dr. Lardner's *Credibility of the Gospel*" (see Whately's allusion to the controversy in "Dr Paley's Works" [Whately 1861: 91].) Similarly, a mid 19th century author wrote: "The Natural Theology was "made up" from his [Paley's] loose papers and notes written while he was a college tutor, and in the course of such a long time as elapsed since its first compilation, Paley had forgotten the sources from whence he derived them. It is also but fair to state that he has taken nothing which he has not greatly improved — "nihil tetigit, quod non ornavit [He touched nothing without embellishing it]." See Wokjian (1877: 585).

[20] Whately comments on this, in Dr Paley's Works" (Whately 1861: 85, 89), comparing Paley's "clear, homely, forcible simplicity" and "eloquence" in writing, with the "bombastic obscurity" of Newman and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

[21] In this study, I use *The Works of William Paley, D.D.* (7 vols. London: C and J Rivington, 1825). References to Paley's writings will be, unless otherwise indicated, to these *Works*, and be incorporated in the text as: *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (Works, Vol. II), abbreviated as Evidences, followed by the volume number from the Works and the page number; *Horae Paulinae: Or, The Truth of the Scripture History of St. Paul, and Tracts* (Works, Vol. III) abbreviated as HorPaul/Tracts, followed by the volume number in the Works, followed by page number; *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Works, IV), abbreviated as M&P, followed by the volume in his Works, followed by page number; *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (Works, Vol. V), abbreviated as NT, followed by the volume in his Works, followed by page number; *Sermons* (Vol. VI), abbreviated as Sermons, followed by the volume in his Works, followed by page

5.3 Reason, proof, and reasonability

Though influenced by Locke's epistemology, Paley does not deal at any length with a discussion of epistemological categories, such as demonstration, proof, and probability.[24] It is true that Paley uses all three terms, and that in many cases the distinction between them loosely follows that of Locke and Hume. For example, Paley notes that, "in science properly so called" (C&S VII: 105) demonstration is appropriate, and that demonstration is independent of contingent matters[25] – that no demonstration is "the less convincing for being old" (C&S VII: 105). On the other hand, he notes "*real life knows nothing of demonstration.* It converses only with moral evidence and moral reasoning" (C&S VII: 106, emphasis mine). Here, the 'age' of the argument counts; in matters of "moral evidence and probable proofs," Paley acknowledges, older proofs are "less convincing" (C&S VII: 106).

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number; *Charges and Sermons* (Works, Vol. VII), abbreviated as C&S, followed by the volume in his Works, followed by page number.

[22] The British statesman, Lord Henry Brougham (1778-1868), who later in life turned to writing on natural theology and who respected Hume, nevertheless found that Paley's evidentialist approach on matters such as miracles, was more plausible. See Pearce (1994).

[23] See Dulles (2005). "The best arguments in these works [i.e., "the most important defenses of miracles in reply to Hume"] were … recapitulated by Paley, the *leading representative* of the evidential school" (Dulles 2005: 187, emphasis mine).

[24] Recall that, in his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), Hume distinguishes between "demonstrations, proofs and probabilities" (Section VI, note 1), and elaborates on the criteria appropriate to each in Section X, pp. 110-112 and in Section XII, e.g., Pt. 3, p. 165 (Hume 1975).

Generally, however, Paley uses the term ‘demonstrate’ in a loose sense – e.g., when one is discussing “a matter in which experience and observation” (NT V: 14) provide sufficient evidence, and Paley does not deal with demonstrations in a strict sense at all. Again, while Paley uses the term ‘proof’ periodically, unlike Hume, he does not have in mind a distinctive category of arguments called ‘proofs.’ Overall, Paley focuses simply on ‘probabilities’; he writes: “in human affairs, *probability* ought to content us” (M&P IV: 236). And reasoning itself is simply a “judgment of probabilities,”[26] although Paley believes that it can lead one to certainty.

What does reasoning look like? Paley writes:

> “The rational way of treating a subject of such acknowledged importance, is to attend, in the first place, to the general and substantial truth of its principles, and to that alone. When we once feel a foundation; when we once perceive a ground of credibility in its history, we shall proceed with safety to inquire into the interpretation of its records, and into the doctrines which have been deduced from them. Nor will it either endanger our faith, or diminish or alter our motives for obedience, if we should discover that these conclusions are formed with very different degrees of probability, and possess very different degrees of importance.” (Evidences II: 426)

Probabilities are matters of experience. Depending on the kind of issue or nature of the case, the degree of probability is determined “by inferences from those parts of the case which, in point of fact, are on all hands acknowledged” (Evidences II: 11). This involves knowing the issue, perceiving the evidence being offered for it, assessing that evidence (e.g., its presuppositions and its completeness), being able to make rational estimations of the consequences, considering objections and responding to them, etc. As the

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[25] In matters of “moral evidence and probable proofs,” Paley acknowledges that, the older they are, “the less convincing” they may be (C&S VII: 105).

[26] Paley writes: “all that can belong to a writer is his mode of reasoning, or his judgment of probabilities” (M&P VI: xv).

evidence or experience ‘accumulates,’[27] so the case for the claim becomes more probable,[28] and the need for further evidence diminishes.[29]

That being said, Paley was not of the view that the calculation or judgement of probabilities was a defective or a lesser form of knowledge or reasonable belief. A matter of “human affairs,” Paley held, could be a “matter of certainty, because it is a matter which experience and observation demonstrate” (NT V: 14) – “demonstrate”, here, as just noted, being a rough synonym for justifying or ‘establishing something as true.’ If a statement is supported by widespread observation and experience, or if it is the most plausible explanation for the occurrence of an event, it can be said to be certain. Thus, for Paley, to be able to show the probability of one’s claims is to be reasonable.[30]

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[27] In his annotations on Paley’s *Evidences*, Whately writes: “It is important to remember that the evidence which has been adduced in the foregoing pages [of the *Evidences*], is *cumulative*; i. e., consisting of several distinct arguments to which several others might be added) each, separately, leading to the same conclusion; and that their combined force in establishing that conclusion is not only much beyond that of each one of them by itself, but beyond that of all of them merely added together” (Whately, 1859a 395).

[28] In the *Evidences*, Paley writes: “it is true, I say, that they who sincerely act, or sincerely endeavour to act, according to what they believe, that is, according to the just result of the probabilities, or, if you please, *the possibilities*, in natural and revealed religion, *which they themselves perceive, and* according to *a rational estimate of consequences*, and, above all, according to the just effect of those principles of gratitude and devotion, which even the view of nature generates in a well-ordered mind, seldom fail of proceeding farther.” (Evidences II: 414, emphasis mine).

One might well ask how one might calculate probabilities. While neither Paley nor Whately provide a way of calculating probabilities, in his *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte* (1819), Whately refers to La Place (1814) and his study of probability.

[29] Hence, Paley writes, against Hume: “Now the improbability which arises from the want (for this properly is a want, not a contradiction) of experience, is only equal to the probability there is, that, if the thing were true, we should experience things similar to it, or that such things would be generally experienced” (Evidences II: 5). But, Paley continues, it is not obvious that there is a need for miracles to be repeated. He writes: “Suppose it then to be true that miracles were wrought on the first promulgation of Christianity, when nothing but miracles could decide its authority, is it certain that such miracles would be repeated so often, and in so many places, as to become objects of general experience? Is it a probability approaching to certainty? Is it a probability of any great strength or force? Is it such as no evidence can encounter? And yet this probability is the exact converse, and therefore, the exact measure, of the improbability which arises from the want of experience, and which Mr. Hume represents as invincible by human testimony” (Evidences II: 5).

[30] See NT V: 377, where Paley writes of a “reasonable proof”, i.e., one based on “not only to all that can be discovered … by researches into nature, but to all that is taught by a revelation, which gives reasonable proof of having proceeded from” its source.

For Paley**[31]**, argument is clearly appropriate – and may even be very strongly encouraged – in the formulation of reasonable belief. For example, in moral matters, Paley recommends that individuals prove (and not just take on authority) the propositions they assert – that they should "pause and tarry at every proposition, till they have traced out its dependency, proof, relation, and consequences, before they permit themselves to step on to another" (M&P IV: xi). In the dedication of his book on *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, for example, it is clear that he takes argument and proof to be valuable – that the more rational something is, the more credible it is (M&P IV:vi). And he notes in *Natural Theology* that when occasions "arise to try the firmness of our most habitual opinions [...] it is a matter of incalculable use to feel our foundation; to find a support in argument for what we had taken up on authority" (NT V: 373). Indeed, in at least some important cases, he holds that it *is* crucial that there be such argument or proof. Paley writes:

> "The truth of Christianity depends upon its leading facts, and upon them alone. Now of these we have evidence which ought to satisfy us, at least until it appear that mankind have ever been deceived by the same….*These propositions alone lay a foundation* for our faith: for they prove the existence of a transaction which cannot, even in its most general parts, be accounted for, upon any reasonable supposition, except that of the truth of the mission." (Evidences II: 428-9, emphasis mine)

Still, Paley does not say that argument or proof is *always* or ever absolutely necessary. Nor does he explicitly affirm that one ought *not* believe (or that one should suspend all belief) until one has engaged in a thorough investigation. Nor is there any use of intuition or 'infused belief' as an appropriate basis for, or means to belief.[32]

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[31] A much earlier version of this and the next section was presented at a conference on 'Deism and Atheism in the Enlightenment,' held at Trinity College, Dublin, and published as Sweet (1999b).

[32] Paley does note, once, that God could have made human beings so that they have an intuitive knowledge of God, but that it is not needed; that there exists all the evidence that is needed. He writes:

"God could have so formed men, as to have perceived the truths of religion intuitively; or to have carried on a communication with the other world, whilst they lived in this; or to have seen the individuals of the species, instead of dying, pass to heaven by a sensible translation. He could have presented a separate miracle to each man's senses. He could have established a standing miracle. He could have caused

Nevertheless, Paley is clearly focused in his work on the empirical as a basis for reasonable belief.

What kinds of argument does Paley employ in discussing claims to knowledge or beliefs about topics outside the demonstrative sciences? There seem to be two.

First, there are arguments that are based on historical evidence – e.g., based on testimony and on the means by which such testimony is transmitted, such as the study of texts. (Interestingly, for Paley, it is *not* that individual pieces of testimony by themselves establish a belief. Rather, it is where we see the sources (e.g., the witnesses or the texts) agreeing – especially where such agreement is unlikely to be due to any collusion – and where what is testified to is *the best explanation* of what it is that is to be explained.)

The second kind of argument which Paley employs, draws on experience as the ground or starting point of an inference from effect to cause – that is, it attempts to explain the cause of certain properties in a thing or of certain events from what one experiences or observes in that thing. Such arguments are not, as we have seen, strictly demonstrative. Nevertheless, Paley holds that such arguments can, if conscientiously constructed, serve as the best – the most probable – explanation of the phenomenon to be accounted for (i.e., an argument to the best explanation).

Specifically, then, what *would* count as satisfactory or sufficient evidence for claims to knowledge or reasonable belief?[33] Consider a historical claim, such as "Early Christians were persecuted for their faith." How does one go about holding that it is reasonable to hold this claim, or that such a historical claim is true? Paley writes that, suppose that we have

> "writings severally attesting the point which we contend for… and attesting it *in every variety of form* in which it can be conceived to appear: directly and

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miracles to be wrought in every different age and country. These, and many more methods, which we may imagine, if we once give loose to our imaginations, are, so far as we can judge, all practicable" (Evidences II: 408).

[33] There is also what Paley calls "the internal evidence of our religion"; see the discussion, later in this Chapter.

> indirectly, expressly and incidentally, by assertion, recital, and allusion, by narratives of facts, and by arguments and discourses built upon these facts, either referring to them, or necessarily presupposing them." (Evidences II: 31-32, emphasis mine)

With such documentation, we have substantial empirical evidence.[34] Moreover, the process of determining whether this evidence is satisfactory or sufficient involves paying attention to its variety and character. For example, not only does one need to be sensitive to the "variety" of the evidence, but one needs to be attentive to where the evidence is found. For example:

> "in examining ancient records, or indeed any species of testimony, it is, in my opinion, of the greatest importance to attend to the information or grounds of argument which are *casually* and *undesignedly* disclosed; forasmuch as this species of proof is, of all others, the least liable to be corrupted by fraud or misrepresentation." (Evidences II: 32)

So, given the range of the attestations of a proposition, when we see the texts agreeing in a document or documents, especially where there is no reason to anticipate such agreement, and particularly on points that would otherwise seem trivial or insignificant, it is probable and, therefore, *reasonable* to believe that what that proposition states is true.

Similarly, consider Paley's lengthy discussion of design in *Natural Theology*. It begins with the following argument, based on experience, and makes an inference from the experience of certain effects to their cause[35]:

> "In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a *stone*, and were asked how the stone came to be there; I might possibly answer, that, for anything I

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[34] Related to cumulative evidence, Paley writes: "more especially not forgetting what credit is due to the New Testament in its capacity of *cumulative* evidence; we now proceed to state the proper and distinct proofs, which shew not only the general value of these records, but their specific authority, and the high probability that there is that they actually came from the persons whose names they bear" (Evidences II: 95). See also (Evidences II: 84)

[35] Note that Paley is not using an argument by analogy, as often and erroneously assumed, but another kind of inductive argument (see below).

> knew to the contrary, it had lain there forever: nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a *watch* upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer I had before given, that for anything I knew, the watch might have always been there." (NT V: 1)
>
> [And so, Paley concludes], "there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers, who formed [the watch] for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use." (NT V: 2)

Again, the argument is based on experience. Paley's argument is not an *a priori* one – e.g., that, by definition, design must have a designer or that an effect must have a cause. The argument would appear to be an 'argument to the best explanation' – with the conclusion based on a premise based on observation ["In like manner, and upon the same foundation (which in truth is that of experience)... they resemble what intelligence and design are constantly producing" (NT V: 288)].[36]

This does not obviously have the logical form of many contemporary inductive arguments.[37] It is, arguably, inductive in an Aristotelian sense,[38] and such an 'inductive' method, Paley holds, is an appropriate means for arriving at reasonable belief. In fact, Paley points out, “Take away this [approach], and you take away from us every subject of observation, and ground of reasoning...” (NT V: 28). The kind of argument and proof that one might offer for one’s beliefs, then, clearly need not be one that is deductive in form or meets the standard of what we saw earlier in Locke and Hume – what is called foundationalism.[39]

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[36] Paley writes: "The reasoning is the same as that, by which we conclude any ancient appearances to have been the effects of volcanoes or inundations; namely, because they resemble the effects which fire and water produce before our eyes; and because we have never known these effects to result from any other operation" (NT V 288).

As another example of such an argument, Paley writes: "in countries and under circumstances very favourable to subsistence, the population has been doubled in the space of twenty years; the havoc occasioned by wars, earthquakes, famine, or pestilence, is usually repaired in a short time. These indications sufficiently demonstrate the tendency of nature, in the human species, to a continual increase of its numbers" (M&P IV: 479). While it may seem as though these arguments have the form of what John Stuart Mill would later call the joint method of agreement and difference, it is clear that Paley has in mind the form of induction, drawn from Aristotle (see below).

[37] Interestingly, however, Paley rarely describes his arguments as 'inductive'; he uses the word 'induction' only a few times in his work: NT V: 374; Evidences II 101, 286, 319.

[38] While, today, people think of induction as employing a method of generalization, or some form of causal reasoning (e.g., Mill's methods), or analogical reasoning, this is not the sense in which those before the mid 19th century thought of it. Aristotelian induction holds that "Induction is a progression to universals, but it isn't simply on the basis of the number of particulars that we actually think inductively, but their similarity. As Aristotle states in his *Topics* (Aristotle 1984), "[the] study of what is similar is useful for inductive reasoning . . .because it is by induction of particulars on the basis of similars that we claim to

In such cases – where Paley would undoubtedly say that one has sufficient evidence – he would not claim that it is (what we would now call) logically impossible that any other explanation be true, but that to try to maintain another explanation would be a “doctrine to which [...] no sound mind can assent’ (NT V: 289). But, a critic might ask, ‘What, if anything, is it about this example that allows Paley to say that he has sufficient evidence for believing that what these men testify to is true?’

Admittedly, in the example of a putatively historical event (i.e., that early Christians were persecuted), Paley does not give us explicit or precise criteria for determining whether the evidence we have in a particular case constitutes ‘satisfactory’ or ‘sufficient’ evidence; he simply speaks of there being “a preponderance of evidence.” Still, to begin with, consider the procedures that he would have us use in determining this: such ‘*mental exercise*’ includes “placing a subject in different points of view, *by induction of particulars*[40], by variety of examples, by applying principles to the solution of phenomena, [and] by dwelling upon proofs and consequences” (NT V: 374, emphasis mine).

Moreover, Paley notes that, to have a ‘preponderation of,’ or satisfactory, evidence, such arguments also need to be made carefully. First, one must be careful in what,

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bring in the universal” (*Topics* 1.18, 108b7-12). “Things are similar when any attribute that a group of things possess is the same (*Topics* 1.17, 108a18). The skilled inductive reasoner is one who is trained in drawing out parallel cases, of making comparisons and discerning what is similar” (*Topics* 8.14, 164a16). See Fitts (2009).

[39] Nevertheless, it seems that we do see traces of a foundationalism in Paley, as we saw earlier in Evidences II: 426. In general, foundationalism, as we saw earlier, admits of a variety of definitions (see Ch 1, ftn 2, above). A generic definition is that “all knowledge must rest on a secure foundation of indubitable truths” (Hasan and Fumerton 2018). But see Alston (1976).

[40] See note 38, above, concerning induction modelled on Aristotle’s *Topics*.

exactly, one concludes from these arguments – that one does not *overstate* what the evidence establishes.

> “In our wishes to convince, we are extremely apt to overstate our arguments. We think no confidence with which we speak of them can be too great, when our intention is to urge them upon our hearers. This zeal, not seldom, I believe, defeats its own purpose, even with those whom we address; but it *always destroys the efficacy of the argument upon ourselves*. “We are conscious of the exaggeration, whether our hearers perceive it or not; and this consciousness corrupts to us the whole influence of the conclusion; robs it even of its just value. Demonstration admits of no degrees; but real life knows nothing of demonstration. It converses only with moral evidence and moral reasoning. In these the scale of probability is extensive; and every argument hath its place in it. It may not be quite the same thing to overstate a true reason, and to advance a false one: but since two questions present themselves to the judgment, usually joined together by their nature and importance, *viz*. on which side probability lies, and how much it preponderates; to transgress the rules of fair reasoning in either question, in either to go beyond our own perception of the subject, is a similar, if not an equal, fault.” (C&S VII:106)

Second, Paley warns his reader about setting too high a level for probability in order to say that someone has proved something.

> “I apprehend much harm to have been done to the community, by the overstrained scrupulousness, or weak timidity, of juries, which demands often such proof of a prisoner's guilt, as the nature and secrecy of his crime scarce possibly admit of; and which holds it the part of a safe conscience not to condenm [sic] any man, whilst there exists the minutest possibility of his innocence. Any story they may happen to have heard or read, whether real or feigned, in which courts of justice have been misled by presumptions of guilt, is enough, in their minds, to found an acquittal upon, where positive proof is wanting. I do not mean that juries should indulge conjectures, should magnify suspicions into proofs, or even that they should weigh probabilities in *gold*

> *scales*:[41] but when *the preponderation of evidence* is so manifest as to persuade every private understanding of the prisoner's guilt; when it furnishes the degree of credibility upon which men decide and act in all other doubts, and which experience hath shewn that they may decide and act upon with sufficient safety; to reject such proof, from an insinuation of uncertainty that belongs to all human affairs, and from a general dread lest the charge of innocent blood should lie at their doors, is a *conduct*, which, however natural to a mind studious of its own quiet, is *authorised by no considerations of rectitude or utility*. It counteracts the care and damps the activity of government; it holds out public encouragement to villainy [sic], by confessing the impossibility of bringing villains to justice; and that species of encouragement which, as hath been just now observed, the minds of such men are most apt to entertain and dwell upon." (M&P IV: 446-7, emphasis mine)

Third, when it comes to accumulating evidence and establishing fact, Paley notes, against Hume, that a key role is played by testimony[42] – although one need be careful about when it is reliable, and when not. Paley does not elaborate, in detail or at length, the conditions required for good or reliable testimony, though it is obvious that he has Locke's criteria in mind. From his examples, one sees that these criteria include the number of the witnesses, their integrity, their knowledge or skill in the matter, whether the testimony is concurrent or whether there be contrary testimony, whether the witnesses have a personal stake in the matter – and Paley would add, their constancy in the face of threat, punishment, and torture – though, interestingly, not whether they agree on every detail.[43] Moreover, Paley is careful to see these characteristics as criteria for the reliability of the fact of their experience or belief in what they are reporting, but not necessarily in their judgement or their inference from experience.

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[41] Note: "to weigh in gold scales" is a legal expression of the time, meaning 'to be unduly precise and rigorous' or "to engage in hair-splitting discussions concerning the merits and demerits" of an issue (*American Gardener* 282). See also Thompson (1889: 1551) [citing State v. Bland, 2 S.E. 460 (N.C. 1887)]: "the jury need not be very nice, or as is sometimes said, weigh in gold scales."

A number of legal texts in the 19th century referred to Paley's worries here. See, for example, "F.F.B." (1867: 392).

[42] In the *Evidences*, Paley notes the variety and the concurrence of testimony that helps to establish its strength and, presumably, the statement being testified to, as true. "The force of the testimony of the period which we have considered is greatly strengthened by the observation, that it is the testimony, and the concurring testimony, of writers who lived in countries remote from one another. Clement flourished at Rome, Ignatius at Antioch, Polycarp at Smyrna, Justin Martyr in Syria, and Irenaeus in France." (Evidences II: 121).

(As just noted, while Paley advises his reader to look at details of the testimony and not just at the judgement of the witnesses, sometimes one should be wary of a complete consistency in minute details. On matters of testimony,

> “The usual character of human testimony is substantial truth under circumstantial variety. This is what the daily experience of courts of justice teaches. When accounts of a transaction come from the mouths of different witnesses, it is seldom that it is not possible to pick out apparent or real inconsistencies between them. These inconsistencies are studiously displayed by an adverse pleader, but oftentimes with little impression upon the minds of the judges. On the contrary, a close and minute agreement induces the suspicion of confederacy and fraud.[44] When written histories touch upon the same scenes of action; the comparison almost always affords ground for a like reflection. Numerous, and sometimes important, variations present themselves; not seldom, also, absolute and final contradictions; yet neither one nor the other are deemed sufficient to shake the credibility of the main fact. The embassy of the Jews to deprecate the execution of Claudian's order to place his statute [sic], in their temple, Philo places in harvest, Josephus in seed time; both contemporary writers. No reader is led by this inconsistency to doubt whether such an embassy was sent, or whether such an order was given. Our own history supplies examples of the same kind” (Evidences II: 370-71)

Even if and when there is variation in testimony, there can also be “substantial truth.”)

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[43] We can infer these criteria from the text in the Evidences (II: 8), concerning the witness of “twelve men [… of] probity and good sense,” cited earlier. See Whately (1846: 18-19), discussed in the next chapter.

[44] When Paley writes of the ‘circumstantial variety’ in testimony, his suggestion is that, on the one hand, this variety of evidences supports the historical claim but, on the other, too much consistency in small detail suggests collusion. Recall his comment, cited earlier, in Evidences II: 32.

In general, then, Paley finds that testimony may provide adequate and sufficient reason to establish a fact, and that the general suspicion of testimony by Hume and, arguably, Locke, is not reasonable.

Thus, by being attentive not to conclude too much or to demand too much evidence, and by weighing evidence carefully – i.e., by engaging in the kind of ‘mental exercise’ described above – it is possible to be certain of a claim or say that we have “sufficient evidence” for it. Further, we can be said to be reasonable in our holding that the claim is true so far as we can be said to have provided proof for that claim.

Paley does not explicitly address the question of the burden of proof – whether this is borne by the believer or by the non-believer. But he warns that bias can impact and impair our reasoning.

> “*Men decide under the power and influence of sinful temptation*; but, having decided, the decision is afterwards remembered by them, and grows into a settled and *habitual opinion*, as much as if they had proceeded in it without any bias or prejudice whatever.” (Sermons VI: 326, emphasis mine).[45]

The model of the kind of *proof* that Paley offers throughout his work looks very much like that which one would find in *a court of law*. Indeed, if we look at the structure of the *Evidences*, Paley begins by enumerating cases – explaining how what is reported is believable, or why those testifying ought to be believed – next, showing that there is something special in the cases that he is considering, and *then* proceeding to consider, and respond to, possible objections. He employs the same technique in *Natural Theology*. This also conforms to Paley’s own account of his method, which he outlines in his *A Defence of the Considerations of the Propriety of Requiring a Subscription to Articles of Faith* – where he proposes that “the fair way of conducting a dispute is to exhibit one by one the arguments of your opponent, and with each argument, the precise and specific answer you are able to give it" (HorPaul/Tracts III: 283).

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[45] Paley is attentive to the role of habit in judgement, for good or ill, anticipating, perhaps, later notions of ‘antecedent probability.’ See his sermon, “How Virtue produces Belief”: “What is it which gives to their judgement its turn and bias? It is these occasional decisions often repeated; which decisions have the same power and influence over the man’s after-opinion, *as if they had been made ever so impartially*, or ever so correctly: whereas, in fact, they are made under circumstances which exclude, almost, the possibility of their being made with fairness, and with sufficient inquiry” (Sermons VI: 326).

Elsewhere, Paley writes of the value of the juridical model in arriving at a reasoned and impartial or "indifferent" conclusion.

> "The construction of English courts of law, in which causes are tried by a jury, with the assistance of a judge, combines the two species [of determining truth] with peculiar success. This admirable contrivance unites the wisdom of a fixed with the integrity of a casual judicature; and avoids, in a great measure, the inconveniences of both. The judge imparts to the jury the benefit of his erudition and experience; the jury, by their disinterestedness, check any corrupt partialities which previous application may have produced in the judge" (M&P IV: 406-7).

Indeed, it should not be surprising that he would use such a model, given his own apparent interest and lifelong pleasure in attending sessions of courts of justice.[46]

If we take into account these matters, Paley writes, and if we construct our arguments and proofs using probabilities, the conclusions to which we – and every reasonable person – must come (even if the arguments leading up to them are not demonstrative or do not use Millian causal reasoning), can be said to be reasonable. The probability here is not a statistical one; it has its weight in 'finding similarities' with what one has experienced in the past, but also in considering the likelihood or probability in comparison with other possible explanations.

Of course, Paley's claim is not that the conclusions one might draw from these arguments are always going to be true – but that the evidence for them is at least probable, and that it would be reasonable to take them to be true, and unreasonable to doubt them. Sufficient evidence, then, is evidence sufficient to exclude any other available option and to remove any reasonable doubt.

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[46] See "Life of Dr Paley" (I: 35) and the discussion by Alexander (1918: 78). See also the description of trials at M&P (IV: 383). Also, Paley's interest in the law, and of legal reasoning as a model for reasoning in general, is evident from the way in which he constructs his examples.

Even if we do not have clear criteria for sufficient evidence, Paley's notion of 'sufficient evidence' is certainly not one that requires a demonstration from axioms that are either self-evident, incorrigible reports of experience, or evident to the senses. Sufficient evidence is not determined by the form of the argument or proof, and it certainly is not (as we saw earlier in Locke and Hume) "foundationalist." The conclusion – the reasonable belief – then, is the 'best explanation' of the data – it is most consistent with what is to be explained. And, as we will see below, Paley would foresee no difficulty arising from the view that this method lays "the foundation of every thing which is religious" (NT V: 375).

5.4 Belief

Unlike Locke and Hume, Paley does not provide a definition or explanation of terms such as 'belief,' 'faith,' and 'knowledge,' and he uses the term 'belief' sometimes rather loosely and in different senses. In some cases, 'belief' seems to signify a trust or 'belief in'; he writes of the society of early Christians "avowing their belief in his [Christ's] mission", and of them "openly professing their *belief in* Christ (Evidences II: 337), and that it was a "conviction" that became "stronger and stronger" (Sermons VI: 323). At other times, in a few instances, it is a rough equivalent of faith – such as when he quotes "Lord, help *his* unbelief, and increase *his* faith"[47], and when he refers to 'systems of belief' (Evidences II: 351).[48] Generally, however, for Paley belief is (simply) "an act of the understanding" (Sermons VI: 322) and, thus, is (generally) propositional (propositions being the proper object of the understanding). For example, Paley writes of those who cannot "reconcile to their belief every proposition imposed upon them by subscription" to the (Anglican) articles of faith (Hor. Paul III: 304); how prior belief facilitates "belief of the fundamental articles of Revelation" (NT V: 377), and how it was "in consequence of

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[47] Paley 1830: 4, 325. But Stephen writes, in his *Dictionary of National Biography* entry, that this "is merely a reprint of an old compilation (see E. Whately)" (Stephen 1985: 106).

[48] Paley cites the Scottish historian and Church of Scotland minister, William Robertson (1721-93), who writes of "the credulity of [certain] nations, in embracing systems of belief" (see Robertson 1792: 324).

their belief of the truth of that history" (Evidences II: 177, 320) that early Christians were willing to engage in various labours, risk dangers, and to suffer.

What is the basis of belief? In some places, Paley speaks of beliefs *as based on* reasoning, or on prior beliefs or truths, or 'on proof and evidence'. Thus, for example, he notes that **"**belief of Christianity, … must, in the first instance at least, depend upon the ordinary maxims of historical credibility" (Evidences II: 432). In other places, however, he writes that one's conduct may be the occasion for acquiring a belief. In his Sermon entitled "How Virtue produces Belief, and Vice Unbelief," Paley writes that "our behaviour does influence our belief" – for example, that acting virtuously leads to certain beliefs (Sermons, VI: 322).[49] What occurs here, as Paley describes it, is that a "process, somehow or other, takes place in the understanding, which *brings the mind* of him who acts rightly *to [a] conclusion*" (Sermons, VI: 323). Correspondingly, a vicious act repeated often "impairs our reasoning," so that our judgments, Paley writes, may be "made under circumstances which exclude, almost, the possibility of their being made with fairness, and with sufficient inquiry" (Sermons, VI: 326). Thus, when one has "a debauched mind no reasoning has its proper influence" (Sermons, VI: 327). This suggests that, for Paley, at least some beliefs are *not* based on reason.

It seems that, strictly speaking, belief is not voluntary for Paley. (It is not clear if it is naturalistic, e.g., 'triggered,'[50] as in Hume and, possibly, Locke.) Paley writes that, as an act of understanding, belief is something that may arise independently of any act of the will.[51] Again, as noted above, our conduct may lead us to certain beliefs. Still, even if belief, as an act of understanding, is not strictly voluntary, at least to the extent that we have control over our behaviour, belief is, at least indirectly, under one's control, so far as assent to belief is under one's control.

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[49] The connection between action and belief is, again, seen in Paley's remark in the sermon "How Virtue produces Belief, and Vice Unbelief": "He that doeth the will of God, cometh to believe that Jesus Christ is of God" (Sermons VI: 323).

[50] Although, as noted earlier, Paley does not often use the term 'induction,' he sometimes refers to a belief being 'induced' by another statement, e.g., "the latter admits, and prima facie, *induces***,** a belief." (M&P IV: 300).

[51] Paley writes, for example, that "conduct is immediately voluntary, belief is not: one is an act of the will, under the power of motives; the other is an act of the understanding" (Sermons, VI: 322)

On Paley's view, assent to propositions of belief can and, arguably, should be the result of evidence and argument; this factor shows that such assent is a matter of choice and seems somewhat close to Locke's view.[52] Thus, Paley considers the 'evidences' for historical as well as 'miracle' claims in early Christianity. Assent may be given to beliefs that appear as "propositions", "evidence", "inferences", "conclusions", "positions", and so on.[53] But while assent should normally have "proper grounds and evidence,"[54] it is not always the case that evidence is effective. In some cases, assent does not follow on evidence; Paley refers to the disciples who, at first, did not believe in the resurrection. In other cases, assent itself may be 'notional' (as JH Newman put it later) – that there may be "mere assent" or "mere complying assent" to a "verbal proposition" (NT V: 375) A further distinction between belief and assent is seen in Paley's view that one may believe a conclusion but not assent to "all the premises."[55]

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[52] See the discussion in Chapter 3, ftn 25, above, referring to Passmore (1986). Locke seems to hold that belief is 'involuntary,' while assent can somehow be voluntary.

[53] Paley writes, for example, of assent to propositions "as principles" (NT V: 343); that "If any one choose to call assent to its evidence credulity, it is at least incumbent upon him to produce examples in which the same evidence hath turned out to be fallacious" (Evidences II: 184); that "Some … may assent to the inference which we draw from it" (NT V: 238); that "Whatever difficulties we may meet with in other topics of the Christian evidence, we can have little in yielding our assent to the following conclusions" (HorPaul III: 266); and that "every attentive observer of human life will assent to [one's] position" (NT V: 349).

[54] On important issues, such as the truths of Christianity, Paley calls for "sober discussion and legitimate reasoning" – e.g.,

"that the cause be tried upon its merits: — that all applications to the fancy, passions, or prejudices, of the reader, all attempts to pre-occupy, ensnare, or perplex, his judgment, by any art, influence, or impression whatsoever, extrinsic to *the proper grounds and evidence upon which his assent ought to proceed*, be rejected from a question which involves in its determination the hopes, the virtue, and the repose, of millions:—that the controversy be managed on both sides with sincerity; that is, that nothing be produced, in the writings of either, contrary to, or beyond, the writer's own knowledge and persuasion: — that objections and difficulties be proposed, from no other motive than an honest and serious desire to obtain satisfaction, or to communicate information which may promote the discovery and progress of truth:—that in conformity with this design, everything be stated with integrity, with method, precision, and simplicity; and above all, that whatever is published in opposition to received and confessedly beneficial persuasions, be set forth under a form which is likely to invite inquiry and to meet examination." (M&P, IV: 313-314, emphasis mine).

[55] Paley quotes Bishop Gilbert Burnet's view that "When divine writers argue upon any point, we are always bound to believe the conclusions that their reasonings end in, as parts of divine revelation: but we are not bound to be able to make out, or even to assent to, *all the premises* made use of by them, in their whole extent, unless it appear plainly, that they affirm the premises as expressly as they do the conclusions proved by them" (Evidences II: 378).

Finally, for Paley, (a) belief is not just a mental state. It can, and in some cases should, have a correlative disposition – i.e., for Paley, belief leads to or, at least, requires action. Paley argues, for example, that, in early Christianity, the belief in certain historical truths led, or ought to have led, to acting on those beliefs, e.g., by being baptized, and by engaging in what he might call the Christian life.[56]

5.4.1 Religious belief

While Paley does use the term 'religious belief' (Sermons VI: 184), he more often refers to "articles of faith" and to "principles of faith."[57] Articles and principles of faith are beliefs, but these beliefs do not seem particularly distinct from other kinds of belief.

Religious beliefs or 'articles' or 'principles of faith,' like all 'acts of the understanding,' are propositional in form. Moreover, like all beliefs of any import, religious beliefs are also, at least sometimes, dispositional – i.e., they lead believers to act in certain ways – and Paley takes the fact that certain beliefs led "the original witnesses of the Christian history" (Evidences II: 320) to act in certain ways in spite of extreme difficulties, to "change their former opinions" (Evidences II: 369),[58] and to "devote[] themselves to lives of toil, suffering, and danger, in consequence of their belief of the truth of that history" (Evidences II: 320),[59] as evidence that this history was true.

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[56] The connection between belief and disposition to act, such that action seems to be implied in the belief, is evidenced by, Paley notes, the fact that those who "were solicitous to secure to themselves happiness after death, ought to receive him as such, and to make profession of their belief, by being *baptized in* his name" (Evidences II: 38). Moreover, those who "faithfully practise what they do know, and live agreeably to the belief which they have, and to the just and rational consequences of that belief, seldom fail to proceed further." (Sermons VI: 329).

[57] Paley writes that Christ's mission was "to afford to a lost and ignorant world … such assured *principles of faith, and rules of practice*; … as might enable all, and engage many, to enter upon a course of life, which, by rendering the person who pursued it acceptable to God, would conduct him to happiness, in another stage of his existence." (C&S VII: 89, emphasis mine).

[58] As evidence, Paley points out "that a great number of men upon the spot, personally connected with the history and with the Author of the religion, were *induced* by what they heard, and saw, and knew, *not only to change their former opinions*, but to give up their time, and sacrifice their ease, to traverse seas and kingdoms without rest and without weariness, to commit themselves to extreme dangers, to undertake incessant toils, to undergo grievous sufferings; and all this, solely in consequence, and in support, of their belief of *facts*, which, if true, *establish* the truth of the religion; which, if false, they must have known to be so." (Evidences II: 369, emphasis mine).

As noted above, however, Paley does not provide a definition of faith, and, like 'belief,' the term has different senses. Here, he clearly varies from Locke.[60] In Paley, 'faith' frequently refers to Christianity in a general sense (as "the faith" or "our faith" or "the true faith" (Evidences II: 366) or – in the case of early Christianity, "the new faith" (Evidences II: 44) Sometimes it refers to one's trust (particularly to one's trust in a particular person, e.g., Christ [Sermons VI: 333]), or to one's own confidence or steadfastness or fidelity. Overall, however, faith is not obviously distinct from assent to a certain set of beliefs that, presumably, are of historical persons or events, but nothing more. (For example, for Paley, it doesn't matter to the truth of a belief that Jesus was the person under discussion; Paley suggests that one would have a similar belief about *any* individual who performed miracles and had the same effect that Jesus had.[61])

Not only is religious belief propositional, but the basis for such belief or faith is also propositional – in fact, it is based on empirical propositions. Paley writes:

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[59] Paley writes that St. James "proceeds in the text to tell us what the effects are which it [religious belief] ought to produce; and these he disposes into two comprehensive classes … positive virtue and personal innocence." (Sermons VI: 333).

[60] According to Locke, one will recall, faith is (only) assent to any proposition "upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God, in some extraordinary way of communication." *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* IV. xviii. 2.

[61] In other words, it is the facts, and not a prior belief, that lead one to this conclusion. Paley writes: "if Socrates had professed to perform public miracles at Athens; if the friends of Socrates, Phaedo, Cebes, Crito, and Simmias, together with Plato, and many of his followers, relying upon the attestations which these miracles afforded to his pretensions, had, at the hazard of their lives, and the certain expense of their ease and tranquility, gone about Greece, after his death, to publish and propagate his doctrines: and if these things had come to our knowledge, in the same way as that in which the life of Socrates is now transmitted to us, through the hands of his companions and disciples, that is, by writings received without doubt as theirs, from the age in which they were published to the present, I should have believed this likewise. And my belief would, in each case, be much strengthened, if the subject of the mission were of importance to the conduct and happiness of human life; if it testified any thing which it behoved mankind to know from such authority; if the nature of what it delivered, required the sort of proof which it alleged; if the occasion was adequate to the interposition, the end worthy of the means. In the last case, my faith would be much confirmed, if the effects of the transaction remained; more especially, if a change had been wrought, at the time, in the opinion and conduct of such numbers, as to lay the foundation of an institution, *and of a system of doctrines*." (Evidences II: 183-184).

> “*The truth of Christianity depends upon its leading facts*, and upon them alone. Now of these *we have evidence* which ought to satisfy us …These *propositions alone* lay a foundation for our faith; for they prove the existence of a transaction, which cannot even in its most general parts be accounted for, upon any reasonable supposition, except that of the truth of the mission.” (Evidences II: 428, emphasis mine).

But religious belief, as we have seen above, can also depend on our behaviour. Paley writes: “our behaviour does influence our belief” (Sermons VI: 332). Moreover, just as “vice tends to obstruct, impair, and, at length, destroy our faith… [Paley holds that] that virtue must facilitate, support, and confirm it” (Sermons VI: 324).[62]

Like belief in general, religious belief is dispositional[63] [64], leads to action, and action – as we have seen – leads to ‘seeing’ or coming to understand certain things. Thus,

> “they who sincerely act, or sincerely endeavour to act, *according* to what they believe, that is, according to the just result of the probabilities, or, if you please, the possibilities, in natural and revealed religion, which they themselves perceive, and according to a rational estimate of consequences, and, above all, according to the just effect of those principles of gratitude and devotion, which even the view of nature generates in a well-ordered mind, *seldom fail of proceeding farther*” (Evidences II: 414).

Finally, faith is sometimes described as a ‘way of *thinking* and acting’[65] – it has an epistemological character. Paley does not develop this point[66], but Paley suggests that the way a Christian sees the world is different from that of a non-believer. Paley does not say that this affects what counts as evidence or sufficient evidence for most beliefs or articles of faith, though it does seem as if it may; recall that, as noted above, that it seems that some things cannot be proved to persons without faith.[67] Moreover, religious belief can also depend on our behaviour.[68] Paley does say that "our perception of evidence or credibility should be affected by our virtues or vices … Our behavior does influence our belief" (Sermons VI: 322).

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[62] On the role of practice on acquiring knowledge, see note 56, above, citing Sermons VI: 329.

[63] Paley notes, as well, that: St. James’s “doctrine is, that … the faith which is unproductive is not the right faith: but then this is allowing (and not denying), that a right faith is the source and spring of true virtue…” (Sermons VI: 333). Moreover, “having marked strongly the futility of a faith which produced no good effects upon life and action, he proceeds in the text to tell us what the effects are which it ought to produce” (Sermons VI: 333-334).

[64] Paley holds that faith leads to action – that “unless [the believer] do good; unless his actions, and dealings, and behaviour, come up to his knowledge and his discourse, correspond with his outward profession and belief, it will avail him nothing” (C&S VII: 393).

[65] Paley refers to “a different turn of mind, and a different way of thinking” (Sermons VI: 260) and, again, to “a new faith, a new way of thinking and acting” (Evidences II: 348).

In order for one to have faith and, thereby, to 'see the world' in a distinctive way, there is a need for divine grace.[69] Paley writes: "our faith as well as to our practice; our *perceiving* the truth, as well as our *obeying* the truth, may be helped and succoured by it [God's grace]" (Sermons VI: 328, emphasis mine).[70] This grace is also necessary because

> "The natural man is immersed in sense: nothing takes hold of his mind but what applies immediately to his sense: but this disposition will not do for religion: the religious character is founded in hope, as contradistinguished from experience, in perceiving by the mind what is not perceived by the eye: unless a man can do

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[66] But see, for example, Paley's comment that: "So soon as religion gains that hold and that possession of the heart, which it must do to become the means of our salvation, things change within us, as in many other respects, so especially in this. We think a great deal more frequently about it, we think of it for a longer continuance, and our thoughts of it have much more of vivacity and impressiveness. First, we begin to think of religion more frequently than we did." (Sermons VI: 18).

[67] Paley writes of "an argument which cannot be addressed to sceptics or unbelievers. A man must be a Christian before he can receive it. The inspiration of the historical Scriptures, the nature, degree, and extent of that inspiration, are questions undoubtedly of serious discussion; but they are questions amongst Christians themselves, and not between them and others." That being said, Paley still insists that "the belief of Christianity… must, in the first instance at least, depend upon the ordinary maxims of historical credibility." (Evidences II: 432).

[68] Again the role of action upon future belief is seen where Paley writes (as noted above) that: "A process, some how or other, takes place in the understanding, which brings the mind of him who acts rightly to this conclusion. A conviction is formed, and every day made stronger and stronger." (Sermons VI: 333)

[69] Paley quotes: "By grace ye are saved, *through faith*, and that not of yourselves, lest any man should boast." (Eph. ii. 8, 9.) And he continues: "Here you perceive distinctly, that, speaking of salvation, with reference to its cause, it is by grace; it is an act of pure favour; it is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; it is not of works." (Sermons VI: 151, emphasis mine).

[70] Paley writes: "Now, this being the general nature and economy of *God's assisting grace*, there is no reason why it should not extend to our faith, as well as to our practice; *our perceiving the truth, as well as our obeying the truth, may be helped and succoured by it*" (Sermons VI: 328, emphasis mine), and that God "can render the mind sensible to the impressions of evidence, and the power of truth" (Sermons VI: 328).

> this, he cannot be religious: and with many it is a great difficulty.” (Sermons VI: 15)

But this assisting grace requires (voluntary) cooperation. Paley remarks

> “He who is studious to improve his measure of grace, shall find that measure increased upon him. He who neglects or stifles … the portion of grace and assistance which is vouchsafed to him, he, the Scripture says, will find that portion withdrawn from him.” (Sermons VI: 328)

In short, what we see in Paley’s remarks about belief, assent, and particularly religious belief, then, is that religious belief or faith is propositional and dispositional.

As we have seen, when we consider the basis and content of the faith that Paley speaks of, Paley refers primarily to propositions and facts. His account of the ‘evidences of Christianity’ is that its basic historical claims are in the form of propositions[71] expressed by the witnesses: that what the witnesses reported – i.e., miracles – occurred, that these miracles were distinct from the ‘miracles’ reported by the witnesses in other religious traditions, and that these propositions form the foundation(s) of faith. Yet, as some earlier figures held, faith is importantly dispositional – that holding some of these propositions entailed, in some way, acting on them. Finally, Paley holds that this faith has an empirical component. This is crucial, Paley believes, for, without empirical evidence, there would be little reason to have faith and one’s faith would be no better nor worse than the faith of those belonging to another religious tradition. Thus, Paley writes:

> “If the apostles did not believe the miracles, they did not believe the religion; and, without this belief, where was the *piety*, what place was there for any thing which could bear the name or colour of piety, in publishing and attesting miracles in its behalf?” (Evidences II: 194)

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[71] In the *Evidences*, Paley writes: “The two *propositions* which I shall endeavour to establish” are, “first, that the Founder of Christianity, his associates, and immediate followers, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings; secondly, that they did so, in attestation of the miraculous history recorded in our Scriptures, and solely in consequence of *their belief of the truth of that history*.” (Evidences II: 176-177, emphasis mine).

Faith, then, is rational. In order to see how Paley thinks that it is so, it is necessary to look at how faith and religious belief rest on evidence.

5.5 Religious belief and reasonability

Paley holds that, since at least some Christian religious beliefs are based on or refer to facts[72] and therefore have a descriptive character, it is at least appropriate if not necessary that to be reasonable in holding them, one must have 'sufficient evidence' for them. Moreover, Paley says, because "Christianity is but ill defended by refusing audience or toleration to the objections of unbelievers" (M&P IV: 313), one needs to have evidence ready. Further, it is useful to provide argument and evidence for at least some articles of faith – e.g., the existence of God, the existence of miracles, and the truth of Christianity – because "whatever renders religion more rational, renders it more credible" (M&P, IV: vi). Finally, thoroughly examining the central beliefs that religious believers assert (e.g., the existence of God, the incarnation, and the resurrection [Evidences II: Pt 2, chs 3, 4, 6]), tracing out what they depend on, their proof, relations to one another, and consequences, and then showing that these beliefs are true, "facilitates the belief of the fundamental articles of *Revelation*" (NT V: 377).

Paley writes that it is, apparently, necessary to provide argument and proof, because, as we have seen, he holds that "the belief of Christianity... must, in the first instance at least, depend upon the ordinary maxims of historical credibility" (Evidences II: 432), or else there would be no more reason for Christianity than for any other religion. Paley writes that "the faith which he [Christ] required [of his apostles], the assent which he demanded, was a *rational* assent and faith *founded upon proof and evidence*" (Paley 1811: 239). It was founded on "facts" (e.g., miracles) that the apostles had observed – or that, because the Apostles had seen these miracles, Christ "was entitled to … demand their assent [not because of who he was, but] … upon his own testimony and assertion" (Paley 1811: 239, emphasis mine). In other words, it was the apostles' "belief of facts, which, if true, establish the truth of the religion" (Evidences II: 369).

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[72] Such argument and proof, Paley writes, were present from the beginning of Christianity; see note 58, above, and Evidences (II: 369).

Moreover, note that it is "to facts" that Paley appeals: "*To facts*, therefore, our Lord appeals; to facts he refers them, and to the demonstration which they afforded of his power and truth." Paley notes, however, that some have "shut […] their hearts and understandings against the proof and conclusion which facts afforded," and that therefore they are "liable to condemnation." (Sermons V: 377).

Thus, much of Paley's argument in the *Evidences* is to show that the early Christian witnesses spoke the truth as they knew it, and were reasonable in their claims. And, if it is reasonable to believe certain historical claims of and about the early Christians – that they were persecuted and yet persisted in their Christian witness, etc., – this is evidence for the truth of what they claim motivated them to endure those persecutions, etc. , and that their testimony warrants our credence.

For example, recall that, early in the *Evidences*, Paley writes that:

> "If twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they should be deceived; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account, should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposture, or submit to be tied up to a gibbet; if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case; if this threat were communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect; if it was at last executed; if I myself saw them, one after another, consenting to be racked, burnt, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account" (Evidences II: 8),

what should one conclude from this, Paley says, except to say one would have (sufficient) evidence for reasonably holding the belief that what they say is true? Paley further concludes that "there exists not a sceptic in the world who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity."[73]

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[73] It is surely no coincidence in this reference to 12 men and the attestation of a miracle. For 12 men normally constitute not only the number of members of a jury, but also the 12 disciples who themselves had such testimony and who themselves were subjected to such treatment in establishing the veracity of their testimony. See Alexander (1918), where Alexander enumerates Paley's status in relation to issues in law and the philosophy of law.

While Paley may be going too far with this latter remark, one sees what Paley takes to be a standard for sufficient evidence for the putative miraculous events. To begin with, the evidence is empirical – the experience of the witnesses and the reliability of their testimony; recall that Paley accepts the criteria for determining the reliability of testimony that one finds in Locke and even Tillotson. Moreover, the veracity of the testimony is based not just on the fact that a number of reliable and competent witnesses (a claim based on evidence) claimed to have witnessed it (i.e., cumulative evidence), but also on what we know from human behaviour – that liars would not persist in a claim that they know to be false if they were to be subject to extreme suffering for claiming it.

Or again, Paley looks at effects in the world, and enquires after their cause. Paley notes that, given that "every organized natural body [...] testifies a cause," and that "our observation of contrivance, design, and wisdom, in the works of nature" fixes "upon our minds the belief of a God" (Evidences II 436), and that as "constant recurrence" to this becomes "the habitual sentiment of our minds," we have laid "the foundation of every thing which is religious" (NT V: 375; see Evidences II: 436). Paley's claim is not just that 'contrivance' in creatures provides us with a way to conclude to the existence and attributes of God (e.g., an intelligent designer), but that "it is *only* by the display of contrivance, that the existence, the agency, the wisdom, of the deity *could* be testified to his rational creatures" (NT V: 28).

Recall also Paley's argument for a 'watchmaker,' referred to earlier. Just as an examination of a watch leads one to infer a designer or watchmaker, given that "Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater or more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation" (NT V: 12), i.e., given the similarities in effects, we have evidence for the existence of a designer. His point is, interestingly, *not* that the human organism is *like* a machine,[74] but that it *is* a machine, and therefore that whatever has "marks of contrivance" (NT V: 287) must have an intelligent *cause*. As noted above, the inference here is an inductive one, following the Aristotelian model of inference from similarities.

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[74] In like manner, throughout the remainder of *Natural Theology*, Paley constantly adverts to the human organism as a "machine" and as "contrived" (see e.g., NT V: 34).

Paley also refers to the consequences of religious belief to make an argument for its plausibility. He writes that these “propositions [which] alone lay a foundation for [...] faith” are also reasonable because they have a tendency “to promote human happiness” and a morality that is “evidence of... good sense and integrity...” (*Evidences* 236). There is also “internal evidence,” which seems to apply only to (Christian) religious belief; Paley refers to

> “*the general impression* which our Lord’s discourses, and the speeches and letters of his apostles, have *left upon their minds* … is sometimes called *the internal evidence of our religion; and it is very strong.* But inasmuch as it is a species of evidence which applies itself to the knowledge, love, and practice of virtue, it will operate most powerfully where it finds these qualities, or even these tendencies and dispositions, subsisting.” (Sermons VI: 324, emphasis mine).

Paley does not, however, deal with this kind of evidence at any length.

For Paley, this *cumulative* evidence – of a diversity of witnesses, as an explanation of effects, of having good results, and the like – provides one with not only a basis for holding that Christianity is reasonable, but the basis for one being reasonable in being a Christian.

In short, Paley’s views on what counts as ‘sufficient evidence’ and on the kinds of arguments that are productive of reasonable belief, outlined earlier, apply, he holds, to all fields of enquiry – i.e., are equally applicable when it comes to the relation between *religious* belief and argument.

This shows that, for Paley, at least a number of key religious beliefs are descriptive, empirical claims. The relevance and use of direct observation, testimony, and inference of what the most probable or best explanation for empirical phenomena might be – all indicate that, for Paley, some fundamental religious beliefs are empirical propositions that can be proven.

This general insistence on proof and evidence does not, admittedly, *require* that every believer base her or his belief on argument and proof, nor that *all* the beliefs associated with one's religion need to have evidence for this truth for one's faith to be reasonable.[75] For, first, to require such would mean that the appropriate position for all people would be agnosticism until they went through all the various arguments, for and against – and Paley does not seem to hold *this* view. Still, he pointedly does not say that it is reasonable to believe without evidence, and he does say that the genuine credulity of Christianity is something that involves having evidence, that believers should not rely simply on authority for their beliefs, and he describes those who do not have this evidence as having only 'habitual opinion' (NT V: 373).

Second, Paley allows that one can hold Christian religious belief without being able to show that all of the particular beliefs associated with it are known to be true or probable.[76] Still, to hold that it is *reasonable* to believe it seems to require evidence. Hence, Paley's efforts, throughout his writings, to show that the 'leading facts' of Christianity, and their presuppositions are probabilities. They can be established (e.g., where all authorities "concur" [Evidences II: 428] on certain points; where the different Gospel narratives concur and reinforce one another, and where those testifying "voluntarily entered upon lives of toil and hardship, and with a full experience of their danger, committed themselves to the last extremities of persecution" [Evidences II: 428] in defending these claims).

Third, there are a number of religious beliefs that Paley does not think are capable of an empirical proof – some seem to be available only to Christians. While experience (e.g., through testimony, or through inference from effects) allows one to know certain truths, Paley holds that there are other truths – truths about the ‘unseen’ – “that cannot be known through experience, and for that faith is needed. And the faith that is the result of this grace, itself serves as evidence of truth of things ‘unseen’”; Paley cites the text “We walk by faith, not by sight [2 Cor 5:7]: faith is the evidence of things not seen.” [Hebrews 1:1] (Evidences II: 432) Further, it is noteworthy that Paley does not provide evidences for doctrinal claims, such as on the Trinity or the nature of the next life, and seems even to wish to avoid such discussions. In some cases, he argues that this shows the credibility of the early Christians – that they were modest in what they claimed to know. And Paley himself is cautious in talking about the Trinity[77]. Overall, it raises the question of how far evidence for religion and religious belief can go. (And it is not surprising, then, that Paley was sometimes regarded as a latitudinarian or as a Socinian.[78])

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[75] It is clearly, then, at least an exaggeration to claim, as James Collins does, that the Noetic or Evidential view was that "no one has the right to believe until he has given a formal demonstration [in syllogistic form] of the doctrines patterned after the proof required in mathematics and natural science" and "when the support of formal logical argument is obtained, it compels the assent of any rightminded person to the articles of Christian belief" (Collins 1961: 5).

[76] In response to those who insist that subscribing to the basic principles of Anglicanism – the Thirty-nine Articles – means that one has a formed belief of each one, Paley responds: "They who contend, that nothing less can justify subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, than the actual belief of each and every separate proposition contained in them, must suppose, that the legislature expected the consent of ten thousand men, and that in perpetual succession, not to one controverted proposition, but to many hundreds. It is difficult to conceive how this could be expected by any, who observed the incurable diversity of human opinion upon all subjects short of demonstration" (M&P IV: 144-145).

This being said, Paley holds that, nevertheless, religion or religious belief is reasonable: it meets epistemic standards of ‘sufficient evidence’ (e.g., it has proof, based on observation), at least some of the testimony is reliable, what the witnesses testified to has an independent value and plausibility, and there are good reasons, based on its effects, for there being a cause.

Such arguments are, generally, ‘probable’ – what they establish is the best (even if not the sole possible) explanation. In Paley’s ‘evidentialism,’ there is no necessary or even relevant connection between the claim that religious belief and practice must have ‘sufficient evidence’ to be held rationally or legitimately, and the view that the standard for such evidence must be a ‘foundationalist’ one. And Paley points out that there is an intended ‘modesty’ in the strength of the arguments for religious belief; that “overpowering evidence which [his] adversaries require in a revelation” would not be appropriate; it would not be consistent with a Deity who wanted assent to religious belief to be a free act – that such “irresistible proof” would be inconsistent with the “probative” character of human existence on earth (Evidences II: 413). Nevertheless, the connection between evidence and religious belief is clear. For Paley, there could be “a rational assent and faith founded upon proof and evidence” (Paley 1811: 239).

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[77] For example, concerning the Trinity, Paley writes: “What is that union which subsists in the divine nature; of what kind is that relation by which the divine persons of the Trinity are connected; we know little, perhaps, it is not possible we should know more…” (C&S VII: 426).

[78] Though Leslie Stephen seems to have regarded Paley as such. See Stephen (1902: 1, 426). For a challenge to Stephen’s view, see the discussion by Cole (1987) and Clarke (1974: 112).

Let me make one ‘side note’ on this issue of religious belief and proof. Some critics[79] have raised the question why Paley apparently did not address Hume’s criticisms of ‘the design argument,’ alleging that Paley’s argument in *Natural Theology* had been effectively refuted by Hume almost 25 years earlier, in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*.

It is difficult to say why Paley did not address Hume’s arguments in the *Dialogues* at any length. In the first place, Paley’s writings are, in general, works of general apologetics. They offer a ‘positive’ set of arguments, but rarely engage in any debate. Second, Paley does briefly mention Hume’s *Dialogues* (NT V: 356), and he refers to Hume as well in the Evidences, particularly concerning Hume’s arguments against testimonial evidence for miracles. The response in the Evidences was not especially novel – Hume’s arguments had been fairly thoroughly challenged even before Paley took up the case in the *Evidences*[80], and Paley’s own discussion of the conditions for the reliability of testimony

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[79] See, for example, Mossner (1978: 174). In this dyspeptic review, Mossner accuses Paley of “shabby thinking” and a “shopworn philosophy,” and claims to be perplexed by Paley’s “prestige” and “influence” in the nineteenth century.

[80] Concerning ‘Why not a more substantial refutation of Hume?, in a commentary on the *Evidences*, the (anonymous) editor of an edition of Paley’s *Works* from 1838 wrote:

“The value of the pilot is known best in the storm; and the lovers therefore of Christianity, the humble, the anxious, and the devout, were, in consequence, delighted, at such a period, with this splendid, this unanswerable work [i.e., the Evidences]. Blasphemy and irreligion were confounded if not abashed; not an infidel could be found hardy enough to attempt to produce an answer. Scepticism began from that day to be no longer generally fashionable; for Paley had shewn, in plain and popular language, that so far from being reasonable, it was not even plausible. The learned, therefore, and the men of science, no longer generally patronised infidelity; it ceased to be thought an evidence of genius to be an infidel; and the professors of it have never since made head in England. The “Age of Reason,” and the natural fruits of it, in the French revolutionary philosophy, helped to give a finishing blow to the once fashionable taste, since it practically convinced all reasonable men of the truth of Paley’s assertions, that infidelity was neither so liberal as Christianity, nor so friendly to the propagation of either liberty or virtue. The good men, of all sects, rejoiced at the opportune appearance of this great work; for they felt that a blow had been struck at infidelity, which all the Gibbons, all the Humes, and all the false philosophy of the age, could not return. The work was read by all classes; the king carried it with him in his carriage; Cambridge made it a text book for her students; and its author was enabled to partake of the general exultation, by the noble conduct of the prelates of England, who caressed and immediately promoted him to some of the best challenged many of Hume's claims. Third, Hume's (posthumous) *Dialogues*, as any careful scholar must have known, aroused only a modest contemporary response (see Fieser 2001 and 2003), although those critical responses had discussed much of what Hume had to say. Hume's scepticism and his positive philosophical views were widely rejected even before the publication of Hume's collected philosophical works in 1874-75 (Green & Grose 1875-1882). This, together with Hume's ambiguity in the *Dialogues* about whether there was design (something that he seems to have not addressed clearly), and the ambiguity about who 'represented' Hume in the *Dialogue*s, may have led Paley not to consider the arguments worthy of more than passing mention. In any event, Hume's arguments in the *Enquiry* concerning miracles – which Paley indirectly but extensively addresses throughout his *Horae Paulinae* and the *Evidences of Christianity* – were seen to be stronger but also more relevant arguments. Finally, Paley fairly clearly rejected Hume's criticisms about inferences from effects to causes, given his remarks on induction, and several of Hume's criticisms about arguments from analogy did not obviously apply to Paley's account. As we have seen, in *Natural Theology*, Paley does not offer an argument from analogy but an argument from effects to causes. The question that some critics raise – 'Why did Paley not reply to Hume?' – might be better framed as "Need Paley have replied to Hume?"

5.6 Summary

Paley's influence was extensive. His moral philosophy continued to have a place in philosophy and political economy well into the mid-nineteenth century,[81] his *Evidences* were read at Cambridge until the early twentieth century, and his *Natural Theology* is frequently read and referred to today. This continued interest in Paley may be due, at

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preferments in their power to bestow upon him" (Paley 1838: 199).

[81] For example, in the 1850s and thereafter, Paley's work on moral philosophy was still regarded as valuable for discussions of ethics and moral philosophy, no doubt because of some of the utilitarian character of his work. See Alexander Bain's edition, with discussion and annotations, of *The Moral Philosophy of Paley* (Bain 1852). The influential Canadian educationalist of the mid 19th century, Egerton Ryerson (1803–82), was also "a devotee of the thought of William Paley who is omnipresent in his writings." See Pearce (2015: 132, n. 22).

least in part, because of his reputation as “a master of lucidity and persuasion” (Mossner 1978: 172).

Like Locke and Hume, Paley insisted on evidence for religious belief – not only that there could be evidence for religious belief but that, for some key claims, that there must be. Moreover, Paley laid out in greater detail than many of his predecessors what was required for ‘sufficient evidence.’ This was an approach that was stronger than Tillotson and Chillingworth, and more in keeping with Locke and Hume.

There is, however, a notable shift from earlier discussion of faith and religious belief. To begin with, the intellectual environment had changed; Paley saw his interlocutors to be not only his fellow Protestant Christians, but also the sceptic and even the non-believer. (He could not take for granted the *prima facie* truth of scripture, as in Tillotson and Chillingworth, and therefore sought to establish its reliability on publicly empirical and rational terms.) Thus, when it came to Paley’s contributions, the question of the place of reason was no longer a debate simply within theology. Religious belief and faith were now part of a broader, intellectual debate. Paley adopted, or at least adapted, therefore, a number of the views found in Locke – and even Hume – as presuppositions for the discussion of religious belief. Experience (e.g., observation and testimony) and reason have not just an important, but a fundamental role in belief, by providing foundations. Evidence and reason are the arbiters of truth and falsity, but also of the reasonableness or unreasonableness of believing. Again, the model of ‘reason’ that Paley employs is likely influenced by Locke and Hume. Reason – generally in the form of a process of a calculation of probabilities – is no longer within religion, as it was for Tillotson, but independent of it. Belief, including religious belief, is propositional in form, and descriptive and cognitive in character.[82] Faith or religious belief as a whole, then, is largely or simply one’s assenting to a certain number of these propositions. As a result of this understanding of faith or religious belief, it makes sense to see whether a belief or article of faith has ‘sufficient evidence.’ Still, while adopting the same general criteria for ‘reasonable belief’ as his sceptical forbearers and contemporaries, Paley held that the sceptical case was ‘not proven.’

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[82] Moreover, Jeffrey Suderman argues that in Locke and thereafter, including in Paley, there were common assumptions made about human psychology “that all human minds are so constituted as to perceive and judge evidence (such as testimony) in a uniform manner, and that God is of such a nature that he places necessary and saving truths within reach of human minds” and, thus, that Paley simply assumed that the only reason “why sane men and women would suffer and die for the sake of religious claims” was that they “believed in an absolutely literal and historical manner” (Suderman 2001: 170).

Aside from criticism of the originality of Paley’s writings, many have argued, as we have seen, that Paley ignored the challenges of sceptics such as Hume – though whether this is so is far from obvious, and has been contested. Paley’s care in setting out the conditions for the credibility of testimony in his *Evidences* arguably addresses the criticisms of Hume on testimony, and his causal inference to the existence of a designer plausibly seeks to avoid the weaknesses of using analogy – though whether Paley was successful in this is another matter.

Some, like Paley’s contemporary George Campbell, provide an interesting defence of testimony[83] which Paley did not make use of. Campbell argues, like Thomas Reid, that there is a *prima facie* credibility to testimony. Others, like Whately, argued that Paley’s claim of benevolent design was unsupported by own Paley’s moral philosophy. Still others, like Coleridge, regarded Paley’s arguments as missing the heart of religious belief – “forgetting that Christianity is not just a theory but rather spirit and life.”[84] Some saw Paley’s arguments as too arid; others, that they verged on Socinianism.

But what is important for present purposes is not whether Paley was correct, but rather what he held was the relation between evidence, argument, and religious belief. Here, Paley offers a view that insists on the usefulness and, arguably, the necessity of reason and evidence for religious belief. Paley adopts an empirical model that puts religious belief on a par with any other belief or claim to knowledge.

Yet Paley’s view is also rather nuanced. While religious belief involves an assent to a descriptive proposition, there is more to it than that; there is some relation to disposition and action. Moreover, the content of religious beliefs is left fairly undefined, with some substantive ones placed outside reason. And while beliefs need evidence, and while what counts as ‘sufficient evidence’ for a belief is, admittedly, somewhat vague, Paley does not employ a foundationalist standard of ‘sufficient evidence’; instead his view is closer to a legal model.[85] Finally, Paley seems to recognise that belief, and particularly faith, is not simply assenting to propositions – though it can include this – but may also be a ‘way of thinking’ or a ‘way of seeing.’

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[83] Campbell argued that there was a *prima facie* credibility to testimony – that testimony did not normally need prior evidence – and that, generally, it is a fact of human nature (as we see particularly in the case of children) that people often trust testimony *prior to* evidence for the testimony (see Campbell 1762 and the discussion in Pitson 2006). In response, see Falkenstein (2016).

[84] See Dulles (2005: 222). Similarly, Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes: “Evidences of Christianity! I am weary of the word.” See his *Aids to Reflection* [originally published (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1825)] (Coleridge 1993: 9, 405).

One of Paley’s successors, Richard Whately, takes up much of what Paley says, addresses some of the challenges to Paley’s views, provides more complete accounts of what is required for sufficient evidence and, arguably, provides a more complete account of ‘theistic evidentialism.’ I turn, now, to the second major representative of evidentialism, Richard Whately.

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[85] Whately writes (in his edition of Paley’s *Evidences*): “I have often recommended the study of this work [*Horae Pauliniae*] to legal students; not merely on account of its intrinsic value, with a view to its own immediate object, but also as an admirable exercise in the art of sifting evidence” (Whately 1859a: 297).

Chapter 6

Whately and 'Evidentialism'

6.1 Introduction

Although the early nineteenth century was a period of continuing reform in Britain, and in Anglo-American society overall, in many ways, it was still a time of shared discourse. For example, although there was a gradual increase in knowledge of other religions, these other religions were generally not taken seriously; Christianity was regarded by most as not only unique, but the highest stage of religion. British theology was still largely insular, and had yet to be significantly influenced by the theological discussions on the continent – and American Protestant theology, dominated by what had been called the dissenting traditions, was still largely 'Puritan' (i.e., Congregationalist) and provincial, though there were soon to be significant changes on the religious landscape.

There was a gradual rise of a "middle class" in America and in Britain, which can be seen in the establishment of not only 'dissenting academies' (e.g., Warrington Academy (1757), its successor, Manchester New College (1783), and Stepney Academy, near London (1810)) but, for the first time in centuries in England, new universities (Durham (1832) and also London (1836) which had no religious tests). The development of this middle class was concomitant with growth in industry and trade, with legal and political reform featuring a central place to be played by the individual, and with a new idea of progress – all of which emphasised the idea of individuals shaping their own destiny.

The development and study of the sciences – e.g., natural history, chemistry, and physics – accompanied and, at that time, supported a natural theology, making religion 'scientifically respectable,' and science religiously acceptable. Thus, as we saw in the previous chapter, Paley's *Natural Theology* drew on the new discoveries in natural science and in mechanics (for example, with his study of the human eye, and the metaphor of 'watchmaking watches'). Interestingly, this natural theology seemed to have engaged those in the new, evangelical circles more than those in the established church. Discussions of religious questions became more widespread, and venues, such as popular magazines (e.g., the *British Critic*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Christian Observer*, and the *Quarterly Review*) and public debates, featured articles and reviews by members of the laity and members of the expanding middle class.

While change was brewing in many areas, there continued to be an interest in a defence of the 'external' credibility of the genuineness of Christianity – a defence using methods on a par with those of new scientific thought. Evidentialism, at this time, is in its maturity, and it was in the theologian, logician, and economist, Richard Whately that it has a mature and influential statement.

6.2 Richard Whately[1]

Richard Whately provides the most developed statement of the claims of the Evidentialist school. Whately was born in London, on February 1, 1787, and entered Oriel College, Oxford, in April 1805, where his tutor was the eminent churchman and literary critic, Edward Copleston. Whately arrived at Oriel during a period of major reform in education in Oxford, largely led by Oriel men (Brock & Curthoys 1997) and, under Copleston, the College became known for its encouragement of a critical temper in its students. Everything, including religious belief, was to be subjected to rational criticism, but the aim was not scepticism nor even 'liberalism,' but a re-founding of religious views. Whately graduated B.A. (second class) in 1808, and received his M.A. in 1812; later, after taking holy orders, he was awarded a B.D. and D.D. in 1825.

Whately was elected fellow of Oriel (1811-21), during which time he wrote a celebrated, though anonymous, critique of Hume's essay *On Miracles*, entitled *Historic Doubts relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (1819). There, he suggests that, if one adopts the criteria Hume uses to evaluate the reliability of testimony, one could 'reasonably' deny that the Emperor Napoleon had ever existed. Whately was soon acknowledged as *de*

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[1] For biographical material, see Sweet (2004). See also Rigg (1899); *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 28 (1911); Akenson (1981); Parton (1997); and Brent (2004). See also E.J. Whately (1866) and (1864); Fitzpatrick (1864); Martineau (1869); and Tuckwell (1909).

facto leader of what was later called the 'Oriel Noetics' or Evidential school,[2] and was a mentor to the educator Thomas Arnold (1795-1842) and to other figures such as the future John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-90). Newman, who was elected to a fellowship at Oriel in 1822, later wrote that Whately "opened my mind and taught me to think" (Newman 1967: 23). Whately served as a parish priest in Suffolk (1822-25), but returned to Oxford in 1825, as Principal at St Alban's Hall and, in 1829, was elected Drummond Professor of Political Economy at Oxford.[3]

Whately's intellectual rigor was reputed to be daunting – though, as a controversialist, he was of uneven reputation[4], and Harriet Martineau refers (unsympathetically) to Whately as an "irrefragable reasoner" (H. Martineau 1869: 173, 174). Still, Whately is considered to be largely responsible for the revival of the study of logic in England in the early part of the nineteenth century (Prior 1962: 103).[5] He was the author of two texts which remained standard even after J.S. Mill's *A System of* Logic (1843): *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828) and *Elements of Logic* (1826) (which first appeared in the *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana*[6], edited by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and which Whately expanded and revised largely with the help of Newman). Whately's logic is generally regarded as largely Aristotelian, but it has been seen as innovative in several respects.[7] In general epistemology[8] and in the role of reason and argument in belief, Whately follows Locke, and he was particularly concerned with the matter of precision of terms.[9]

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[2] According to William Tuckwell, "Theologically [the Noetics] [...] stood between the bibliolater and the rationalist; fearlessly applying historical tests to the Scripture narratives, accepting them, when modified by such corrections, as oracular" (Tuckwell 1909: 259).

[3] Interestingly, this interest in political economy was one that he shared with Paley. On Whately's view, see Waterman (1994): "the science of political economy abstracts from ethical aspects of its subject matter, political economy can provide guidance only with respect to the means of obtaining certain social ends, and none at all about whether those ends ought to be pursued" (Waterman 1994: 57–58).

[4] Owen Chadwick describes Whately as "more ingenious than profound" (Chadwick 1987: 42). Bernard Reardon notes that "As a writer he could hit hard, but the sort of thing he was best at is of its nature ephemeral" (Reardon 1971: 44).

[5] Whately's contributions to and innovations in argumentation and the teaching of logic are also discussed in Kennedy (2004) and Hansen (2006).

[6] The books first appeared as essays on "Logic" and "Rhetoric" in *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana* (1818), to which Coleridge, F.D. Maurice, and Nassau Senior also contributed.

[7] James Van Evra points out that Whately's *Logic* was "one of the most popular [logic] texts of the 19th century, appearing in a series of nine editions during Whately's lifetime, and in many reprint editions in Britain throughout the century," and that "Whately created a new and distinctly different one, a logic more characteristic of the later 19th century than the 17th" (Van Evra 1984: 2).

In 1831, Whately was named Archbishop of Dublin. Although Whately was considered 'High church,' he was sympathetic to the Broad Church[10], and he generally eschewed sectarianism. He was active in the religious and political life of Ireland, showed a keen interest in social reform, but also continued to publish a number of essays, pamphlets, and books, in logic and rhetoric, politics, economics, and religion. He admired the writings of William Paley, producing editions of two of Paley's principal works (see Whately 1859a and 1859b). Like Paley, Whately held that, it was important in holding a religious belief, that this belief be true and known to be based on solid argument, and he put this into practice; while in Dublin, he held weekly levées where he would set a proposition to his clergy and have them debate it (Akenson 1981: 90). Indeed, he took even Paley to task concerning his views on the nature and possibility of proofs of benevolent design and for the existence of a benevolent God, and on the reliability of testimony as a basis for accepting reports of miracles.[11]

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[8] Patokorpi (1996) alleges that Whately has a 'relativist theory of knowledge'. He writes "Whately's writings can be read as a rich discursive project or theory whose principal elements are a relativist theory of knowledge, a presentation of the Christian ethics of duty, and a normative theory of discourse ethics."

[9] See his *Logic*, Appendix I, on 'Ambiguous Terms' [especially his introductory remarks on pp. 320-322]. In fact, Whately brought such precision to the reading, interpretation and defence of Scripture, that he was regarded as a liberal, though his conclusions were still quite orthodox.

[10] For example, in 1822, Whately gave the Bampton Lectures at Oxford ("The Use and Abuse of Party Feeling in Matters of Religion") in which he argued for a toleration that was more than mere indifference. Moreover, in 1833, Whately made a speech in the House of Lords to extend more 'toleration' to Jews. See Whately (1833).

[11] For Whately's discussion of Paley, see Whately 1861: 94-97, and his Introduction and annotations to Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (Whately 1859a). Whately notes, for example, that the arguments in Paley's *Horae* and *Evidences* are plausible, and that they have not been seriously challenged. On Paley as a moralist, however, Whately writes: "much of what he says is truth, though far short of the whole truth; and that he arrives at many right conclusions, though based on insufficient grounds" (Whately 1859b: 27). Moreover, Whately argues that there is a 'fundamental error' in Paley's moral philosophy – that Paley seems to deny the existence of a 'moral faculty' in humanity, a point that has implications also for much of Paley's other work. For example, in his edition of Paley's *Evidences*, Whately argues that this affects Paley's account of the argument for the morality of Jesus' teaching. (Note, however, Whately's *Rhetoric* (appendix 3, pp 421-427) where Whately provides a syllogistic reformulation of Paley's arguments for the evidences of Christianity.) Concerning Paley's *Natural Theology*, Whately argues that, if human beings had no basic moral faculty, they would not be able to recognize the fundamental goodness of creation, and would, therefore, have no reason to infer a fundamental goodness or benevolence of a designer.

Whately's works were widely read. His *Logic* and his *Rhetoric* had a significant impact,[12] and his *Rhetoric* was one of the first British texts to be used extensively in the United States.[13]

6.3 Reason and reasoning[14]

Unlike Locke and Hume, Whately does not provide or discuss directly the epistemology underlying his views on reason, reasoning, and proof. That being said, for Whately, reasoning is of fundamental importance; it is in reasoning that one finds "the most appropriate intellectual occupation of MAN, *as* man" (L Preface, p. xix).

By 'reasoning', Whately means "argumentation" – the inference from certain accepted propositions to another proposition, the conclusion[15] – but also proof, whereby one takes the proposition to be proven, and looks for propositional evidence or support for

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Whately notes that critics of Paley's – but also his own – view, such as an anonymous author [probably William Sewell; see Bellon 2015: 47] – hold, to the contrary that "the poor, ignorant, uninstructed peasant will probably come nearest to the answer of the Gospel" (Sewell 1838: 305). Alternately, Whately notes (1859a: 7), there are those such as James Stephen who hold that "He who lays the foundation of his faith on such evidences will too commonly end either in yielding a credulous and therefore an infirm assent, or in reposing in a self-sufficient and far more hazardous incredulity." (Whately's citation is slightly inaccurate; see Stephen 1840: 212; 1843: 186).

[12] It has been argued that "From Whately more, perhaps, than from any other single writer stem our present-day concepts of rhetoric in general and of "inventio" ["finding arguments"] in particular" (Cf. Berlin 1980).

[13] To see some of this influence, see, for example, Todd (1943) and the entries on Asa Mahan, Daniel D Oliver, Charles Murray Nairne, and others, in the *Dictionary of Early American Philosophers* (Shook 2012).

[14] This section draws extensively on my published article (Sweet 1999b).

The texts referred to in what follows are: *Elements of Rhetoric* (Whately 1841), referred to as R, followed by book, chapter and section; *Historic Doubts relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (Whately 1846), referred to as HD, followed by page number; *Elements of Logic* (Whately 1859), referred to as L, followed by book, chapter and section; *Cautions for the Times* (Whately 1853), referred to as Cautions, followed by page number; *Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences* [first published as *Easy Lessons on Christian Evidences*] (Whately 1856), referred to as ICE, followed by page number.

As noted above, Whately also edited volumes of *Paley's Moral Philosophy*, with annotations (Whately 1859b) and of *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, with annotations (Whately 1859a).

[15] Whately writes: "Reasoning shall be taken in the sense, not of every exercise of the Reason, but of Argumentation, in which we have all along used it, and in which it has been defined by all the Logical writers, viz. "from certain granted propositions to infer another proposition as the consequence of them" (L IV ii 1 [pp 262-3]).

it.[16] What would count as a "*satisfactory reason* for... conviction" (HD 3), then, is a "solid proof," the general standards for which are to be found in "a sound system of Logic" (HD 3).

In Whately's *Logic* and in his *Rhetoric*, we see that there are many different models of proof. To 'prove' is 'the assigning of a reason [or argument] for the support of a *given* proposition' (L IV iii 1 [p. 291]) And, while he distinguishes between 'moral' or probable, and 'demonstrative' or necessary arguments, he does not hold that the latter provide better or more certain evidence than the former (R I ii 1 [p. 41])[17] ; both provide proof. For example, arguments that are 'probable' can nevertheless have a syllogistic form and a 'morally certain' conclusion (R I ii 4 [p. 76]). So-called inductive arguments, Whately held, were in fact syllogisms with "the Major premise suppressed" (L IV i 1 [p. 256]). (Whately has in mind that one reasons *from* induction (e.g., from observation), but *not by* induction.) The conclusion, he says, has "the same degree and kind of certainty with the premises" (R I ii 1 [p. 43]). What makes an argument necessary or probable is not its form, but the *content* of the premises.

The distinction between probable and demonstrative arguments, then, is based on the difference of the *subject* matter – the latter (i.e., demonstrative) arguments being those appropriate to mathematics, where the conclusion "is implied in that which we *already know*, we assent to on that ground, and not from observation or testimony" (L IV ii 1, emphasis mine). Probable arguments can be divided "into Arguments from "Example," from "Testimony," from "Cause to Effect," from "Analogy," &c." (R I ii 1 [p. 42]).

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[16] Whately writes: "For Reasoning comprehends *Inferring* and *Proving*; which are not two different things, but the same thing regarded in *two different points of view* (like the road from London to York, and the road from York to London,) he who infers, proves; and he who proves, infers; but the word " infer" fixes the mind *first* on the Premiss, and then on the *Conclusion*; the word "prove," on the contrary, leads the mind *from* the Conclusion to the Premiss. Hence, the substantives derived from these words respectively, are often used to express that which, on each occasion, is *last* in the mind; Inference being often used to signify the *Conclusion*, (i.e. *Proposition inferred*) and *Proof*, the *Premiss*. We say also "How do you prove that?" and "What do you *infer* from that?" which sentences would not be so properly expressed if we were to transpose those verbs. One might, therefore, define *Proving*, "the assigning of a reason [or argument] for the support of a *given* proposition;" and "*Inferring*," the "deduction of a Conclusion from *given* Premises." (L IV iii 1 [p 291f]).

[17] They are frequently divided into "Probable" [or "Moral"], and "Demonstrative" [or "Necessary"].

In most arguments with which people are concerned, then, they are seeking a ‘probable’ conclusion – where the level of probability can range from plausible to probable.[18] The degree or level of proof, then, depends in part on the nature of the evidence. Whately’s evidentialism entails that one’s claims need evidence in order to be reasonable. But, interestingly, what counts as a strong or weak argument, is not just a matter of the probability of the conclusion, but of that conclusion *in relation to other conclusions* – i.e., something comparative or relative[19]; the conclusion of an argument is more or less probable in comparison with another conclusion from the same information.[20] And Whately adds that, the level of proof that we would expect for an argument about a non-controversial topic would be different from what we would expect when it is a matter of controversy.

Since proof requires evidence, what does Whately say counts as evidence? Like Paley – and, arguably, Locke – our own experience and observation, as well as “the testimony of others as to their own experiences”[21] are the sources of evidence available to us. But since testimony, as we have seen, has been challenged as a reliable source of evidence, like Paley, Whately wants to (re)establish the credibility of testimony in establishing matters of fact.

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[18] Whately refers to “treating of the Plausible as something *distinct from* the Probable, instead of regarding it as a *species* of Probability” (R I ii 2 [p. 50]). Whately explains the distinction between the certain, and the plausible and probable, as follows: “If the Cause be fully *sufficient*, and no *impediments* intervene, the Effect in question follows certainly; and the nearer we approach to this, the stronger the Argument” (R I ii 2 [p. 50]).

[19] Re: “relative” Whately writes: “It is usual to call an Argument, simply, strong or weak, without reference to the purpose for which it is designed; whereas the Arguments which afford the most satisfaction to a candid mind, are often such as *would have less weight in controversy* than many others, which again would be less suitable for the former purpose.” (R I iii 1 [p. 115], emphasis mine).

[20] Whately notes: “The truth is, that any supposition is justly called improbable, not from the number of chances against it, considered independently, but from the number of chances against it compared with those which lie against some other supposition.” (R I ii 5 [p. 79]).

[21] Whately is clearly less hesitant on matters of testimony. He writes: “Experience, in its original and proper sense is applicable to the *premises* from which we argue, not to the *inference* we draw. Strictly speaking, we know *by* Experience only the *past*, and what has passed under our own observation; thus, we know by *Experience* that the tides *have* daily ebbed and flowed, during such a time; and from the Testimony of others as to their own Experience, that the tides have formerly done so: and *from* this Experience, we conclude, *by* Induction, that the same Phenomenon will continue.” (R I ii 7 [p. 91]).

Whately's views on the role of testimony in the formulation of a proof are, perhaps, most evident in what is arguably his most famous work, the *Historic Doubts relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*. Here, Whately explicitly refers to Hume's essay (in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section X) 'On Miracles,' and suggests that, if we adopt the criteria Hume uses to adjudicate the reliability of testimony – criteria which Whately here does not explicitly challenge – one could make a case for rejecting the belief that the Emperor Napoleon had ever existed. (Though he does not say explicitly what his purpose was, one might suppose that Whately's object in *Historic Doubts* was a *reductio ad absurdum* of Hume's criteria [see HD 53[22]], as well as an indirect argument for Whately's own view of the conditions of rational belief.)

Whately makes two programmatic comments about the role and use of testimony. First, he is careful to acknowledge that "Testimony is of various kinds; and may possess various degrees of force", not only in terms of its own intrinsic character, but also in terms of the kind of conclusion that it is used to support. (Whately notes Locke's discussion of testimony, here, but points out that "Locke has touched on this subject, though slightly and scantily.")[23] For example, one would take into account not just the veracity of a witness, but also that person's judgement; whether the individual was testifying to a particular matter of fact or to a general conclusion[24]; whether one's testimony fits with one's prior beliefs or opinions[25] – and, further, whether there is concurrent testimony from other sources,[26] particularly from sources unknown to one another[27]; the number of such witnesses, and whether the individuals are at odds with one another on the main point under discussion.[28] He also adds, citing Paley, that the more trivial and indirect a testimony, the more likely that it is true.[29]

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[22] Though see also *Logic* (appendix I, pp. 335-336), where Whately writes that his "object has been to point out, by use of this example, the fallacies and blunders which may result from inattention to the ambiguity of the word Experience".

[23] Amusingly, perhaps, Whately writes: "Whether there is a lake in the centre of New Holland, – whether there is land at the South Pole – whether the Moon is inhabited, – would generally be admitted to be questions of fact; although no one has been able to bear testimony concerning them; and, in the last case, *we are morally certain that no one ever will*" (R [1846, 7th ed] I ii 4 [p. 59]).

[24] Whately writes: "If, for instance, a person relates his having found coal in a certain stratum…, he is bearing testimony as to simple matters of fact: but if he declares that the stratum in question *constantly* contains coal…, it is evident that his testimony,—however worthy of credit—is borne to a *different kind of conclusion*; namely, not an individual, but a *general*, conclusion, and one which must rest, not solely on the veracity, but also on the judgment, of the witness" (R I ii 4 [pp. 63-64]).

[25] Whately has in mind the "testimony of prejudiced, though honest men, when *their prejudices are on the same side with their testimony"* (R I ii 4 [pp. 64-65]).

Second, Whately's discussion in *Historic Doubts* brings out his general understanding of the *role* of testimony – that it is to serve as *part* of a case. The testimony is not *eo ipso* to serve as the basis for a belief; we must be careful to see what exactly we can use it to prove (e.g., that something is the established belief) and what the effect of uncontroverted testimony might be (e.g., that *the case* is reasonable).[30] With these conditions in mind, then, we can usefully employ it; is that testimony can be used, as evidence, to establish or support a conclusion.

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[26] Whately [R I ii 4 (p. 75)] quotes George Campbell that "It deserves likewise to be attended to on this subject, that in a number of concurrent testimonies, (in cases wherein there could have been no previous concert) there is a probability distinct from that which may be termed the sum of the probabilities resulting from the testimonies of the witnesses, a probability which would remain even though the witnesses were of such a character as to merit no faith at all. This probability arises purely from the concurrence itself. That such a concurrence should spring from chance, is as one to infinite; that is, in other words, morally impossible. If therefore concert be excluded, there remains no other cause but the reality of the fact" (see Campbell 1841: 125).

[27] Whately writes: "It is manifest that the concurrent testimony, positive or negative, of several witnesses, when there can have been no concert, and especially when there is any rivalry or hostility between them, carries with it a weight independent of that which may belong to each of them considered separately." … "the chances might be incalculable against their all agreeing in the *same* falsehood" (R I ii 4 [p. 71]). Later, Whately adds: "The remark above made, as to the force of concurrent testimonies, even though each, separately, might have little or none, but whose accidental agreement in a falsehood would be extremely improbable, is not solely applicable to the Argument from Testimony, but may be extended to many arguments of other kinds also; in which a similar calculation of chances will enable us to draw a conclusion, sometimes even amounting to *moral certainty*…" (R I ii 5 [pp. 75-76], emphasis mine).

[28] Thus, Whately writes, "other points being equal — many must have more weight than one, or a few; but it is no uncommon mistake to imagine many witnesses to be bearing concurrent testimony to the same thing" (R I ii 4 [p. 65]).

[29] Whately notes that "for the more minute, and intrinsically trifling, and likely to escape notice, any point is, the more does it preclude the idea of design and fabrication" (R I ii 4 [p. 68]). But, against this, see Whately's comments on the value of 'minute detail' in confirming the reliability of a report (see Whately 1861: 86-7).

[30] Whately is distinguishing between 'the testimony' and 'the case' – where (along with other relevant data) the testimony has been examined and found to be plausible or reliable. Thus [as we will see below], Whately writes: "We believe what is not disproved, most reasonably, because we know that there are those abroad who are doing their utmost to disprove it. We believe the witness, not because we know him and esteem him, but because he is confronted, cross-examined, suspected, and assailed by arts fair

Whately resists any attempt to give an *a priori* determination of the weight of a piece of testimony, though he notes that such an *a priori* determination has been attempted in some systems of law.[31] Whately states that trying to set, in the form of a general rule, exactly what degree of weight a certain kind or piece of testimony should be given, would be "useless" and "mischievous"; its weight is a matter of determination, as one examines each individual piece.

Whately also considers what is meant by 'reasonability.' To be reasonable, he writes, requires having "sufficient evidence" for one's beliefs. To begin with, Whately suggests (like Locke – and also Hume) that one needs evidence for a belief proportionate to the degree to which she or he assents to it.[32] Whately tells us that those canons which relate to "the 'Laws of Evidence'" "may furnish a standard for determining what evidence is to be received" (HD 3).

But we have to take into consideration other factors as well. What counts as "a very good reason" or 'sufficient evidence' is, Whately writes, agent-relative. For a child to obey a command, the reason – "because my kind and wise parents have commanded me" (Whately 1861: 105)[33] – is appropriate for her or him (though not for his or her parents). Moreover, Whately writes, evidence is also relative to the subject matter and to the expert. It is, Whately writes, "the province of whatever Science furnishes the subject matter of your argument. None but a Politician can judge rightly of the degree of

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and unfair. It is *not his authority*, but *the reasonableness of the case*. It becomes conviction well-grounded, and not assent to man's words." (R App D, p 474, citing Samuel Hinds).

[31] Whately writes: "It might seem superfluous to remark that none but very general rules, such as the above, can be profitably laid down; and that to attempt to supersede the discretion to be exercised on each individual case, by fixing precisely what degree of weight is to be allowed to the testimony of such and such persons, would be, at least, useless trifling, and, if introduced in practice, a most mischievous hindrance of a right decision. But attempts of this kind have actually been made, in the systems of Jurisprudence of some countries; and with such results as might have been anticipated." This passage is added in the 7th edition of the *Elements of Rhetoric* (R [1846, 7th ed] I ii 4 [p. 72]).

[32] Concerning proportionate evidence, relative weight, and persuasiveness, see (R I ii 4).

[33] See, also Whately's remark that: "A pious Christian again has the same implicit reliance on his God, even where unable to judge of the reasonableness of his commands and dispensations, as a dutiful and affectionate child has on a tender parent" (R I iii 4).

evidence of a proposition in Politics; a Naturalist, in Natural History, &c. &c."[34] And, further, it seems as if the subject matter of some arguments, and who holds them, can give some strength. According to Whately, we can speak of "proof" of matters of opinion (by 'antecedent probabilities'[35]).

In general, however, matters of fact can be "established" chiefly by arguments by Signs (roughly, *a posteriori* arguments [R I ii 2 [p. 54]), including testimony. Whately claims that such arguments, based on "concurrent signs," can be conclusive (R I ii 4 [p. 76]) and even provide "certainty" (R I ii 5 [p. 80]).[36] Indeed, the lengthiest portion of his treatment of argument is devoted to arguments based on signs (R I ii 4-6 [pp. 62-87]) and from example (I ii 7-8 [pp. 87-114]), which would normally fall into the 'probable' category.[37]

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[34] The entire passage reads: "In short, the degree of evidence for any proposition we originally assume as a Premiss, (whether the expressed, or the suppressed one,) is not to be learned from Logic, nor indeed from any one distinct Science; *but is the province of whatever Science furnishes the subject matter of your argument.* **None but a Politician can judge rightly of the degree of evidence of a proposition in Politics; a Naturalist, in Natural History, &c. &c**: e.g. from examination of many horned animals, as sheep, cows, &c. a Naturalist finds that they have cloven feet; now his skill as a Naturalist is to be shown in judging whether these animals are likely to resemble in the form of their feet all other horned animals; and it is the exercise of this judgment, together with the examination of individuals, that constitutes what is usually meant by the Inductive process; which is that by which we gain new truths, and which is not connected with Logic; being not what is strictly called Reasoning, but Investigation. But when this major Premiss is granted him, and is combined with the minor, viz. that the animals he has examined have cloven feet, then he draws the conclusion Logically: viz. that "the feet of all horned animals are cloven" (L [9th octavo ed) 1870] IV i 2 [p. 155], bold emphasis mine).

[35] Thus, in the *Elements of Rhetoric* Whately writes: "Matters of opinion, (as they are called; i.e. where we are said properly not to know, but to judge, see ch. ii. § 4,) are established chiefly by Antecedent-probability [Arguments of the first class, viz. from Cause to Effect], though the Testimony (i.e. authority) of wise men is also admissible." (R I iii 3 [p. 136]).

[36] Note Whately's discussion of the ambiguity of the term 'certainty.'

[37] For a further discussion of signs as 'miraculous evidence', see *Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences* [first published as *Easy Lessons on Christian Evidences*]: "Any thing wonderful in short, is then (and then only) a miraculous Sign, when some one *performs* or *foretells* it, in a manner surpassing human power, so as to make it *attest* the truth of what he says" (ICE 93).

To have a better idea of what kind of argument could be said to provide sufficient evidence for a conclusion, it is instructive to consider one that Whately considers adequate – and which provides "moral certainty."[38] He writes:

> "If any one out of a hundred men throw a stone which strikes a certain object, there is but a slight probability, from that fact alone, that he aimed at that object; but if all the hundred threw stones which struck the *same* object, no one would doubt that they aimed at it." (R I ii 4, p. 76)

He notes that, in the former case, "[i]t is not improbable [...] that *each* of the stones, considered *separately*, may have been thrown at random" (R I ii 4, p. 77). But to say that *all* of the stones had been thrown at random would, he says, be absurd.[39]

As we can see, Whately does not give an explicit model of how reasoning or argumentation occurs. Nevertheless, like Paley, it seems plausible that Whately has a 'legal' model in mind. For every "reasoner" is, in his own way, "one whose business is to ascertain truth" – i.e., "a Judge" – who must "decide according to the preponderance of the reasons," and "such evidence as would satisfy any *twelve jurymen* of plain sense" [40] would seem to be a more than sufficient basis for being convinced.

Whately introduces another consideration in his discussion of reasoning, and that is the issue of the 'burden of proof.' As we have seen, to hold a belief reasonably, there must be (and one must have) a preponderance of evidence or argument in its favour. Nevertheless, where there are two or more sides on an issue, Whately notes that it does not follow that each side must provide an exhaustive, positive proof. Whately writes that there is a presumption or "*preoccupation* of the ground [in favour of the established view] that must stand good till some sufficient reason is adduced against it" and that the burden "lies on the side of him who would dispute it." (R I iii 2 [p. 120]). (Whately seems to take it that the established view has evidence for it, and that, over time, it has likely been subject to examination and critique (see R, App D. 7th ed, p. 274[41]; see also R II, 4, [p. 43][42]). According to Whately, then, the burden of proof lies on those who would challenge the 'tested,' established view, and it would be reasonable for an individual to believe what is generally accepted as such (if one knew that to be so), even if that individual herself did not have much evidence or argument in its favour.[43]

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[38] Whately emphasises that such a moral certainty is possible: "sometimes even *amounting to* moral certainty, from a combination of data which singly would have had little or no weight" (R I ii 4 [p. 76], emphasis mine).

[39] Whately does anticipate a reply to this argument from those who would hold that – i.e., "[t]he multitude of the chances [...] against any series of events, does not constitute it improbable" (R I ii 4 [p. 79]). But recall Whately's remark, noted earlier, that when a supposition is to be called 'improbable', it is so, only when we consider "the number of chances against it *compared* with those which lie against some *other* supposition" (R I ii 4 [p. 79]).

[40] Whately opposed this to 'philosophical' reasoning. The full passage reads: "Moreover, those who fancy themselves very exalted *philosophers*, are resolved to believe whatever they do believe on some peculiar grounds of their own—some reasonings not intelligible to the vulgar. And they cannot endure the idea of being convinced of a religion on such evidence as would satisfy any *twelve jurymen* of plain sense." [Cautions 189].

Whately's remarks on reasonability, argument, and proof suggest, then, that the notion of 'sufficient evidence' is much broader than one might expect. One may sometimes have extensive arguments or proofs for a belief, but generally one does not. And when we examine the kinds of arguments that Whately finds rationally persuasive, we see that the criterion for rational believing is not that one has an exhaustive, positive proof, but, rather, that one has “sufficient” grounds for holding that one’s belief is able to satisfy the demands of an investigation such as that found in a legal system.[44]

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[41] Quoting Samuel Hinds (1831: 38-39).

[42] Whately's defence of testimony, and particularly the importance of concurrent testimony, is clearly a response to Hume. Whately writes (in a late edition of the *Elements of Rhetoric*): "It is manifest that *the concurrent testimony*, Positive or negative, of several witnesses, when there can have been no concert, and especially when there is any rivalry or hostility between them, carries with it a weight independent of that which may belong to each of them considered separately. For though, in such a case, each of the witnesses should be even considered as wholly undeserving of credit, still the chances might be incalculable against their all agreeing in the same falsehood. It is in this kind of testimony that the generality of mankind believe in the motions of the earth, and of the heavenly bodies, &c. Their belief is not the result of their own observations and calculations; nor yet again of their implicit reliance on the skill and the good-faith of any one or more astronomers; *but it rests on the agreement of many independent and rival astronomers*; who want neither the ability nor the will to detect and expose each other's errors. It is on similar grounds, as Dr. Hinds has justly observed [see the quotation referred to in note 41, above], that all men, except about two or three in a million, believe in the existence and in the genuineness of manuscripts of ancient books, such as the Scriptures. It is not that they have themselves examined these; or again, (as some represent) that they rely implicitly on the good faith of those who profess to have done so; but *they rely on the concurrent and uncontradicted testimony of all who have made, or who might make, the examination*; both unbelievers, and believers of various hostile sects; any one of whom would be sure to seize any opportunity to expose the forgeries or errors of his opponents." (R [7th ed] I ii 4 [p. 57]), emphasis mine).

[43] Whately writes: "*Burden of proof* lies with him who maintains it; since men are not to be expected to abandon the prevailing belief till some reason is shown." (R I iii 2 [p. 124]).

Thus, in accumulating evidence for a belief, as in a criminal case, it is important to follow the requirements of the laws of evidence (HD 4), which include knowing on which side the burden of proof lies (R I iii 2 [pp. 119 ff]). In a court of law, there is a presumption in favour of the innocence of the accused and a burden of proof on the accuser. For an argument to be sufficient to establish guilt, it must make its case beyond all reasonable doubt. Similarly, it seems that, for Whately, there is a presumption in favour of an ‘established view’ – a view that presumably has positive evidence for it and that has withstood challenge. To establish that a person is unreasonable in continuing to believe a claim, the challenger must make a case whose plausibility is greater than the case for the claim in question and, thereby, create reasonable doubt.

Again, the kinds of arguments to which one would normally appeal in showing in a court of law that one has sufficient evidence, are arguments based on testimony – and it is no coincidence that Whately devotes a good deal of space to the presentation for the articulation of ‘arguments from signs’ (e.g., testimony). Testimony provides a basis for rational believing, then, when it withstands cross examination. And recall that it is *the case*, not the person testifying, Whately says, that is our evidence (see R appendix, pp. 473-474, cited above). Consequently, if one’s believing is based on *such* evidence as has withstood challenge, it is sufficient for rational belief.

What can we conclude, then, from Whately’s views concerning the role of argument or proof in holding a belief? Interestingly, while Whately is of the view that one should have evidence, he does not say that, if it seems that the ‘evidence’ we have for our beliefs is sparse, we must abandon them, or stop believing, or become sceptics. In some cases, he notes, we need simply make more precise what exactly we *do* believe, and why. For example, Whately writes that:

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[44] We can see a further illustration of Whately’s interest in law, and of legal reasoning as a model of reasoning in general, when we consider his views on the utility of cross examination (R I ii 4 [pp. 69-70]).

> “many persons are liable to be startled and dismayed on its being pointed out to them that they have been believing something – as they are led to suppose – on very insufficient reasons” (R I ii 4 [pp. 72-73]).

The problem here, however, may not be the quality or amount of the *evidence* at all. “[T]he truth is perhaps that they have been mis-stating their reasons” (R I ii 4 [p. 73]). Thus, these persons may be

> “convinced, indeed, and perhaps with very *sufficient reason* [my emphasis]; but they imagine this reason to be a very different one from what it is. The evidence to which they have assented is applied to their minds in a different manner from that in which they believe it is – and suppose it ought to be – applied. And when challenged to defend and justify their own belief, they feel at a loss, because they are attempting to maintain a position which is not in fact that in which their force lies.” (HD 4).

If one is careful and precise in stating what it is one believes, then, one may well find that one does have an argument and evidence after all.

Second, ‘sufficient evidence’ is not exhaustive evidence; one does not have to show the necessity of the conclusion or the impossibility of any opposed view. Whately holds that “it may be possible and easy, and in many cases, highly desirable, to have *sufficient reason* for believing what we do believe; though these reasons may not be the twentieth part of what *might* be adduced, if there were any need for it” (Whately 1861: 113).

Third, Whately does not expect that one have or be able to provide conclusive evidence for every belief or knowledge claim. Given that, for Whately, the standard of proof is that which one might have in a court of law, to have sufficient evidence for a belief, one does not need to have met a foundationalist standard. Rather, it simply has to be the case that the evidence for the belief in question has to be greater than that for any other potentially competing hypothesis.

Finally, there is no evidence that Whately thought that we cannot hold any beliefs until we have conducted a thorough examination of the case.[45] And while he insists that, to be epistemically and morally responsible, one should have evidence, at times Whately seems to waver on this, and be more flexible. He writes: "And hence it has been justly and happily remarked, that, 'he must be an indifferent physician, who never takes any step for which he cannot assign a satisfactory reason' " (R I iii 2 [p. 119])

This being said, Whately does not mean to absolve people from the need for evidence and argument for their beliefs. In "On the Intellectual and Moral Influences of the Professions of Character," for example, Whately argues that there is not only an epistemic or intellectual but – as Locke and some others suggest – a *moral* danger in not developing and cultivating one's reasoning (Whately 1861: 8-9). (Thus, Whately challenges the view that "it is better to let [those who "believe in a true religion"] alone in their uninquiring faith" – i.e., that "[t]hey should be kept in ignorance" [Whately 1861: 113-114].) Since human beings are, by nature, 'reasoners,' they are the sorts of beings who should be interested in finding or having reasons for what they believe. Moreover, having evidence is important (and required) because a failure to provide evidence for a conclusion may constitute, at least in some minds, a reason against it.[46]

For evidentialists and, therefore, for Whately, the truth or plausibility of a belief or knowledge claim, or the reasonability of believing it, requires evidence, and this evidence and the case as a whole, are based on probabilities. Still, Whately is clearly not setting an unusually high standard; it is one that takes account of the circumstances in which the claim is made, and it is one that one's belief claims can generally meet.

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[45] Though he did hold that "the Scriptures were the only reliable source of evidence as to the nature of Christianity, and that this evidence should be read without dogmatic preconception and should be read not selectively, but in its entirety" (Akenson 1981: 47).

[46] In *Essays on Some of the Dangers to Christian Faith*, Whately writes: "It is not merely that men to whom sufficient evidence has not been furnished, will be likely, themselves, to reject what has not been proved to them; but that men of *all* classes – the learned as well as the unlearned – will be likely to regard it as a *positive evidence against* the religion" (Whately 1847 [II 2]: 89).

6.4 Belief and religious belief

Whatley's primary interest was not epistemology, but logic and rhetoric, and he does not discuss, at any length, the differences between knowledge, faith, and belief. In an essay on "Revelation of a future state," he writes that the word 'knowledge' "implies, when strictly employed, three things; viz., Truth, Proof, and Conviction" (1856a: 23), but he uses the word in a range of ways: to refer to what is obtained through observation[47]; in the sense of 'having a mastery of something' (e.g., a language) or a skill at doing something (e.g., knowing – i.e., being able to do – logic); and in the sense of an expertise (e.g., a knowledge of geography). Similarly, he uses the word 'belief' broadly. In general, a belief is something that one judges to be true or assents to[48], but it can also be a "conviction" or even a "feeling"[49] that something is the case. Whately also seems to make a distinction between 'belief in' or trust in (e.g., in someone or in something, such as revelation)[50], and 'belief 'that' (e.g., that a proposition is true).[51] Often, a belief may be a "maxim" – something that we take for granted. But belief is not normally understood by Whately in the sense of something that is, by definition, uncertain or unsure, or a level inferior to knowing.[52]

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[47] Whately explains this in the *Elements of Logic*, in a section entitled "Dissertation on the Province of Reasoning." He writes: "The communication of this kind of **knowledge** [i.e., discussions of "matters of fact not known before"] is most usually and most strictly called *information*: **we gain it from *observation*, and from testimony**; no *mere internal workings* of our own minds, (except when the mind itself is the very object to be observed,) or *mere* discussions in words, will make these [objects] known to us; though there is great *room* for sagacity *in judging what testimony to admit*, and forming *conjectures* that may lead to *profitable observation*, and to experiments with a view to it. The other class of Discoveries is of a very different nature; that which may be elicited by Reasoning, and consequently is implied in that which we already know, we assent to on that ground, and not from observation or testimony: to take a Geometrical truth upon trust, or to attempt to ascertain it by observation, would betray a total ignorance of the nature of the Science" (L IV ii 1 [p 268], bold emphasis mine).

But Whately also makes a key distinction between 'possession of information' and 'knowledge': "Suppose for instance a man of much reading, and of retentive memory, but of unphilosophical mind, to have amassed a great collection of particulars respecting the writers on some science, the times when they flourished, the numbers of their followers, the editions of their works, &c. it is not unlikely he may lead both others and himself into the belief that he is a great authority in that Science; when perhaps *he may in reality know* — though a great deal about it — *nothing of it*." (see R [7th ed, rev], II iii 5 [p. 223]).

[48] Whately does not, however, seem to distinguish belief and assent (see R I ii 2 [p. 51]).

[49] "The Probability, then, which the writer of fiction aims at, has, for the reason just mentioned, no tendency to produce a *particular*, but only a *general*, belief; i.e. not that these particular events actually took place, but that such are likely, generally, to take place under such circumstances: **this kind of belief** (unconsciously entertained) being necessary, and all that is necessary **to produce that sympathetic feeling** which is the writer's object." (R I ii 2 [p. 52, bold emphasis mine)

[50] In *Essays on Some of the Dangers to Christian Faith*, for example, Whately refers to "effects which continued long after, tending to shake men's belief in revelation" (Whately 1847: 72-73), of "*believers in* the truth of the doctrines of their respective Churches" (1847: 288), and "that they who have *believed in* God may be careful to maintain good works" (1847: 13).

Thus, in general, 'belief' is belief that a proposition is true or probably true – and it is something coherent and intelligible.[53] Further, belief is a judgement (or feeling) for which we normally have evidence or grounds[54]; Whately disparages the notion of a "blind belief," and encourages all to have or get evidence for what they believe.

What, then, is religious belief? Whately uses the term 'religious belief'[55] and faith roughly synonymously. By faith, Whately means, broadly, a "readiness to listen fairly"

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[51] For example, in *Essays on Some of the Dangers to Christian Faith*, Whately raises the question "what testimony is sufficient to establish the belief *that* a dead man was restored to life?", and he refers to "the reply of Nathanael, when Philip declared his belief *that* He of whom Moses and the prophets had spoken, had been found in "Jesus of Nazareth" (Whately 1847: 297).

[52] In his *Rhetoric* (I ii 5 [p. 82]), Whately writes: "The proper opposite to Belief is either conscious *Ignorance*, or *Doubt*. And even Doubt may sometimes amount to a kind of Belief; since deliberate and confirmed Doubt, on a question that one has attended to, implies a "verdict of *not proven*"; this, as we will see, bears on William Clifford's response to 'absence of sufficient evidence'; Whately goes on to say: "a *belief that there is not sufficient evidence* to determine either one way or the other" would, "in some cases … be accounted a mark of excessive credulity," as suggesting that *all* explanations or conclusions were equally probable (R I ii 6, p. 82).

[53] Whately suggests that something that is incoherent or contradictory cannot be believed – even if one thinks that one believes it; "there is no danger of any one's believing, in the strict sense of that word, a contradiction in terms" (Cautions 474) – and he notes "that a very large part of this profound theology [of the Oxford Tractarian movement] is nothing better than a mere jargon of words without meaning, *unintelligible* even to "the learned" themselves." (Cautions 275-6, emphasis mine).

[54] By way of confirmation, in the *Elements of Rhetoric* Whately cites an anonymous review in the *Edinburgh Review* (1845: 420): "As to all truths capable of being established by evidence either on certain or probable grounds, God has given us the faculty of judging of that evidence, as the instrument of obtaining a belief in them. *Any belief acquired not* through the use of this instrument, but by pressing into the service faculties intended for other purposes, be the subject of belief never so true, *rests on defective grounds* as regards the party believing. If truth have really any objective existence at all – if it be any thing more than that which every man troweth – it is the merest truism to say, that to believe as truth that which is established on slight evidence or no evidence, or arguments addressed to the conscience and not to the reason, may be an act piously done, but *must proceed from a neglect of that portion of the faculties which are specially assigned to us by our Creator for that special purpose*. This is an error which may often lead to good results in particular cases, as it has led, and still leads, to fearful evils in many others." (R [7th ed rev] II ii 1 [p. 115], emphasis mine).

[55] For example, in Whately 1856b, he uses the term 'religious belief four times.

and "confident trust" or conviction, based on reason and evidence,[56] but not 'fidelity' or loyalty that certain things are true.

So, when it comes to faith or religious belief, this belief, like all belief, must be intelligible.[57] It is also propositional – it involves "assent to the truth of certain propositions," though it is more than that. (Interestingly, Whately makes a distinction between speculations on, or statements of matters connected with religion, on the one hand, and 'faith,' on the other,[58] which suggests that what makes a religious belief religious is not a matter of content – though Whately does not develop this point.) Again, like all belief, religious belief is an assent or claim for which there should normally and properly be evidence. Not to have evidence, to have a "blind sort of belief", or to 'go against' evidence, Whately says, is not only insipid[59], but contrary to faith and to the examples found in Scriptures, and is better termed "credulity."[60] Not only does Whately reject any sort of 'blind faith' or mere appeal to authority[61], but there is an epistemic and, arguably, a normative ethics in belief: there is a "duty" "to learn what proofs religion rests on," and one ought to distrust anyone who praises having belief *without* reason.[62] In fact, Whately holds that "the doctrines of Christianity, so far as they are revealed, are rational and not mysterious".[63]

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[56] In *Essays on Some of the Dangers to Christian Faith*, Whately emphasises the role of evidence for faith. He writes: "For, (besides the proofs of this which I have offered elsewhere) it should be remembered that […] the Christian Faith *is distinguished from others by resting on evidence*" (Whately 1847: 210, emphasis mine). Moreover, "A sufficient amount of proof seems always to have been afforded to all among whom the Gospel was preached, *to produce a rational conviction*, both as to the divine origin, and as to the true character, of the Christian religion" (Whately 1847: 141, emphasis mine). Whately continues that, from the beginning, faith has a ground in 'reason,' and that it was consistent with evidence. He writes: "The faith which Jesus and the Apostles commended in their hearers, consisted in a readiness to listen fairly to what was said, in an ingenuous openness to conviction, and in an humble acquiescence in what they had good ground for believing to have come from God: … **in a firm trust in what they were rationally convinced God had promised,** however strange, and foreign from their expectations and conjectures." (Whately 1847: 141-42, bold emphasis mine). That faith has a close relation to evidence is also clear from his comments in the *Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences* – for example, "When they commend **a** man's faith, it is because he listens fairly **to** evidence, **and judges** according to the reasons laid before him. The difficulty, and the virtue, of faith, consists in a man's believing and trusting, **not against *evidence,*** but against his expectations and prejudices, against his inclinations, and passions, and interests." (ICE 23, bold emphasis mine).

[57] Though Whately does not say this directly, in App L of the *Rhetoric*, he writes: "Now *nonsense* is that whereof we cannot say either that it is true, or that it is false. Thus, when the Teutonic Theosopher enounces, that 'all the voices of the celestial joyfulness, qualify, commix, and harmonize in the fire which was from eternity in the good quality,' I should think it equally impertinent to aver the falsity as the truth of this enunciation. For, though the words grammatically form a sentence, they exhibit to the understanding no judgment, and consequently admit neither assent nor dissent. … I say there is no meaning, and therefore properly nothing is affirmed" (*Rhetoric*, App L, pp. 505-506 (citing Campbell 1841)). [The "Teutonic theosopher" referred to is, almost certainly, Jakob Böhme; see Böhme (1764-1781).

[58] Whately writes: "It is much to be wished that religious persons would be careful to abstain — I do not say, from entering on any physiological or metaphysical speculations (which they have a perfect right to do) — but from mixing up these with Christianity, and making every thing that they believe on matters at all connected with religion, a part of their religious faith." (R [7th ed] II iii 6).

[59] In the *Cautions for the Times*, Whately writes: "First, the mere absence of good proof, as the foundation of faith, is highly dangerous to him who is thus left without "a reason for the hope that is in him." A faith which is based upon deliberate and rational conviction, has a life and reality that are seldom found in that

To have religious belief or faith requires more than (what Newman would later call) a notional assent. It requires having certain 'beliefs-in' and a commitment[64]; Whately

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languid kind of belief which springs from the mere *habit* of assenting to what is taught. **Examining the evidences of Christianity brings the truths of it before us as *real facts***: it proves them to us in the same way that other facts are proved in which we are practically interested. While, on the other hand, if we are trained to receive them implicitly in a way that no other important truths of ordinary life are received, we shall be apt to assent to them **with but little feeling of their reality**, and with a dim, dreamy kind of belief that has small influence on practice." (Cautions 190, bold emphasis mine).

[60] In the *Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences*, Whately distinguishes clearly between faith as 'blind belief' and faith in what he takes to be the Christian sense. He writes: "The ***faith*** which the Christian Scriptures speak of and commend, is ***the very contrary of that blind sort of belief and trust*** which does not rest on any good reason. This last is more properly called *credulity* than faith. When a man believes without evidence, or against evidence, he is what we rightly call *credulous*; but he is never commended for this" (ICE 22, bold emphasis mine). Whately continues: "**they fancy that** this faith consists in a person's readily and firmly believing what is told him, and trusting in every promise that is made to him; and that the less reason he has for believing and for trusting, and the less he doubts, and inquires, and seeks for grounds for his belief and his confidence, the more faith he shows. **But this is quite a mistake"** (ICE: 21-22, bold emphasis mine).

Against 'blind belief,' Whately writes: "whatever you teach us, should be, either what God has required us to believe (however mysterious that may be), ***or else*** what man can prove and see to be reasonable." (Cautions 276; bold emphasis mine).

[61] Much later, in *Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences*, Whately writes: "It is plain… that Jesus and his Apostles *did not mean by Christian faith a blind assent* without any reason. And if we would be taught by them we must be " prepared to answer every one that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us." (ICE: 125, emphasis mine). He adds that a Christian "is right **only by chance**, if he holds a faith that is true, not *because* it is true, but merely because **it** is that of his forefathers" (ICE 133, bold emphasis mine) and that "It is possible for us… to inquire, and to learn, what the reasons were which satisfied them …. And it must, therefore, be **a duty for all** who have the opportunity to learn what proofs it rests on; that they may be ready to give an answer" (ICE 18, bold emphasis mine).

[62] In *Cautions for the times*, Whately warns against such misology: "Distrust… all teachers, however high their pretensions to holiness, who would persuade you to believe what you happen to be told, without having or seeking any "reason for the hope that is in you" (*Cautions* 236).

[63] Hunt 1896: 107, referring to Whately's *The Parish Pastor* (Whately: 1860: 76). Similarly, Whately writes that "when Christianity was first set up, the Gospel was (by God's own direction) 'preached to the poor' *upon the ground of rational evidence*" (Cautions 183, emphasis mine).

[64] The importance of issue of 'belief in' is also evident in *Essays on Some of the Difficulties in the Writings of St. Paul*. There, Whately writes, for example, that "The Christian faith is not merely to believe what

challenges “one who confesses, with his lips only, the whole of what is really true, but which he does not thoroughly believe.”[65] Religious belief also involves acting on that belief; in *Cautions for the Times,* Whately writes: “true faith is a deliberate and rational submission to the guidance of an authority *proved by sufficient evidence* to be divine” (Whately 1853: 182-3), and that “Christianity does not consist in a mere name, or in a mere assent to the truth of certain propositions, without a subjection of the will, and a conformity of life, to Christ.” And religious belief should be efficacious, and have a practical result.[66]

While religious belief has a dispositional character, however, it is not clear what or whether there is a connection between the cognitive or descriptive side and the dispositional side of (religious) belief, or whether the fact of these two ‘sides’ affects the meaning of the belief. To explore this issue, we need to look more closely at the relation between religious belief and evidence.

6.5 Religious belief, evidence, and proof

For Whately, there is religious truth. Religion and religious belief are not just matters of perspective, of opinion, or subjective or matters of ‘blind faith.’ As we have seen above, Whately holds that religious belief – specifically, Christian religious belief – has evidence, and he rejects the view that faith or trust without evidence is admirable or desirable – that “an uninquiring assent [is] a mark of commendable *faith*” (Whately 1847: 262). Indeed, Whately holds that proof and sufficient evidence were available at the beginning of Christianity, in order to “afford them [i.e., the early Christians] rational conviction”

Christ has taught, but to *believe in* Him” (Whately 1830: 67).

[65] In the Cautions, Whately writes: “*By a Christian is understood,* not merely any one who believes that such a person as Jesus of Nazareth existed, but one *who receives the Gospel* EVANGELIUM of Jesus Christ.” (*Cautions* 453, emphasis mine). See also Whately (1847: 125).

[66] Whately writes: “**faith** must be both rightly directed towards the object which we have **good grounds** for relying on; **and** also must be a lively (i.e., living) faith, **bringing forth good works** and necessary fruit.” Again, he writes: “those who contend against the efficacy of faith, usually employ that word in their arguments in the sense of **mere belief**, **unaccompanied** with any moral or practical result, but considered as a mere intellectual process” (*Logic*, III [no chapter] xv [p. 239], bold emphasis mine).

(ICE iii). Without evidence, Whately writes, there would have been no reason for the early Christians to have changed what they had formerly believed.[67] Moreover, given that the human person is, by nature, 'a reasoner' and naturally seeks reasons – he endorses Edmund Burke's maxim that "the same reason [is] available in theology and in politics"[68] – if one is to be a believer, there ought to be, Whately writes, evidence or proof for belief (ICE 10), so that we have "rational faith" [Cautions 177] and "rational conviction" (ICE 4) – and by this he means evidence "sufficient to satisfy any reasonable mind" (ICE 62).[69] This suggests that there is a normative issue in believing, i.e., an 'ethics of belief.'[70]

What do such arguments look like? The arguments that Whately offers are 'external evidences'; like Paley, he does not discuss at length the 'internal evidences' that believers might use to confirm their belief.[71] The general features of such 'external arguments' are those characteristic of external arguments in all areas (R I ii 1 [p. 40]). For example, Whately says that there can be arguments from 'concurrent signs' that establish basic religious views, i.e., when rejection of the 'number' and 'variety' of evidences would be absurd (R I ii 4 [p. 77]). Moreover, the kind of argument and proof involved is probabilistic, not demonstrative; just as ethics cannot be a demonstrative science,[72] neither can religion or theology. Still, there can be argumentation leading to 'certainty'.

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[67] In the *Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences,* Whately writes: "if the lower classes had [in ancient times] (as many of them did) stuck blindly to the teaching of their superiors—as these objectors now encourage them to do – and had refused to judge for themselves, and had shrunk from the presumption of questioning the claims of their "natural guides," they could never have become Christians at all" (Cautions 207).

[68] Cited on the title page of *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*.

[69] Whately also writes "Although, therefore, the generality of Christians cannot be expected to know the whole, or near the whole, of the proofs of their religion, that is no reason against their seeking, and obtaining, proofs enough to convince a reasonable mind." (ICE 63).

[70] In the Rhetoric, Whately states that "we cannot be perfectly safe in adopting the belief they hold, unless we are convinced that they hold it in consequence of their being the wisest and best instructed; so far forth as they are such" (R I ii 6 [p. 85]).

[71] "Internal evidences," not in the sense of 'internal to the scriptural texts', as in much of Whately's *Introductory* (or *Easy*) *Lessons on Christian Evidences*, but in the sense of the effect of scripture upon the minds and characters of believers (see ICE 90-95). See the commentary on Whately edited by Thomas Auden (Auden 1868).

Like Paley, Whately offers historical "evidences" of the foundational beliefs of early Christianity and, in his *Rhetoric*, he refers to arguments for the existence of a divine designer. While Whately does not give an argument from design in detail, he follows, in broad strokes, Paley. For example, recall the inference, given earlier, that, supposing that one hundred men had each thrown a stone and that all had hit the same object, it was reasonable to believe that they all were aiming at it. Whately's claim was that, if just one had hit it, we could have inferred little. But if *all* struck it, it would be unreasonable to think that they did not intend to aim at it; to say that *all* of the stones had been thrown at random would be absurd (R I ii 4 [p. 77]). We can, therefore, reasonably infer causal intention and purpose from such effects. Whately suggests that just the same kind of inductive argument from particulars can be made for the existence of an intelligent designer. He writes: "from the marks of contrivance visible in the Universe, though many of these are such as, taken singly, might well be conceived undesigned and accidental; but that they should *all* be such, is morally impossible. (R I ii 4 [p. 76]). Consequently, from this and similar evidence, "we [may] infer the existence of an intelligent Creator" (R I ii 4 [p 76]) ."[73]

Whately does anticipate a reply to this argument from those who would hold that the features of an apparently designed universe were 'fortuitous' – that there need be no designer and that "[t]he multitude of the chances [...] against any [particular] series of events, does not constitute it improbable" (R I ii 4 [p. 79]). But recall Whately's remark, noted earlier, that when a supposition is to be called 'improbable', it is so, only when we consider “the number of chances against it *compared* with those which lie against some *other* supposition” (R I ii 4 [p. 79]), so that

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[72] Up to the 4th edition of the *Elements of Logic*, Paley commented on Locke in this regard. "**[Locke] should speak so often of building Morals into a demonstrative Science**, and yet speak so slightingly of those very propositions to which we must absolutely confine ourselves, in order to give to Ethics even the appearance of such a Science; for the instant you come to an assertion respecting a matter of fact, as that "men (i.e. actually existing men) are bound to practise virtue," or "are liable to many temptations," you have stepped off the ground of strict demonstration, just as when you proceed to practical Geometry." (Whately 1831 / L [4th ed] IV ii I [p. 244], bold emphasis mine)

[73] Whately also favours a design argument in (Whately 1861: 116-117).

> “if any one were cast on a desert island under circumstances which warranted his believing that the chances were a hundred to one against any one’s having been there before him, yet if he found on the sand pebbles so arranged as to form distinctly the letters of a man’s name, he would not only conclude it probable, but *absolutely certain* [my emphasis], that some human Being had been there; because there would be *millions* of chances against those forms having been produced by the fortuitous action of the waves.” (R I ii 4 [p. 80])

Similarly, one may allow that the odds that there is a divine designer may be low, but that the sum of objects showing apparent design be the result of an unintelligent force or just chance is a possibility even more remote.

What we have here is a causal argument, based on probabilities. Moreover, the claim that ‘There is a designer’ is more probable than other hypotheses asserting other ‘causes’, such as ‘chance’ or ‘natural law.’ It is, therefore, (what we might call) ‘morally impossible’ that apparent design come about in any way except through the intention of a designer. The probability for design and the improbability of the alternatives provide, then, a ‘case.’ Consequently, on the basis of such evidence, we can take the conclusion – the existence of a designer – as something ‘proven.’

Whately’s focus in his writings, however, is not the kind of argument or proof that aims at establishing the existence of a designer – which one can see falls far short of what believers believe. He is more focussed on the evidences of *Christianity*. He remarks that “a still greater absurdity [...] is involved in the rejection of evidences of our religion, will be plain to any one who considers, not merely the individual force, but the *number* and *variety* of those evidences” (R I ii 4 [p. 77]). Like Paley, Whately believes that, not only did the early apostles have good evidence and a good case for believing the miracles of

Jesus and, therefore, the truth of Jesus' message about who he was, but that it is reasonable for us to believe this as well.[74]

Whately is, however, very cautious here. First, he notes that "In the statement of the Evidences of our Religion, so as to give them their just weight, much depends on the Order in which they are placed" (R I iii 4 [p. 147]). We need first establish, Whately writes, the "antecedent probability" that a revelation should be given to humanity; this is the context in which miracles are given, and to ignore this context – i.e., to ignore why a miracle might occur – is to look at miracles too abstractly. Once that is established, one can then consider the possibility or probability of miracles. The problem, as Whately sees it, is that many critics of religion, such as Hume, start with the latter – the probability of miracles alone – and without the proper order or context. More broadly, one might say that, to understand an event, one must see it in its context.

Second, Whately notes, when it comes to one's belief in Christianity, there may be confusion about what exactly one is affirming or believing, and what exactly one's evidence is. Whately writes that:

> "all men, except about two or three in a million, believe in the existence and in the genuineness of manuscripts of ancient books, such as the Scriptures. It is not that they have themselves examined these; or again (as some represent) that they rely on the good-faith of those who profess to have done so; but they rely on the *concurrent* and *uncontradicted* testimony of all who have made, or who *might make*, the examination" (R I ii 4 [p. 72]).

Thus, what the two groups – scripture scholars, on the one hand, and the ordinary layperson, on the other – believe is, in fact, different:

> "The one is, in reality, declaring that so and so is, as he conceives, a conclusion fairly established by *reasons* pertaining to the subject matter [e.g., "by research and reflection"]; the rest, that so and so is the established belief; or is held by persons on whose authority they rely. These last may

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[74] Whately addresses Hume on testimony, and on reason as evidence, in Whately (1847: 108, 149).

> indeed have good reason for their belief [...] but still it is to be remembered that they are not, in reality, bearing witness to the *same* thing as the others." (R I ii 4 [p. 66]).

Those who have "examined manuscripts or read the works in question" have "gone through the demonstration." They have "positive proof" (R appendix, p. 472) – although Whately acknowledges that a lifetime would be "scarcely sufficient to examine for one's self one branch alone of such evidence" (R appendix, p. 473). But this is not the case for those who have *not* gone through such an investigation, and so, if called on to justify one's belief, "[t]he mind feels disappointed and unsatisfied" (R appendix, p. 474). It does not follow, however, that the latter group has *no* evidence or ground for belief. Rather, Whately says, they have 'misnamed' what they are believing.[75]

> "The man who has not examined any branch of evidence for himself, may, according to the principle above stated, very reasonably believe in consequence of it; but his belief does not immediately arise out of it, is not the same frame of mind which would be created by an actual examination for himself [...]; [...] the discontent is occasioned [...]" (R appendix, pp. 474-475)

But does it follow that such a person could no longer say that she has evidence – i.e., 'evidences of Christianity'? Can we say that those who have not themselves examined *all* of the evidence do not have "reasonable faith"? (R appendix, p. 472) Whately would allow (though it is Samuel Hinds speaking here) that one's faith here can still be "reasonable", but that the *basis* for one's beliefs is not so much the testimony of scholars as the fact that the

> "assertions are set forth, bearing on their face a challenge of refutation. The assertions [of the testimony of scholars] are like witnesses placed in a box to be confronted. Scepticism, infidelity, and scoffing, form the very groundwork of our faith, so long as we are sure that any untenable assertion may and will be refuted. [...] We believe the witness, not because we know him and

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[75] Whately's point is that this fails to distinguish between what is the *established belief* and what is *the case*.

> esteem him, but because he is confronted, cross-examined, suspected, and assailed by arts fair and unfair. It is not his authority, but the reasonableness of the case. It becomes conviction well-grounded, and not assent to man's words." (R appendix, pp. 473-474).

In short, for those of us who are not Biblical scholars, it is our knowing that the testimony of these scholars has withstood challenge – and not (our confidence in) their testimony – that is the case and the basis for 'our' belief. The reasoning process here is 'juridical'; Whately's allusions to elements found in trials – a case being made, witnesses testifying, and cross examination taking place – are part of what constitutes one's evidence. (I will return to this point in a moment.)

Whately believes, therefore, that the standards for evidence for one's religious belief are not particularly onerous. They are standards that are appropriate to the subject matter, and attentive to the context in which the argument is given. But there is more involved in arguments for religious belief.

For example, recall Whately's attentiveness to context in proof. To hold a belief reasonably, there must be (and one must have) a preponderance of evidence in its favour. Nevertheless, where there are two or more sides on an issue, it does not follow that each side must provide an exhaustive proof. There is a presumption or "*preoccupation* of the ground [in favour of the established view] that must stand good till some sufficient reason is adduced against it" and the burden "lies on the side of him who would dispute it." (R I iii 2 [p. 120]). According to Whately, then, the burden of proof lies on those who would *challenge* the established view, which explains why it could be reasonable to believe what is generally accepted as such (if one knew it to be so), even if one did not have any additional argument in its favour.

In a court of law, for example, there is a presumption in favour of the innocence of the accused and a burden of proof on the accuser. For evidence to be sufficient to establish guilt, the prosecution must make its case beyond all reasonable doubt. Similarly, Whatley says, there is a presumption in favour of any 'established view' – the view that presumably has some positive evidence for it and that *has withstood challenge*. To establish that one is unreasonable in believing the established view, the challenger must make a case that is at least more probable, and beyond reasonable doubt.

Now, in accumulating evidence, as in a criminal case, it is important to follow the requirements of the laws of evidence (HD 4), which include knowing on which side the Burden of Proof lies (R I iii 2 [pp. 119 ff]). And the burden can differ, depending on whether the case is a civil or criminal one. Moreover, the kinds of arguments to which one would normally appeal in showing that one has sufficient evidence are arguments based on testimony – and it is no coincidence that Whately devotes a good deal of space in his *Rhetoric* to the presentation and the articulation of 'arguments from signs' (e.g., testimony). Testimony provides a basis for rational believing, then, when it withstands cross examination. But it is *the case*, not the testimony, that, Whately says, is our evidence (see R appendix, pp. 473-474, cited above).[76] If one's judgement – and one's belief – are based on the presence of *such* evidence, it is rational or reasonable.

So, once we take account of antecedent probability, the laws of evidence, the burden of proof, as well as what exactly one's argument and conclusion are, Whately holds that we can have arguments for religious beliefs that can meet the standard of sufficient evidence. In fact, he believes that those who refuse to give assent to Christianity in light of such arguments may appropriately be 'censured' (see R xii). Whately would maintain, then, that, given these standards of evidence, many religious beliefs can be, and have been, proven, that their being proven serves as the best explanation of their persistence, and that contrary evidence has been successfully challenged. (Whether this is *in fact* the case for most religious beliefs is another matter – but it is irrelevant to determining what Whately held that being reasonable in believing them required.) His view is that, if one has such evidence, religious belief is not just one hypothesis (or set of hypotheses) among many other equally supported beliefs and, hence, a matter of free choice, but, rather, a hypothesis which is the most reasonable, and that a rational being is obliged to accept.

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[76] We can see a further illustration of Whately's interest in law, and of legal reasoning as a model of reasoning in general, when we consider his views on the utility of cross examination (R I ii 4 [pp. 69-70]).

That being said, Whately seems to accept Paley's view that there is not and should not be "overpowering evidence" for religious belief (see Whately 1859a: 371). He, too, does not aspire to identifying or constructing an "irresistible proof" which, as Paley says, would impinge on the freedom of the will, but also on the development of individual rationality and character – i.e., as Paley says in the *Evidences*, it "would restrain the voluntary powers too much; would not answer the purpose of trial and probation; would call for no exercise of candour, seriousness, humility, inquiry; no submission of passions, interests, and prejudices to moral evidence and to probable truth; no habits of reflection; none of that previous desire to learn, and to obey the will of God" (Paley, Evidences II, 413).

One might ask, however, whether Whately holds that *all* of one's religious beliefs *need* sufficient evidence, and whether one must refuse to believe or assent to a proposition of faith (and to refuse to act on such a proposition) until one has undertaken a thorough examination. In other words, does Whately hold that, if one cannot provide a good argument or substantial evidence for a belief, one must abandon it?

Before answering, we need to remember Whately's view that there may be beliefs that bear on religion or that are found in religious texts, that are *not* religious beliefs. Statements found in scripture about ancient history, science, geography, and the like, may be matters that religious people hold but, it seems that Whately would say, that that does not make such statements matters of religious belief or faith.[77] Moreover, while Whately held that pastors "must address [their "People"] as rational Beings" (Whately 1860: 76), it does not follow that all religious beliefs are provable by reason.[78]

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[77] Thus, presumably, not all of what is contained in scripture is a *religious* belief. Tillotson and later authors also make this point. Recall that, in his *Introductory Lessons, on the History of Religious Worship*, Whately writes: "Now the object of the Scripture revelation is to teach men, not Astronomy, or Geology, or any other physical science, but *religion*" (Whately 1867: 22).

[78] See, for example, his discussion in his *Essays on Some of the Peculiarities of the Christian Religion* concerning the *provability* of a life after death (or 'future state') (Whately 1856: 72-73). Still, as is clear in Whately's 'Introduction' to this volume, the opinion of those who make "faith not the result of evidence, but something *opposed* to it" (Whately 1856: 4, emphasis mine) is also to be rejected.

That being said, Whately's answer here would seem to be, first, that one *should* have evidence for one's religious beliefs and that, if one doesn't have it, one should seek it[79] (something suggested by his holding, while Archbishop of Dublin, 'interrogations' of his clergy during his levées). Yet, neither does he say that we should abandon or suspend belief pending a thorough investigation of the subject.[80] Thus, Whately says "it has been justly and happily remarked, that, "he must be an indifferent physician, who never takes any step for which he cannot assign a sufficient reason." (R I iii 1 [p. 119])[81] But, second, it would be absurd to impose such a rule on everyone – for it is clear that many people do not have (and could not supply, unless prompted a good deal) much evidence. It would also be 'very unwise', Whately says, if one were to follow such a rule.[82] Indeed, one thing shown by his *Historic Doubts* is that it would be unreasonable to expect individuals to engage in an exhaustive enterprise to investigate all their beliefs, or to show that all the arguments against one's beliefs are implausible, or to suspend their belief or assent until they have engaged in such an enterprise.[83] For, if one did expect individuals to do so[84], then they would also likely have to suspend their belief in all manner of *prima facie* evident things – in his own time, for example, that Napoleon existed. Thus, Whately would not claim that it is either immoral or irrational to maintain certain beliefs simply because one is not able to prove them.

In admitting this, however, Whately is not abandoning evidentialism. For there are few cases indeed in which he would think that one could not provide not only *some* argument, but ‘sufficient evidence’ for a belief. Here, it is important to recall Whately’s views on ‘the burden of proof,’ on ‘sufficient evidence’ as relative to the individual and the context, and on the basis for one’s belief that testimony is true.[85]

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[79] See note 69 above (ICE, p. 63).

[80] See note 45, above, and Akenson (1981: 47). See also Whately (1830).

[81] Whately also notes that "in some subjects, no language can adequately convey (to the inexperienced at least) all the indications which influence the judgement of an acute and practised observer" (R I iii 2 [p. 119]).

[82] One is "excited to enquiry [...] very unwisely,– by seeking for answers to all these objections: and fancies that unless they can all be satisfactorily solved, he ought not to receive the religion" (R I iii 2 [p. 133]).

[83] Of course, we may not be able to prove everything, because we may have not considered, or even had a chance to consider, everything – e.g., our presuppositions. In the *Elements of Logic*, Whately writes: "On the other hand, in all Reasonings which regard matters of fact, we introduce, almost at *every step*, fresh and fresh propositions (to a very great number) which had not been elicited in the course of our Reasoning, but are taken for granted; *viz.* facts and laws of Nature which are here the principles of our Reasoning, and *maxims*, or "elements of belief…" (L IV ii 5 [p. 286]).

[84] See note 69 above, referring to (ICE 63).

One can see from this, then, that while Whately is what was later called an ‘evidentialist,’ it is equally clear that he believes that one need not subscribe to a foundationalist standard of proof in order to have reasonable belief or even (as suggested in the earlier example of the arrangement of stones on the desert island) “absolute certainty.” Evidentialism requires that one has ‘sufficient evidence’ for one’s beliefs and, if we take Whately’s view of what this means at face value, many believers of his time would no doubt have held that this requirement was not particularly unattainable.

6.6 Summary

Whately is, arguably, the paradigmatic evidentialist – one who sought not only to engage the critics of the Christian religion, but to make a sustained case for the reasonability of Christian religious belief. Whately’s directly theological writings are relatively few: a number of sermons, and some tracts and short books of Christian ‘evidences.’ But, combined with his *Rhetoric* and his *Logic*, Whately influenced more than a generation of clerics, in Britain and in North America, in holding that there are rigorous arguments, based on empirical evidence, for Christianity.

Whately did not spend much time dealing with matters of Church doctrine, taking many of the debates to be too theoretical and abstract, and about matters that were far too often full of perplexity or irresolvable – and he was regarded as latitudinarian in his views. He dealt only very briefly and indirectly with issues such as the Trinity, the incarnation, or disputes over issues such as transubstantiation, no doubt largely because they did not admit of any experimental or experiential verification. Whately focussed, instead, on fundamental and "practical" matters – on how the Divine relates to the human[86] and on the foundations of Christianity. Here, he believed that not only could a solid case be made for Christianity, but one could engage and reply to the critics of the Christian religion. While believers today do not need evidence for *every* religious belief, Whately held that it was necessary, in early Christianity, to have sufficient evidence for key religious claims, and Whately argues that we should, as rational beings, aspire to it.

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[85] See note 30, above, and the discussion earlier in the text, where Whately argues that it is not the authority of the witness, but the fact that his testimony has withstood critique and been established as reasonable.

What was the character of these 'evidences'? As we have seen, Whately took religious beliefs (e.g., miracle reports and the conclusions that can be drawn from them about Christianity, or indications of order and the existence of a designer) on a par with other beliefs or knowledge claims. They were descriptive propositions, and so had to be meaningful or intelligible, cognitive, and open to 'external evidence.' And Whately argued that there was 'a case' – i.e., 'sufficient evidence,' based on observation, carefully examined testimony, and on an assessment of probabilities and on causal inferences – for them. Any reasonable person, he believed, would be able to grasp this.

While Whately did not give a detailed model of what made "sufficient evidence" *sufficient*[87], it seems clear that he had in mind the kind of case that a judge or a jury would encounter, or offer, in arriving at a judgement or verdict in a court of law. Such an argument would take account of context and content, and would be, in part, statistical or probabilistic.[88] Whately recognises the limitations of such cases – e.g., that one's prior

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[86] In his *Sermons on Various Subjects*, for example, Whately writes of his interest in "what God is *relatively* to us," and, arguably, not in some absolute sense. See Whately (1849: 199).

[87] Whately is reluctant to give any generic account of what counts as evidence or sufficient evidence; his view is, in this sense, somewhat 'relativistic.' About what may count as 'evidence,' he writes:

"The Author has accordingly been solicited to endeavour to frame some canons which may furnish a standard for determining what evidence is to be received. This he conceives to be impracticable, except to that extent to which it is accomplished by a sound system of Logic; including under that title, a portion — that which relates to the "Laws of Evidence"— of what is sometimes treated of under the head of "Rhetoric." But the full and complete accomplishment of such an object would confer on man the unattainable attribute of infallibility" (HD, pp iv-v).

[88] Though Whately did follow an Aristotelian "model" of induction, he noted that "Logic takes no cognizance of induction. . . as a distinct form of argument.. . . The essence of an inductive form of argument (and so of the other kinds which are distinguished for it) consists not in the form of the Argument, but in the relation which *the subject-matter* of the Premises bears to that of the Conclusion" (L II iv 7 [pp. 128-129], cited in Van Evra 1984:14).

Similarly, Whately writes: "In all cases of the establishment of a general law from Induction, that perspective or beliefs can influence one's judgement and what counts as 'sufficient' evidence – but still saw that a properly constructed case could lead to 'certainty' and provide a basis for reasonable belief.

In short, Whately would say that the theist can construct an argument, based on evidence, at least on a par with those of 'empiricist' opponents, such as Hume – whom Whately sees as 'stacking the deck' and 'cherry-picking' counter evidence – and he believes that, given the quality of arguments, such as those of Paley, the 'theological' evidentialist conclusion is more plausible than the alternative sceptical evidentialist claim. Whately was supportive of many of Paley's arguments, though he was more attentive to contextual issues involved in the cogency of an argument and to the issue of the burden of proof. Whately is also more careful in articulating how testimony has credibility, and under what circumstances it is reliable. Indeed, Whately seems to be more rigorous than Paley, by holding Paley to a consistency of his views expressed across his writings.

Some have argued that Whately's arguments have too little breadth; John Stuart Mill is reputed to say of him that "He was the least equipped with books among any of the great thinkers of his times" (Tuckwell 1909: 56). Some have claimed as well that Whately did not appreciate sufficiently the 'internal evidences' of faith, the significance and impact of faith in the human being, complaining that there was "no room for poetry or mysticism, and little room for awe in his somewhat arid mind" (Tuckwell 1909: 56). Akenson claims that Whately's prodigious output actually undercut his longer influence, remarking that "He wrote too fast and too much" and estimating that, "during the 1820s, Whately published on religious and secular subjects at a rate of almost a hundred thousand words a year" (Akenson 1981: 47).

Yet, Whately's focus throughout was animated by a desire to show that arguments for religious belief can be made and can be successful against critics of the past, such as

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conclusion (as has been formerly remarked) is ultimately established by Reasoning." (L IV ii 2 [pp. 274-75]). This is a slight modification from earlier editions (such as the 4th edition), which reads: "In all cases of the establishment of a general *fact* from Induction, that general *fact* (as has been formerly remarked) is ultimately established by Reasoning."

Hume, and critics of his own age. In doing so, Whately embraced, to an extent, several of the assumptions of Locke and Hume on the nature and meaning of reason and faith – though he does not take the standard of 'sufficient evidence' to be what Locke and, arguably, Hume seem to suggest that it is – i.e., a foundationalist one. But there are traces of earlier understandings of religious belief and faith. For Whately, like Chillingworth and Tillotson, faith goes farther than the affirmation of a set of beliefs.[89] In short, Whately provides a robust example of evidentialism – of an evidentialism that had a profound impact not only on some of the later 19th century discussions in Britain and America of the relation of reason and faith, but also, arguably, on aspects of the contemporary debate.

6.7 Conclusion

The writings of the evidentialists, particularly Paley and Whately, constitute a second phase in the development of the understanding of the reasonableness of religious belief – e.g., the relationship of religious belief to evidence and proof – in Anglo-American philosophical theology. Theology and religious belief were, then, increasingly on the defensive, and evidentialism was part of that defence – providing assurance to the believer, but, perhaps more importantly, a reply to increasing atheism and scepticism.[90] Paley and Whately held that the standard of reasonableness – for a belief to be reasonable and for one to be reasonable in holding belief – was 'sufficient evidence'; this is the core of their 'evidentialism.' What constitutes 'sufficient evidence,' however, is a controversial matter – and there has been some misunderstanding about what these evidentialists held that it was.[91]

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[89] This can also be seen in other evidentialist authors, such as George Campbell. In his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Campbell writes: "To make me believe, it is enough to shew me that things are so; to make me act, it is necessary to shew that the action will answer some end" (Campbell 1807: 530).

[90] In his *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, W.E.H. Lecky, an early critic of the evidentialists, writes that: "[Nathaniel] Lardner and Paley and their followers acted strictly on the defensive, and were therefore compelled to meet their assailants on the ground which those assailants had selected" (Lecky 1870: 175).

[91] As we have seen, and as will be discussed in later chapters, some have thought that these evidentialists insisted on 'sufficient evidence' being 'demonstrative' (see Collins 1961: 5) and 'foundationalist', but, as

Paley and Whately may also be seen as the culmination of a ‘current of thought’ that places reason and evidence at the centre of the issue of the reasonableness of religious belief. As we have seen in earlier chapters, while reason and evidence had a key place in theological discussion from the mid-seventeenth century, this ‘reason’ initially lay within the context of religion. By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, however, discussion of religion now lay within the context of reason and experience. Moreover, the burden of proof had almost certainly shifted – from a presumption for religion, to a presumption that religion, like all belief, political, ethical, and aesthetic, needed at least some evidence, external or internal, to be reasonably held. Though Paley and Whately did not refer to Chillingworth and Tillotson except in passing, and while they could not assume that their audience saw the truth of scripture as earlier generations had, Paley and Whately took to heart the appeal to reason and the focus on experience found in both Chillingworth and Tillotson, as they proceeded to provide ‘evidence’ for religious belief.

The influence of both Paley and Whately was significant in the United States as well as in Britain, with their writings part of the standard curriculum at Harvard University and Oberlin, Dartmouth, Williams, Bethany, and many other colleges, between the mid-1810s and the middle of the 19th century.[92]

As noted above, Paley and Whately ‘follow’ Locke on several points, but not on all.

For example, on the nature of religious belief, Paley and Whately, like Locke and Hume, subscribe to a view that sees religious belief as, in general, no different from any other kind of belief: religious beliefs are propositional in form and must be intelligible or cognitively meaningful.[93] Faith or religious belief as a whole is largely, or simply, the assent to and acting on a certain number of these propositions. (This is not, however, obviously the view of Chillingworth and Tillotson, where individual articles of faith

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we have seen, this is not substantiated by the discussion above.

[92] See footnote 13 above for some examples of their influence among theologians, such as Mahan, Oliver, and Nairne, and other intellectuals in the United States.

[93] While Paley and Whately understand religious belief to be propositional, it is not obviously true that all evidence be propositional. As Whately’s comment, cited above, suggests, one may have good grounds for making certain judgements, even if one cannot – or has difficulty in articulating – one’s evidence. Neither is it necessary that all evidence must be put into the form of an argument.

themselves seem to have a dispositional character.) Moreover, to speak of religious belief (or of faith) as true is to say that the particular propositions that it contains or presupposes are true. While there is some suggestion that Paley and Whately distinguish between religious belief or faith as such, and particular religious beliefs, both involve or entail a number of particular empirical propositions or beliefs.

Where the 'evidentialist school' does seem to differ more markedly from Locke and, particularly, Hume, is on the relation of argument or evidence to religious belief.

It is true that the general criteria for holding a belief reasonably were much the same for Paley and Whately as for their opponents. Whately, for example, held that evidence is generally necessary for reasonable believing and reasonable belief. He writes:

> "it is surely an important part of education that men should be trained in some degree to weigh evidence, and to distinguish good reasons from sophistry, in any department of life, and not least in what concerns religion" (Whately 1861: 113).

Paley and Whately also held that (what one might call) Lockean empiricism, with its understanding of probability and of 'reasonableness', was useful, and it informed their responses to the challenges to religious belief mounted by such figures as Hume – but also to fellow believers who were sceptical of the powers of reason in establishing religious belief. Paley and Whately held that it was appropriate to ask for, and provide, "sufficient evidence" for the basic claims of Christianity.

The standard of sufficient evidence that they used, however, was not that suggested by Locke and Hume – i.e., what has been called a foundationalist view – but one suggested by the law. As we have seen, Whately's discussions of probability in argument and of 'tested' testimony in the *Rhetoric* and in the *Historic Doubts*, and Paley's use of testimony and probability in the *Evidences*, drew on a juridical model.[94] While what counts as 'sufficient evidence' for a belief in Paley and Whately is, admittedly, somewhat vague, it is clear that, on Paley and Whately's view, what one needs for a 'reasonable belief' is that the evidence for it is presented in such a way that 'the case' is established – not that the evidence for it logically excludes all other explanations. Thus, Paley and Whately hold that, to be reasonable, a belief *must* have sufficient evidence. This must take into account several points: First, that what is to be proven is proven only if it is based on probabilities, and the decision to believe this conclusion is also comparative and takes into account the probability of competing views. Second, that testimony – not as such, but properly examined and 'tested' – can be a reasonable basis for belief, or a piece of evidence for a belief.[95] And, third, that there is a presumption in favour of the established view; the onus is on the critic to show that it is not reasonable to hold it. A criticism that challenges an established belief – such as an accusation of guilt – must be supported by evidence that makes the criticism more probable, and likely to be true beyond a reasonable doubt. Thus, just as in a court of law one is presumed innocent, and normally not required to give positive proof of one's innocence, so Paley and Whately presume that an established belief, by virtue of being established, likely has *some* evidence and is true. One does not have to have, therefore, as much positive evidence as would be required to establish it in the first place. Thus, one who holds the established belief has only to show that the critic's case is not sufficient to controvert it. (Whether the established belief is true is, of course, another matter.)

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[94] By way of illustration, a note by the anonymous editor of an 1838 edition of Paley's *Works*, to Part I of Paley's *Evidences* (Paley 1838: 203), explains the notion of 'satisfactory evidence,' by summarizing a lengthy passage from *A Compendium of the Law of Evidence*, by Thomas Peake.

If one has "sufficient evidence," the conclusion is as certain as it can be. Probabilistic arguments can provide "certainty," even if they are not immune to doubt. While Locke would hold that it is going too far to say that such a belief could ever be certain, Paley and Whately would say that such beliefs can be so, given the subject matter, even if they do not have the support of a foundationalist argument.

Paley and Whately do not refer or embrace, at least, not explicitly, the potentially sceptical epistemologies of Locke and Hume, and given the rehabilitation of and emphasis on testimony in Paley and Whately, there is a strong(er) evidentiary basis for reasonability. While we need evidence in order to be reasonable in our believing, how much and of what kind is “sufficient” are far from what might be expected to satisfy the apparently foundationalist model suggested by Locke and Hume.

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[95] Caleb Clanton notes that George Campbell provides an interesting alternative to Whately and Paley's approach. "Campbell writes that "we must trust to testimony before we can reason about it. Children have a propensity to believe and rely upon the testimony of others. It is necessary [for] their improvement and happiness. Human testimony is the first truth. Children don't lie till they are taught from example, motive and alurements [sic]." It has been claimed that Campbell adopted this view from George Jardine. See, A. Campbell [n.d.] cited in Clanton (2013: 173).

That being said, Paley and Whately seem to allow that sometimes argument and evidence are not necessary for religious belief. For example, since it is not entirely clear what, exactly, is the content of faith or religious belief, it may be that only very fundamental beliefs are capable of or require evidence. Moreover, recall that Paley allows that Christian religious belief does not require assent to all of the individual beliefs that are part of it. And neither Whately nor Paley insist that one must hold or suspend belief until one can supply argument or proof, and they allow that it might even be reasonable to believe in some situations where access to the full evidence comes only after the fact.

(Moreover, ‘reason’ may involve engaging in activities ‘beyond’ reasoning. Whately distinguishes (in contrast to Locke, he says) between ‘reason’ and ‘reasoning,’ so that there may be appropriate means of employing the mental faculties that need not involve ratiocination and logic (see L, app. I [p. 372]). Whately holds that ‘knowledge of religion is not the same as knowledge of logic’ – one can have degrees of knowledge based on the level of one’s mastery of the content in the former, but not in the latter. Again, logic, he writes, is limited to the theory of reasoning, and that reason can have other instruments than the rules of reasoning (see Logic IV iii 1 [p. 29]). Whately also holds that logic does not furnish the sole instrument for discovery of truth in all subjects, because presumably, it is clear that it is limited in what truths it can discover and that, even here, it cannot discover much [see xv-xvi]. For Whately, reason is sufficient, but not necessary, for at least some belief (see *Logic*, Appendix III, p. 432).)

From their shared understanding of reason, proof, and the nature of religious belief, then, Paley and Whately took issue with and challenged the arguments of the so called deists and atheists of the Enlightenment. But they were not without their opponents.

Though it exercised a “vast influence” (*The New Jerusalem magazine*: 425), the evidentialism of Paley and Whately met with significant criticism, and some note a "rapid decline" of the evidential school after Whately.[96] Lecky takes this to be primarily a shift of interest away from miracle reports, as Christians allegedly turned to "the moral [rather] than the intellectual portion of human nature." Others see this shift away from evidentialism as due to the influence of the philosophies of Kant and Hegel – that their critique of 'rationalism,' which putatively underlies evidentialism, was beginning to have greater influence on religion and theology, particularly in Britain (Lecky 1870: 1, 177). For example, as early as the beginning of the 19th century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had been influenced by Kant and, arguably, Hegel (see, e.g., Roy [2007]), found Paley's religious doctrine "feeble," and that he "more than fear[ed] the prevailing taste for books of Natural Theology, Physico-Theology, Demonstrations of God from Nature, Evidences of Christianity, and the like" (Coleridge 1993: 405). (For Coleridge, "Christianity is not a Theory or a speculation, but a *Life*" [Coleridge 1993: 202]; talk of evidences was far removed from matters of 'repentance'; and the understanding of scripture ignored the results of hermeneutics.) And some held that the evidentialist approach made a number of unwarranted assumptions about the role of argument and proof – that, in assessing the testimonies found in scriptures, it assumed that the Apostles judged as human beings do today.[97] Some, therefore, held that the standard of proof expected by the evidentialists was too high. And others turned to 'intuition' and the possibility of an 'inborn idea of God' as the foundation of religious belief.[98]

A number of authors, however, did not directly challenge this evidentialism, but simply abandoned it. For example, (the Rev.) Mark Pattison, a sometime student of Oriel and disciple of Newman, and, later, the Rector of Lincoln College,[99] called evidentialism "Old

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[96] In his *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, Lecky writes: "Among those who are usually called orthodox Protestants, it has been clearly shown in the rapid decline of the evidential school." Lecky (1870: 1, 175).

[97] As Jeffrey M. Suderman puts it, Paley "assumed that the early Christians observed the miracles and weighed the claims of Jesus in the manner of an eighteenth-century empirical philosopher, and consequently arrived at morally certain conclusions" (Suderman 2001: 170).

[98] See, for example, Henry Manning. On Manning, see Sweet (2019).

[99] In "Tendencies of Religious Thought in England, 1688-1750," an essay in the controversial Broad Church 'manifesto' *Essays and Reviews*, the contemporary Oxford academic, Mark Pattison, provides a brief, and somewhat acerbic, account of the evidentialists. Pattison writes: "…from 1750 onwards, the controversy was narrowed to what are usually called 'the Evidences,' or the historical proof of the genuineness and authenticity of the Christian records. From this distinction of topic arises an important difference of value

Bailey theology," that ignored "the substance of the Gospel," and that could "stir no feeling" and know "*nothing of the spiritual intuition*." Similarly, (the Rev.) Baden Powell, a mathematician and a former student of Oriel and of Whately, favoured "spiritual theism" over "Whately's evidential argument," regarding evidentialism as 'anachronistic,'[100] and (through its defence of miracle reports) as undermining humanity's understanding of natural order (Stephen 1873). (Both Pattison and Powell were contributors to the *Essays and Reviews* (1860) volume, which signaled the liberal shift in theology of the mid and later 19th century, and which focused on the 'internal evidences' – the effect on the moral character – of Christianity.)

Whether these challenges, responses, and reactions provided an effective counter to the approach and arguments of Paley and Whately, or whether the view of religion and religious belief found in them was one to which believers ought to subscribe, is not, however, the concern of the present study. The concern of this study is, rather, to take note of their approach, to understand what, exactly, evidentialism held, and to see

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between the theological produce of the two periods. A great injustice is done to the 18th century, when its whole speculative product is set down under the description of that Old Bailey theology in which, to use Johnson's illustration, the Apostles are being tried once a week for the capital crime of forgery. This evidential school – the school of Lardner, Paley, and Whately – belongs strictly to the latter half only of the period now under consideration. This school, which treated the exterior evidence was the natural sequel and supplement of that which had preceded it, which dealt with the intrinsic credibility of the Christian revelation. This historical succession of the schools is the logical order of the argument. For when we have first shown that the facts of Christianity are not incredible, the whole burden of proof is shifted to the evidence that the facts did really occur. Neither branch of the argument can claim to be religious instruction at all, but the former does incidentally enter upon the substance of the Gospel. It may be philosophy rather than theology, but it raises in its course some of the most momentous problems which can engage the human mind. On the other hand, a mind which occupies itself with the external evidences knows nothing of the spiritual intuition, of which it renounces at once the difficulties and the consolations. The supply of evidences in what for the sake of a name may be called the Georgian period (1750-1830), was not occasioned by any demands of controversy. The attacks through the press were nearly at an end, the Deists had ceased to be. The clergy continued to manufacture evidence as an ingenious exercise, a literature which was avowedly professional, a study which might seem theology without being it, which could awaken none of the scepticism then dormant beneath the surface of society. Evidences are not edged tools; they stir no feeling; they were the proper theology of an age, whose literature consisted in writing Latin hexameters. The orthodox school no longer dared to scrutinize the contents of revelation. The preceding period had eliminated the religious experience, the Georgian had lost besides, the power of using the speculative reason." (Pattison 1860: 260-261).

[100] Pietro Corsi writes: "Baden Powell … was more sympathetic towards spiritual theism than towards Whately's evidential argument… [Baden Powell's] moderate and sympathetic criticism of the intuitionist school sharply contrasted with his irritated denunciation of the anachronism of the evidential school… stressing that it belonged to the past and was based on priorities rejected by the contemporary intelligentsia" (Corsi 1988: 219).

specifically how it saw the relation between faith and reason, and the reasonableness of religious belief.

As the next three chapters reveal, however, the issues of the relation of faith and reason, and the reasonableness of belief, were taken up in very different ways.

Chapter 7

Developments and Responses in the 19th Century: Qualifying Evidentialism

7.1 Introduction

By the mid 19th century, reflection on the relation of faith and reason was still an issue for Christians in the Anglo-American World, but as the place and character of Christianity, and of religious belief as a whole, within society had changed, so had the discussion of the reasonableness of religious belief.

In Britain, the number of 'dissenting' churches or communities had increased; beginning in the mid 18th century, Methodism and the evangelical movement (originally reform movements within the Church of England), made many of the theological debates of the 17th and even early 18th centuries quaintly archaic (Cantor 2005). The Catholic Relief Act of 1829 and the Universities Tests Act of 1871 removed membership in the Anglican Church as a qualification for public office. For some, religion was increasingly a subjective matter – a matter of feeling or faith alone – and the relation to a specific (Protestant) Church or tradition much less relevant. There was a developing secularist movement, which gradually encountered less and less state opposition (Sommerville 1992), and a growing 'radical' or utilitarian school that challenged Christianity. Philosophers and theologians from the European continent began to shift the understanding in the Anglo-American world of religion and its content. The established Church of England was experiencing reform: on the one hand, those like Edward Pusey, John Keble, and John Henry Newman, and other so-called 'Tractarians' or members of the 'Oxford movement' who supported a 'High Church,' insisted on a return to tradition, an emphasis on sacraments and the rituals of the liturgy, and traditional doctrine. On the other hand, there were reformers who were more latitudinarian, professing doctrinal tolerance, and who were seen as a 'low' or 'Broad church.' Here, one finds figures such as the classicist and a progenitor of the British idealists, Benjamin Jowett (1817-93), and the future Archbishop of Canterbury, Frederick Temple (1821-1902). By mid-century, some 'High Church' figures, such as Newman and Henry Manning, had abandoned the established church for Roman Catholicism, and Pope Pius IX had 're-established' the Catholic hierarchy in Britain[1], with a corresponding growth in the expression of anti-Catholicism.[2]

In part, because of this diversity – though there were also other factors – the political and even religious influence of the Anglican church began to decline (Green 1996). There were developments in Biblical criticism, which challenged the historical character of Biblical texts; philosophies that focused on the evolution of consciousness, and that thereby sought to provide a naturalistic explanation of religious consciousness and religious belief; a growth of scientific and humanistic naturalism and of evolutionary theory, particularly through the work of the biologists Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) and Charles Darwin (1809-82; *The Origin of Species* was first published in 1859)[3], and of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and T.H. Huxley (1825-95). Intellectuals struggled with reconciling their religious commitments with these changes and shifts[4] and, given the increase in secularism and the nascent 'atheistic' and agnostic movements after 1850[5], it became practical to think of faith and religion as a matter of free choice, and religion itself as not just 'faith' but as a phenomenon. Although religious belief and religious practice were still strong, and while there were renewal movements in religion and 'reconversions' of sceptics back to faith[6], it was increasingly accepted in much of the Anglo-American world was that there was a legitimate plurality of religions and even of non-religion. In such a tumultuous environment, the discussion of the relation between faith and reason, and the reasonableness of religious belief, took very different angles.[7]

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[1] In the papal bull *Universalis Ecclesiae* (September 29, 1850), Pope Pius IX reestablished the dioceses that were suppressed or had become extinct after the mid-16th century, following the establishment of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland.

[2] For a general discussion of the impact of Pius IX's bull on the religious environment in Britain at the time, see, for example, Paz (1982).

[3] In the second and subsequent editions of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, Darwin's final sentence read: "There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one" (Darwin 1861: 525). Whether Darwin was an atheist is a matter of some debate. But, in 1879, shortly before his death, Darwin wrote: "I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God. – I think that generally ... an agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind" (Darwin 1958).

[4] See, for example, the 1864 'Declaration of Students,' discussed in Gay (2017).

[5] The term 'secularism' was first used by George Holyoake in 1851, and it was in 1866 that Charles Bradlaugh founded The National Secular Society (though there were other secularist groups throughout England). The term 'agnosticism' is said to have been coined by T.H. Huxley, in 1869, at a meeting of the Metaphysical Society. 'Philosophical' atheism may be traced to before the 18th century, but it had little obvious presence until the early 19th century. See, for example, Berman (1988) and Royle (1974). What the concrete impact of agnosticism was, beyond seeking legal acceptance, was at first rather limited. Lightman (1987) notes, for example, that "Many of the agnostics revered the Bible as a reservoir of spiritual truth" and "retained an evangelical fervor for sincerity, honesty, and moral earnestness."

Not surprisingly, there was an explicit reaction or response to the evidentialism of Paley and Whately. Some theists challenged it. John Henry Newman, who had been, for a time, a disciple of Whately, argued that evidentialism was not an appropriate standard for determining the reasonableness of religious belief or of religious believing. But other theists, as well as non-theists, embraced evidentialism; for example, the mathematician and philosopher William Clifford took the principles of evidentialism to heart, seeing them as an appropriate standard in order to challenge religion. Others, such as Henry Manning, later Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, held that many religious beliefs lay beyond the sphere of publically verifiable evidence, and argued instead for the relevance of 'internal' evidences and intuition (see Sweet 2019). Others still, such as William James and Bernard Bosanquet thought that the essence of religion and faith required a very different approach, and an investigation into the nature of religion and the nature and development of 'religious consciousness.'

It is in this environment that continued discussion of the relation of reason and faith, and the reasonableness of belief, took place – sometimes in response to evidentialism, at other times simply taking a different tack. I turn, now, to an early 'disciple' of Whately, who engaged evidentialism but, then, abandoned it: John Henry Newman.

7.2 John Henry Newman

Born on February 21, 1801, in London, Newman was raised in the Church of England. At the age of 15 he had a religious experience that led him to embrace evangelical

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[6] Some speak of 'the Victorian crisis of faith,' though this was a phenomenon initially of the middle class, and was uneven. As some moved towards non-religion, others moved back to faith. See Larsen (2006).

[7] It is worth noting another important shift: the arguments of the evidentialists were not primarily directed at an audience of the faithful. Their arguments did not focus on theological matters (as had their predecessors), made no assumptions about one's pre-existing religious beliefs, and started simply from common experience, using an argumentative model that even the nonbeliever could accept.

Protestantism. Soon thereafter, in December 1816, Newman matriculated at Trinity College, Oxford, where he studied classics and mathematics. During this time, Newman read widely, not only in theology, but in epistemology and logic, as well as some of the work of Gibbon and Locke.[8] Preparation for his examinations at Oxford led to a minor breakdown, but he received his BA (1820)[9] and, in 1822, won a fellowship at Oriel College (which he held until 1845, the year of his entry into the Catholic church). Interest in epistemology was characteristic of his colleagues at Oriel, and Newman fell under the sway of the 'Oriel Noetics.' Key among those who had an effect on him were the Oriel churchman, Edward Hawkins (who, Newman wrote, held that scripture "was never intended to teach doctrine, but only to prove it"), and Richard Whately (who Newman wrote, "opened my mind, and taught me to think and to use my reason"[10]). Beginning in 1822, Newman assisted in the preparation of Whately's *Elements of Logic* (1826). Newman took holy orders in the Anglican Church in 1824, served as curate of St Clement's Church, Oxford, before being selected as Vice-Principal at St. Alban Hall, Oxford (1825-26), where Whately was Principal. Newman returned to Oriel as tutor in 1828. He and Whately took different positions over the re-election of Robert Peel as Member of Parliament for the University, which led to some estrangement between the two, and, by 1830, Newman was coming to find some of Whately's theological views suspect.[11] After Whately's move to Ireland in 1831, they had little contact with one another – and not at all during the time that Newman was in Ireland.[12]

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[8] Possibly "A Commonplace Book in reference to the Holy Scripture, 1697", ascribed to Locke, though doubtful. See Newman (1995: 235) and Newman (1891: 39). For the influence of Locke on Newman, see Walker (2019). Earlier key discussions are found in Cameron (1960) and Cameron (1967); Naulty (1973); and Price (1969), especially "Lecture 6: Degrees of Assent: Newman's Criticisms of Locke."

[9] Drawing on recent information on Newman's use of the Oriel College senior library [see Parker (2019)], Walker (2019) argues that the influence of Locke on Newman was lifelong – as a 'foil', but also, positively, in Newman's discussion of assent. Walker seems to diminish the influence of Whately who followed Locke in certain respects, and her evidence for a direct influence of Locke on Newman is, at times, rather speculative.

[10] See Newman (1864). Widely acclaimed when published, the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* also met with concerted opposition, both from Catholic and Protestant quarters. An extensively revised edition appeared the following year.

[11] See Newman (1966: 199). See also Nockles (2017: 90-92), and Zuijdwegt (2013).

[12] That the rift was not final by Whately's departure for Ireland, however, is evident in Newman's letter to his sister Harriet Elizabeth (at Stowlangloft), dated October 16, 1831, where he wrote that he was

In 1828, Newman became the Vicar of St Mary's University Church in Oxford; some of his 'university' sermons[13] formed the basis for his 1843 collection of his sermons on religious belief. And, beginning at this time, a number of 'High Church' Anglican theologians and clerics came to be dissatisfied by the plainness and the latitudinarian and evangelical attitudes in the Anglican Church, and sought to reinstate and renew some of the Christian traditions bearing on practice and doctrine but also on liturgy. Many of these figures were associated with the Oriel Noetics, and Newman came to be chief among them. This movement, first called the 'Tractarians' and, later, the Oxford Movement, came to reform but, in the end, divided, intellectual Anglicanism.[14] By the early 1840s, Newman had become convinced that the Catholic Church was the only true Christian church. He was received into Catholic Church in 1845, and ordained in 1847. He established the Oratory of St Philip Neri in England in 1848, but also continued to engage in religious controversy concerning the place of the Catholic Church in a still largely Anglican England. In 1851, Newman was asked to establish a Catholic University in Ireland, which later led to his book 'The Idea of a University.' Throughout, however, Newman remained "a controversialist" – his aim was not the aim of the scholar, but, rather, to persuade – and his relations with Anglicans but also with the Catholic Church were often unsettled. In 1864, in response to attacks upon his integrity by members of the Broad Church, particularly the anti-Catholic (Rev.) Charles Kingsley, Newman wrote a 'defence of his life' – the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.

At this time, Newman was considering revising his *Oxford Sermons*[15], though he decided instead to produce an entirely new work, published in 1870, entitled *An Essay in Aid of a*

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concerned that Whately might have wanted him to follow to Dublin. That Whately did not propose this suggests that the break was probably more Whately's doing.

[13] University sermons were directed to all members of the University, as distinct from sermons for members of the parish.

[14] See, for example, James Pereiro (2017). Discussion occurred through a number of 'tracts' – publications on religious topics – in a series called *Tracts for the Times* (which explains why this movement was called, first, 'Tractrarian'), but also in a publication entitled the *British Critic*, of which Newman was briefly an editor.

[15] There are notes on this, as well, in Newman's posthumously published (in 1970!) *Philosophical Notebook* (Newman 1969-70).

Grammar of Assent.[16] Revealing is the fact that Newman's interest in assent to religious belief was not just at the theoretical or conceptual level, but particularly at the personal level.[17] It was allegedly in part because of his wish to complete this work that, in 1869, Newman declined an invitation to join the Metaphysical Society – a discussion and debating group that brought together many of the leading figures in philosophy and theology, but also in the sciences, of late 19th century Britain, such as Henry Sidgwick, William Clifford, (Lord) Arthur Russell, T.H. Huxley, William Gladstone, James Fitzjames Stephens, and others. Newman was, however, certainly appraised of the Society's discussion, through some of its members, particularly his fellow Oratorian, John Dobrée Dalgairns (1818–1876).[18]

After 1870, Newman continued his work with the Oratory, and was made a Cardinal in 1879. In his later years, he lived at the Oratory in Birmingham, supervising the revision and republication of some of his writings from his Anglican period, such as his *Oxford Sermons* and his *Development of Christian Doctrine*, and responding to debates in articles 'On the Inspiration of Scripture' (1884) and the 'Development of Religious Error' (1885). By 1886, Newman was in ill health, and he died in 1890.

Newman's writings covered a wide range of topics and had a wide range of forms – essays, sermons, letters, novels, poems, and books. As a convert to Catholicism, Newman did not draw easily on some of its intellectual traditions, and he was ill at ease with the apologetics that arose out of them (Zeno 1952: 301). Yet, because he was well acquainted with the texts and arguments of the Anglican and Protestant traditions, Newman's efforts to describe faith and reason, the relations between them, and the nature and limits of proof, are instructive, not only in how he dealt with these issues with his contemporaries, but also for current discussions in theology.

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[16] See Newman (1901). It is worth noting that there are a number of revisions in this, the final edition from the first edition, published in 1870.

[17] Nicholas Lash summarizes the structure as follows: "the argument, in both parts, consists of a general phenomenological analysis of 'belief' and 'certitude,' which is then applied to, or illustrated in respect of, "the matter of Religion" at the end of each part, in chapters 5 and 10. In other words, the contrast between faith and reason is not, for Newman, a contrast between belief and unbelief, or between irrationality and rationality, but between two modes of rationality" (Lash 1979: 5-6).

[18] Newman's rivals, William Ward and Archbishop (later Cardinal) Henry Manning, were also members.

7.3 Belief, assent, and faith[19]

Newman’s comments on belief, assent, and faith must be placed in the context in which they were expressed. In some cases, they were expressed in sermons; in other cases, they were expressed within the context of then current theological debates. Throughout, they express resistance to the evidential approach of Whately[20] and Paley, and the underlying influence of Locke[21], but they also show some admiration for Paley and, more broadly, for the importance and place of reason in relation to adopting religious belief and religious beliefs.

In 1870, on the publication of the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman wrote that his “fundamental ideas [on the nature of belief (including religious belief), assent, faith, and reason] were ever the same” (Newman 1973b: 29), but for some years he struggled to get them clear, or at least expressed in a sufficiently satisfactory way. In his *Oxford Sermons* (delivered in Oxford, between 1826 and 1843, prior to his reception into the Catholic church, but republished in a third edition after that event[22]), initially entitled, in 1843, *Sermons, Chiefly on the Theory of Religious Belief* and, particularly in his final five sermons, Newman seeks to clarify ‘faith’ and ‘reason.’ In later work, particularly the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman deals with ‘assent’ as well.

While Newman had considered the writing of what became the *Grammar of Assent* for some twenty years, writings such as Henry Mansel’s *The Limits of Religious Thought* (Mansel 1858)[23] no doubt convinced him that a mere revision of his *Oxford Sermons* would not do. The *Grammar of Assent* had, as its objects, an explanation of the nature of faith as well as accounts of 'how faith can possess certainty' (without there being conclusive evidence) and the role of reason and evidence.[24] But what it offers is much broader than that. One way of looking at the *Grammar of Assent* is to see it as a general, theoretical text in epistemology or rhetoric on how "ordinary processes of thought" lead to "conviction" (Ker 2009:649) that, then, can be applied not just to religion, but to aesthetics and ethics as well.

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[19] What follows (pages 217-237) draws extensively on, but substantially revises, my article (Sweet 2013). **In this Chapter, I refer principally to: Newman (1901), abbreviated as GA, followed by page number to this edition (unless otherwise noted), and included in the text. I also refer to Newman (1900), abbreviated as ‘Oxford Sermons,’ followed by sermon number and section, and to Newman (1969-70), abbreviated as ‘Notebook,’ followed by page number.**

[20] See Aquino and King (2018). Zuijdwegt (2013) argues that the first four Oxford Sermons were directed specifically against Whately’s evidentialism.

[21] See, for example, Walker (2019), Naulty (1973), and Price (1969), cited above.

[22] See Newman (1900). The first and second editions of *Fifteen sermons preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843*, were published, with the title *Sermons, Chiefly on the Theory of Religious Belief*, in 1883 and 1884, respectively. The third edition, with a new, analytical Preface and the addition of one sermon, was first published in 1872.

[23] For the possible influence of Mansel’s work on Newman’s writing of the *Grammar of Assent*, see the editors’ introduction to Newman (2006: cxvi).

In general, then, in his discussion of belief, assent, and faith, Newman had in mind (or, more precisely, what he understood to be) the evidentialism of Paley and Whately, and the critique of religious belief raised by "hard-headed logicians," holding that neither evidentialists nor the critics of religion nor even some Catholic apologists grasped the relation of faith and reason properly. But, most importantly, he wished to reassure that it was appropriate to believe even if one was not able to provide conclusive evidence. This all depended on what belief, assent, and faith mean.

7.4 Belief

Though Newman does not provide a single definition of belief, in one important sense, to believe seems simply to apprehend or grasp (or *to have* apprehended or grasped, but not judged) something; Newman writes of the "vividness of apprehension" as directly related to the "strength of belief". At the very least, belief is like an "apprehension" or "an impression" (GA 295), but not inferred.

In another important sense, though consistent with the above, belief is (at least, sometimes) something naturalistic – that is, a natural and appropriate response to (an) experience; Newman refers to the "secret belief in the stability of nature" (Oxford Sermons 11.19), and that experience could *cause* or produce "a real and personal belief"[25] – understanding that causes are not reasons. Here, beliefs depend on grounds, but these grounds can be weak, and people can come to have some beliefs rather easily. Still, Newman writes:

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[24] The object of the book "would be to show that a given individual, high or low, has as much right (has as real rational grounds) to be certain, as a learned theologian who knows the scientific evidence" (Newman 1973b: 294). See also Lash (1979). Thomas Norris notes that, in 1877, a fellow priest of the Birmingham Oratory, Edward Caswall, discussed the book with Newman, and in his copy he wrote: "Object of the book twofold. In the first part shows that you can believe what you cannot understand. In the second part that you can believe what you cannot absolutely prove" (Norris 2009: 95).

> "I would rather have to maintain that we ought to begin by believing everything that is offered to our acceptance, than that it is our duty to doubt of everything. This indeed seems the true way of learning. In that case we soon discover and discard what is contradictory; and error having always some portion of truth in it, and the truth having a reality which error has not, we may expect that when there is an honest purpose and fair talents, we shall somehow make our way forward, the error falling off from the mind, and the truth developing and occupying it." (GA 377).

But there is more to the meaning of belief than this. In a more technically precise sense, for Newman, beliefs are often, and perhaps normally, something for which evidence is relevant and, therefore, propositional; what a person believes is (normally) a proposition – e.g., an article of faith. Many of one's beliefs are based on reasons, and in such cases their acquisition is something over which one has control; in this way, Newman can be said to be a voluntarist about belief, unlike Hume and Locke. A belief may be the product of an informal inference (given antecedent probabilities). And evidence is relevant to belief; Newman writes that "belief, grounded on sufficient probabilities, 'rises to assurance'" (GA 316).

Newman sometimes refers to belief as a "state of mind" or "mental state"[26]; it may even be a 'habit of mind' (though not in Hume's sense). By this, Newman seems to mean something like 'a way of looking at the world.' Newman writes of "Faith," but also

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[25] Newman writes: "a real and personal belief, being *produced in* different individual minds *by various experiences and disposing causes,* variously combined; such as a warm or strong imagination, great sensibility, compunction and horror at sin, frequenting the Mass and other rites of the Church, meditating on the contents of the Gospels, familiarity with hymns and religious poems, dwelling on the Evidences" (GA 86-87, emphasis mine).

[26] "Belief is a state of mind; belief generates belief; states of mind correspond to each other; the habits of thought and the reasonings which lead us on to a higher state of belief than our present, are the very same which we already possess in connexion with the lower state" (GA 412). Belief is not, however, a 'sensation'; cf letter to Charles Meynell, Professor of Philosophy at the Seminary of Oscott near Birmingham, in Ward (1912: 2, 258).

"Reason" – and, indeed, "Religion," "dogmatism", "positiveness," and "Doubt" – as habits of mind (and even distinguishes a 'religious habit of mind' from a 'theological habit of mind').

Sometimes, Newman uses the term belief as a rough synonym for faith – though he is careful to distinguish the two (see GA 99).[27] His *Oxford Sermons*, as noted earlier were initially entitled "Sermons, Chiefly on the Theory of Religious Belief", though he uses the term but once in these sermons.[28] And frequently he writes of "belief" or "believers" to mean the Christian faith or of those who 'believe in' it.[29]

Belief is closely connected with assent, but the term 'assent' is rarely mentioned in the *Oxford Sermon*s, and becomes central in Newman only in the 1850s (Ker 2009: 621). (One will recall that the distinction between belief and assent made in Locke.[30]) An assent is a "mental assertion" (GA 13) – a "mental assertion of an intelligible proposition" (GA 188) – "a mental act, that is expressed in the assertion of a proposition" (GA 255) (though it is more than this, as assertions indicate conditions). (Though Newman does not dwell on the issue of 'intelligibility,' he, like Whately, recognises that not every putative proposition has meaning.[31]) The object of one's assent is, Newman writes, a proposition, though strictly speaking, one does not assent to propositions, but "to the truth of ... propositions" (GA 45). Assents are unconditional (GA 157); either one assents or one does not, and "to give the assent of the mind to" a proposition is to believe it (GA 98). But to assent to a truth does not entail that one understands it completely; one may, for example, ‘profess’ that one is a ‘democrat’ or that one is a ‘conservative,’ without being able to say much about what that term means.[32] Moreover, even though one’s assents might be based on ‘probabilities,’ Newman argues, against Locke, that nevertheless these assents may be regarded as ‘certainties’ or “infallibly demonstrated” (GA 160-164).

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[27] Newman writes: "I mean by belief, not precisely faith" (GA 99).

[28] When Newman generally uses the term 'religious belief,' he seems to be thinking of beliefs in relation to 'Natural Religion', i.e., religion [or religious truths] independent of revelation that are available to all humanity (though, perhaps following upon some measure of grace), and the apprehension of religious objects (GA 388, 487). But this is not always the case, as in his use in the initial title of the Oxford Sermons. For Newman, strictly speaking, 'faith' is not the same as 'Religious belief.'

[29] For a discussion of 'belief in,' here, see Price 1969.

[30] On 'degrees of assent,' see GA 160-162. Newman argues that there is a difference between Locke's and his views on 'degrees of assent.' Naulty rightly points out that Locke need not hold, and does not obviously hold, that there are 'degrees of assent' (see Naulty 1973: 453). See also Jay Newman, who does not take seriously the difference between assent and belief (J Newman 1986: 37).

[31] Newman recognises the importance of definition and meaning. He suggests that many controversies are primarily verbal ones, and that if terms were properly defined, one would see that the difference is one of 'first principles' or assumptions, or that there is no real disagreement at all. He writes "We need not dispute, we need not prove,— we need but define." (*Oxford Sermons* 10.45).

Newman distinguishes two modes of assent: notional and real. Notional assent is “Assent made to propositions which express abstractions or notions” (GA 42). This includes “assent to all reasoning and its conclusions, to all general propositions, to all rules of conduct, to all proverbs, aphorisms, sayings, and reflections on men and society” (GA 73). By themselves, “acts of Notional Assent [...] do not affect our conduct” (GA 90). *Theology*, Newman points out, is always notional because its propositions are abstract and ‘scientific’ (GA 55).

By ‘real assent’ Newman means “a real and personal belief.” It is ‘concrete.’ While such belief, in itself, does not necessarily “lead to action [...], the images in which it lives, representing as they do the concrete, have the power of the concrete upon the affections and passions, and by means of these indirectly become operative” (GA 89). Such beliefs or assents, then, ”form the mind out of which they grow” (GA 88), and have a central effect upon our behaviour. They are assents that we live in and through in life. A religious assent, therefore, is a real assent; a theological assent is not.

Newman also distinguishes between simple and complex assents. Simple assents are made to propositions “unconsciously”, without much consideration, and “are often little more than prejudices” (GA 194), such as “expressions of our personal likings, tastes, principles, motives, and opinions, as dictated by nature, or resulting from habit” (GA 188). A complex assent is voluntary, “made consciously and deliberately” (GA 189), and may involve “ascertain[ing] the producible evidence in its favour”, without ever doubting it (GA 190-191).[33]

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[32] Newman writes: “I have used the word *apprehension*, and not *understanding*, because the latter word is of uncertain meaning, standing sometimes for the faculty or act of conceiving a proposition, sometimes for that of comprehending it, neither of which come into the sense of *apprehension*. It is possible to apprehend without understanding. … I may take a just view of a man's conduct, and therefore apprehend it, and yet may profess that I cannot understand it; that is, I have not the key to it, and do not see its consistency in detail” (GA 20). For example, “under the head of Profession… are the assents made upon habit and without reflection” (GA 42).

A religious belief in a dogma, as distinct from a theological belief, Newman writes, is a kind of real assent (GA 98). To have a religious belief *in* God, is not simply to have given notional assent to a proposition or set of propositions – to believe that there is a being called ‘God’ (though, of course, one must adhere to some such propositions). It is an assent that has a practical or intentional character (e.g., indirectly serving as *a platform for action*), as referred to above, arguably because it has a broader epistemic character. Notional assent to dogmas or ‘articles of faith’ (e.g., those studied in theology), then, is distinct from ‘faith’ or religious belief.

What does Newman mean by ‘faith’? As noted above, Newman notes that faith is closely related to belief, but it is not the same, because faith involves both belief in the thing believed and belief in the ground or basis for that belief (GA 99).[34] Still, faith and belief are fairly close, and it is mainly about the religious beliefs that are part of one’s faith that Newman is concerned.

Now, in the popular sense of the term, faith (like belief) is seen as something less than knowledge and inferior to reason. Newman notes that, in this sense, faith is taken to be “judging on weak grounds in religious matters” and an “easiness … in accepting the claims of Religion”, and closer to “a feeling or sentiment” than cognitive (*Oxford Sermons* x-xi). But Newman insists that one challenge the popular view. Faith is, on his view, *cognitive* and “an instrument of knowledge” (*Oxford Sermons* 10.5).

Given what he has said about ‘assent,’ Newman holds that, i, faith involves a mental act – an assent to a proposition, but, particularly, to a ‘truth’; ii, faith is ‘dispositional’ and practical.[35] As we have seen, because faith involves a ‘real assent,’ it affects our conduct, forms our mind, and is a platform for action (as any real assent does); iii, faith is an act of religion, not an act of theology. A notional assent to (the truth of) a proposition studied in theology is distinct from faith.

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[33] Newman distinguishes between investigating the grounds of one’s assent, and inquiring whether it is true.

[34] Newman writes: “I mean by belief, not precisely faith, because faith, in its theological sense, includes a belief, not only in the thing believed, *but also in the ground of believing*; that is, not only belief in certain doctrines, but belief in them expressly because God has revealed them” (GA 99-100).

[35] In saying that faith or religious belief is ‘*practical*,’ Newman is drawing our attention to the fact that we act out of our religious belief – it is a principle of action (*Oxford Sermons* 10.27) – and it is rooted in the

Religious belief or 'faith' is also a 'certitude' [a 'perception of a truth'] (*Oxford Sermons* xvi) – a "right conviction" (GA 221; see GA 196) – a certitude being "a deliberate assent given expressly after reasoning" (GA 229). As an assent, a religious belief is unconditional; all inference has disappeared. But a religious belief is more than a 'mere' real assent. "Assents may and do change" (GA 220); certitudes *endure*. Without certitude, "there can be [for example] no habit of prayer [...] no generosity of self-sacrifice" (GA 220), and so on. Still, though Newman challenges Chillingworth's arguments against the infallibility of the Catholic Church (because this requires an infallible or certain proof), Newman acknowledges that certitudes can be mistaken – i.e., based on mistaken reasons or reasoning (GA 228-230).

Further, faith is foundational – and this applies to both religious and non-religious belief. Faith has a framework-like character. It has an important epistemological role in a person's life, because (Newman holds) it reflects the way in which one determines what is to count as evidence.

> "Most men must and do decide by the principles of thought and conduct which are habitual to them; that is antecedent judgement [...not only causes a man] to go out to meet the evidence in greater or lesser degree [...] but, further, it practically colours the evidence [...] and interprets it for him.“ (*Oxford Sermons* 12.8).

Faith, then, determines what is probable, and how far evidence counts for or against a belief. In this sense, Newman writes, faith "makes its own evidence" (*Oxford Sermons*, 10.34) – that is, the object of faith determines what appropriately counts as evidence for and against it. It is not that faith depends on evidence, but that what is to count as evidence depends on one's prior faith. Thus, when it comes to religious belief, Newman writes: "We decide one way or another, according to the position of the alleged fact,

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practices of everyday life (*Oxford Sermons* 10.27). It is not (or not normally) the product of argument and evidence but of tradition.

relatively to our existing state of religious knowledge and feeling." (*Oxford Sermons* 12.9). In light of this, Newman acknowledges that 'different men may have different determinations' of what counts as evidence, how strong it is, and so on.

Finally, faith is "an instrument of knowledge" and action (*Oxford Sermons* 10.5, pp. 179-180), and is a "method of proof" (*Oxford Sermons* 10.6) that is different from exercises of reason, such as "trains of argument, discussion, investigation" (*Oxford Sermons* 10.9) – though reason may "test and verify it" (*Oxford Sermons* 10.13). This is, again, to attest to the foundational character of faith, as part of the antecedent probability that gives meaning to… arguments" (*Oxford Sermons* 10.44).

What makes such faith, assent, or belief *distinctively* religious? As we have seen, for Newman, there were other kinds of faith than the religious. Newman does not answer this directly, but his answer seems to be that it is the *content* of this belief--the dogma or the objects referred to (GA 98-99). It is apparently not in how it is held or in how one makes the world intelligible.

7.5 Reason and evidence

What is the relation of belief, faith, and articles of faith to reason and argument? When can or should we *properly* assent to a belief? Can believers know whether what they believe – what they assent to – is true?

At first look, there may seem to be an inconsistency in how Newman answers these questions. Newman says in his 1866 essay, "An Internal Argument for Christianity," "Faith, be it deep or shallow, does not need Evidences" (Newman, 1899: 386). And in his *Grammar of Assent*, when referring to religious belief, or faith, or religion, Newman is dealing with truths that he already accepts on the strength of the word of God alone (Gilson 1955: 15). Newman also warns his readers of a reliance on reason in matters of reading scripture, and criticizes Paley's efforts to show the reasonability of the New Testament (*Oxford Sermons* 10.41).[36] And, as we have seen, when Newman writes that faith is an instrument of knowledge, he adds that it is “independent of reason” (*Oxford Sermons* 10.5).[37]

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[36] Recall that, in the *Oxford Sermons*, Newman writes that a focus on "Evidences" "draws men away from the true view of Christianity, and leads them to think that Faith is mainly the result of argument, that religious Truth is a legitimate matter of disputation, and that they who reject it rather err in judgment

On the other hand, Newman says (as he writes in his *Philosophical Notebook* in 1860) that faith is a reasonable act, and that “an act or process of faith… is certainly an exercise of reason” (*Notebook* 207). Indeed, Faith is a *kind* of reasoning (Zuijdwegt 2013: 88). Here, “unless the doctrines received by Faith are approvable by Reason, they have no claim to be regarded as true” (Oxford Sermons: 10:13; see also 10:14,16). Indeed, Newman writes that “faith must rest on reason, [...] even in the case of children, and of the most ignorant and dull peasant” (Newman 1976: 86; see also Collins 1961: 3).

The key to resolving this apparent inconsistency is, first, to consider what Newman means by ‘reason’. While he makes an effort to explain this in the *Grammar of Assent*, he provides a more complete account in the Preface to the third edition of the *Oxford Sermons*, published in 1872. Thus, in general, by ‘Reason’ “is properly understood *any process* or act of the mind, by which, from knowing one thing, it advances on to know another” (*Oxford Sermons*, xi; see 12.2; 11.6-7; 13.7,9; 14.28). (In this rather broad sense, there seems to be no specific ‘process’ that is at work here.) Newman adds that reason is ‘forward looking’ – it is a process of proceeding. He writes “Reason does not really perceive any thing; but it is a faculty of proceeding from things that are perceived to things which are not; the existence of which it certifies to us on the hypothesis of something else being known to exist, in other words, being assumed to be true” (*Oxford Sermons*, 11.7).

Newman distinguishes, next, between reasoning as a natural process (*Oxford Sermons*, xi), and the reasoning that involves reflection on one’s prior reasonings – the latter is characteristic of logic (see *Oxford Sermons*, Preface .9 xiv). (What Newman has in mind here is “expertness in logical argument”.) This distinction is significant because it recognises that someone might be able to reason well in a particular area, and yet, in

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than commit sin. They think they see in the study in question a tendency to betray the sacredness and dignity of Religion” (*Oxford Sermons* 10.42).

[37] For perhaps obvious reasons, Newman’s discussion of ‘evidences’ is to Paley, not to Whately.

the latter sense, be unable to “bring out into shape his reasoning” (*Oxford Sermons*, Preface .9) on that matter.

Newman, then, notes that there are, in fact, several ways in which the term ‘reason’ may be used.

One sense is that associated with “framing evidences” (*Oxford Sermons*, xv) and “evidential methods” (*Oxford Sermons* 10.5, ftn 2) – e.g., the reasoning of evidentialists like Paley and Whately (see GA 424ff.). On this view, “Reason has a power of analysis and criticism in all opinions and conduct, and that nothing is true or right but what may be justified, and, in a certain sense, proved by it” (*Oxford Sermons* 10.13). This view of reason is appropriate when it comes to the adjudication of testimony, or arriving at verdicts in trials. And Newman praises Paley – calling him a “clearheaded and almost mathematical reasoner” (GA 424) – and finds “Paley’s argument clear, clever, and powerful” (GA 425). But Newman denies that this is how we always ought to understand reason. To emphasise this sense, as Newman alleges the evidentialists do, is not a very powerful way to lead individuals to believe, and runs the risk of missing the truth.

A second way in which the word ‘reason’ can be used is to refer to an approach employed by some sceptics. Here, Newman writes, the critic comes to Religion “without a due familiar acquaintance with its subject matter” (*Oxford Sermons*, Preface .11) and assumes that, if religion is to be reasonable, it should be able to be inferred from axioms of reason. To use this sense of reason to apply to more than this is the sense of the term ‘reason’ associated with demonstration and syllogism.[38] This, Newman writes, is “parallel to the abuse of Reason in other subject-matters, as when chemical truths are made the axioms and starting points in medical-science, or the doctrine of final causes is introduced into astronomical or geological enquiries” (*Oxford Sermons*, Preface .11, xv-xvi); such a use of reason is beside the point when it comes to religious faith (GA 425;

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[38] Newman writes that a “demonstration is syllogism which commands assent” (GA 76) and that “a syllogism is at least a demonstration, when the premises are granted” (GA 293). Recall that Whately had a somewhat more restrained view of the syllogism; he writes: “For Logic, which is… the Grammar of Reasoning, does not bring forward the regular Syllogism as *a distinct mode of argumentation*... but as the form to which *all* correct reasoning may be ultimately reduced; and which consequently serves as the purpose (when we are employing Logic as an *art*) of a test to try the validity of any argument.” (L Intro 3, pp. 13-14).

see also 92-97). Thus, in the *Oxford Sermons*, he devotes an entire sermon to 'The Usurpations of Reason.'

Newman's response to these first two senses of reason, in short, is to note that reason, if properly employed, must be appropriate to and consistent with what is being studied or reflected on – and it is not obvious that either of these two senses are appropriate to religious belief. He writes that "Life is not long enough for a religion of inferences" (GA 94). It is not that Newman rejects these two senses of reason; it is that they are simply not appropriate to all subject matters.

There is, however, a third way in which 'reason' can be understood, and that is in the sense in which *we* might say that one reasons 'out of one's faith', "the reasoning of a religious mind" (*Oxford Sermons* 11.1) (– what one author has called "reasoning on love" [Juergens 1928: 208, 212]). It is presumably this that is the context for the operations of what Newman was to call, in the *Grammar of Assent*, the 'illative sense.'[39] The illative sense is, as Newman writes in the first edition of the *Grammar of Assent*, 1870,[40] "the power of judging about truth and error in concrete matters" (Newman 1870: 340; see GA 359), i.e., in things other than purely logical matters (GA 358). The illative sense of reasoning is "parallel to *phronesis* in conduct, and to taste in the Fine Arts" (Newman 1870: 348). While he calls it a faculty, it operates as a form of induction; in one place, Newman refers to it as the "inductive sense"[41] (in the Aristotelian meaning of the term).[42] One does not have demonstrative knowledge in law, or arrive at demonstratively established conclusions in matters before the courts – or, for that matter, in literary analysis and criticism – yet it is obvious that one can come to reasonable conclusions in these matters and, this, he assigns to the illative sense. Reasoning using this sense need not involve much time, though it is not the same as intuition.[43] But it presupposes (as Newman, perhaps controversially, holds all reasoning does) antecedent probabilities.[44] By way of illustration, Newman refers to what, and how, a great general knows in making decisions in war (*Oxford Sermons* 11.24). Here, believers can and ought to accept what they know by faith – their antecedent probabilities – perhaps not as a first premise in an argument, but as a *condition* under which they reason. (One may see in this in the notion of 'faith seeking understanding' in St Anselm's *Proslogion*.)

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[39] Some see here an influence of Locke, because of his reference to the notion of 'illatio'. But the term 'illation' had been in use since the 16th century, and may be found in major writers on theological topics, such as John Donne (1572-1631, in his *Sermons*), Barthélemy d' Astroy (1612?-1681), Chillingworth (1602-1644), Joshua Oldfield (1656-1729, in his *An Essay Towards the Improvement of Reason*), and Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753), among others.

[40] Meszaros (2018) argues persuasively that changes to later editions of the GA concerning Newman's presentation of the illative sense do *not* indicate a change in his view of the illative sense as "the instrument of induction from particulars" (see GA 354).

[41] In a letter (unfinished) to William Froude, of April 29, 1879, Newman writes: "There is a faculty in the mind which I think I have called the inductive sense, which, when properly cultivated and used, answers to Aristoteles' [sic] φρόνησῐ̈ς, its province being, not virtue, but the "inquisitio vera" which decides for us, beyond any technical rules, when, how etc. to pass from inference to assent, and when and under what circumstances etc. etc. not." [Cited in Ward 1912: 2, 589), and in Dr Zeno, OFM Cap. [Bartholomeus Michiel van den Barselaar] (Zeno: 1957).

[42] Note that, in the first edition of the *Grammar of Assent* (1870), Newman writes that "it is the instrument of *induction from particulars*, and determines what are general laws, and what conclusions

This third understanding of reason is reflected in what was described earlier as the 'foundational' character of religious belief. Newman suggests that faith or religious belief is the standpoint – the 'antecedent probability' – from which the investigating believer begins, and this determines what is to count as evidence and how proper 'reasoning' is to be engaged in. Thus, the 'foundationalism' (understood as the view that to have sufficient evidence for a belief, that belief must be either self-evidently true, an incorrigible report of experience, evident to the senses, or deducible from such beliefs) that seems to be found in Locke and Hume, and that has been, I have argued in earlier chapters, erroneously attributed to Paley and Whately, is clearly not present in

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cannot reach beyond bare probability" and "it is by the Illative Sense that we reason out, from the data we possess, that nature is uniform" (GA 354-355, emphasis mine). Recall that Paley [see Ch 5, notes 38 and 40 above] and Whately [Ch 6, above, note 88] use this kind of induction in their 'evidences.' See also, Meszaros (2018: 775), who discusses whether the changes found in the 1889 edition of GA indicate a change in Newman's epistemology.

[43] See the discussion of intuition, below.

[44] See *Oxford Sermons,* xii: "Again: there are two methods of reasoning — a priori, and a posteriori; *from antecedent probabilities* or verisimilitudes, and *from evidence*, of which the method of verisimilitude more naturally belongs to implicit reasoning, and the method of evidence to explicit." This is something that Newman seems to draw from Whately. Zuijdwegt (2013: 88 ff) supports my reading of the possible influence between Whately's account of antecedent probability (see, e.g., R I iii 2 [p. 53], I iv 4 [pp. 144, 147], and Chapter 6, pp. 180, 194, above) and Newman's. Zuijdwegt complains, however, that Whately (and Paley) ultimately did not make use of antecedent probabilities in their respective apologetics (Zuijdwegt 2013: 93), but it is *not* obvious that Whately understands antecedent probabilities in the sense in which Newman did. On antecedent probability in Newman, see also Ker (2009: 620).

Newman.[45] Thus, Newman will say in his 1866 essay and in places in his *Oxford Sermons*, that religious belief does not need "evidences" in the technical sense of the term used by the evidentialists. And while one can *investigate* one's faith – i.e., having faith, one can delve into arguments and conditions about it – people with faith do not, indeed cannot, approach it in the way of the sceptic that suggests what they are examining might possibly be false.

On this third approach, it seems that standards of evidence are 'internal' to a system of belief or view of the world, and so one cannot give an argument that is independent of all contexts or that starts from neutral principles. One can have 'evidence' for faith, but this evidence comes after the fact, and confirms rather than provides a basis for faith. Newman makes just this point in his discussion of miracles.[46]

What Newman is saying here is that this third sense of reason and of the standards of evidence is not found only in religious faith but in many areas – including, presumably, the empirical sciences. This explains some of Newman's criticism of Hume (*Oxford Sermons* 10.18). Not only does Newman point out that Hume ignores the historical context of miracles but, there, points out that "different men have different determinations" or antecedent probabilities.[47]

7.6 The relation of faith and reason

What, then, is the relation of religious belief, faith, and articles of faith to reason? Newman is obviously committed to rationality. Throughout the *Grammar of Assent*, we find an analysis of the phenomenon of religious belief and of the structure of religion that is comparable to that found in evidentialism and even what we might call today conceptual analysis. The idea of a grammar of assent – a logic of the language of assent – underscores this.

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[45] Gerald McCarthy attributes a "reduction foundationalism" to Newman, in order to "justify" 'first principles.' But, even on McCarthy's account, what is 'self-evidently true', or 'an incorrigible report of experience', or 'evident to the senses,' depends on a prior acceptance of a "language system" (McCarthy 1981: 75) that is, itself, not justified.

[46] See *Oxford Sermons*, 10.41. Newman suggests that Paley does this as well (*Oxford Sermons*, 13.13, 13.33; See GA 424 ff.)

[47] Interestingly, this fits with what several contemporary philosophers say about the context-dependent nature of argument and knowledge or 'contextualism' (e.g., Alasdair MacIntyre and Jürgen Habermas). See Habermas (1993: 95-105), where Habermas discusses MacIntyre's attempt to reconcile contextualism with antirelativism, and about how to properly understand the phenomenon of religious belief (e.g., Plantinga 2000). Some might object that this understanding of evidence and argument is circular. But, according to Newman, this is true of *all* faith, and not just religious faith; it is as true of religious belief, he says, as non-belief.

Newman's analysis of reason in general, however, provides a foundation for understanding not only the relation of faith and reason, but the reasonableness of religious belief. (It also enables one to see how Newman's understanding of religious belief and faith is similar to, but also distinct from that of Paley and Whately, but also from Locke and Hume.)

First, for Newman, believers, in fact, *do* have a reason for their faith and for their act of faith – that is, there is some process by which believers are led to assent. (This is, as noted above, the case for all instances of faith, and not just religious faith.) Faith depends on reason in this sense. Yet, while "all men have a reason," he notes that "not all men can give a reason" (*Oxford Sermons* 13.9). For example, in the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman gives us the famous example of the dying factory girl who cries out

> "if this should be the end of all, and if all I have been born for is just to work my heart and life away, and to sicken in this dree place, with those mill-stones in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop and let me have a little piece of quiet, and with the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath of the clear air, and my mother gone, and I never able to tell her again how I loved her, and of all my troubles, – I think, if this life is the end, and that there is no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes, I could go mad!" (GA 312)

The factory girl does not have faith randomly, nor is her having faith just a natural, or a naturalistic, phenomenon. And she is, *ex hypothesi*, unable to give a justification of what led her to her belief or faith; she cannot "bring out into shape" her reasoning. (The process of reasoning, recall, is distinct from the ability to articulate an argument.) Yet, since 'an act or process of faith' is a case of reasoning – Newman clearly understands 'reason' here as a rational process through which one may be 'led' to an assent – and since reasoning involves gaining knowledge “on grounds,” there are “grounds” for her assent (*Oxford Sermons* Preface p. xvi; 11. 8,9).

Second, in such cases, Newman distinguishes between what leads one to religious belief and the grounds or evidence that one might think of giving for one’s religious belief. While a person may – indeed, must, Newman says – have (and have had) a reason for his or her faith, the reason need not be the kind of thing that one expects for empirical or scientific beliefs. Faith, then, need not be the product of “minute and finished investigations” (*Oxford Sermons* 10.27). As noted above, the kind of ‘reason’ that Newman has in mind is of a generic variety; it is a natural process that *may* be, but does not have to be, expressed in a formal way. And so Newman writes that “an act or process of faith, simply considered, is certainly an exercise of Reason; whether a right exercise or not is a farther question; and, whether so to call it, in a sufficient account of it, is a farther question” (*Oxford Sermons* 11.9, p. 207). Perhaps a better way of putting this point, then, is to say that faith can be based, not so much on evidence, as on “presumptions” (e.g., tradition, experience, and rules of thumb), and on ‘grounds’ (e.g., features of the environment in which one finds oneself, one’s family, and the example of those in one’s community, such as teachers, clergy, and so on). But not all grounds can be exhibited; Newman writes “*Faith is a process of the Reason* [‘a kind of reasoning’ unlike that found in evidentialism[48]] in which so much of the grounds of the inference cannot be exhibited” (*Oxford Sermons* 11.24, emphasis mine). As an analogy of this process:

> “Consider the preternatural sagacity with which a great general knows what his friends and enemies are about, and what will be the final result, and where, of their combined movements, — and then say whether, if he were required to argue the matter in word or on paper, all his most brilliant conjectures might not be refuted, and all his producible reasons exposed as illogical.” (*Oxford Sermons* 11.24).

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[48] See note 44, above.

Third, all the same, there can be *proof*. It is through what Newman called the "illative [or ratiocinative] sense" (GA 353) that one can come not only to know and assent, but, further, come to prove or establish the truth of at least some religious beliefs. Concerning this latter case, Newman writes:

> "It is by the strength, variety, or multiplicity of premisses, which are only probable, not by invincible syllogisms, – by objections overcome, by adverse theories neutralized, by difficulties gradually clearing up, by exceptions proving the rule, by unlooked-for correlations found with received truths, by suspense and delay in the process issuing in triumphant reactions, – by all these ways, and many others, it is that *the practised and experienced mind* is able to make a sure divination that a conclusion is inevitable [...] This is what is meant by a proposition being "as good as proved," a conclusion as undeniable "as if it were proved," and by the reasons for it "amounting to a proof," for a proof is the limit of converging probabilities." (GA 321; emphasis mine)

Here, 'proof' is "cumulative," involving "accumulated probabilities" (*Oxford Sermons* 1.16; cf GA 411; see Shea 2018: 286). And such a proof, Newman holds, is productive of certitude – and of certainty.[49] Thus, Newman praises Paley for the quality of his argument, and he acknowledges "'the formal proofs on which the being of a God rests' … as affording 'irrefragable demonstration'" (GA 500).[50] But Newman adds that such proofs are not infallible or immune to criticism.[51] And, in any event, certainty and

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[49] Newman writes that "I … rely on that of an accumulation of various probabilities…, that from probabilities we may construct legitimate proof, sufficient for certitude" (GA 411).

[50] GA 500, Note II, citing William Samuel Lilly (1840-1919), who is, in turn, citing Newman's *Discourses to Mixed Congregations* (Newman 1906: 261).

[51] In principle, then, it seems that there could be 'disproofs' of religious beliefs, but Newman would resist any claim that 'science', as such, disproves religion. See, for example, his *Lectures and Essays on University Subjects* (Newman 1859), which includes two essays: "Christianity and Physical Science" and "Christianity and Scientific Investigation"). See also his May 22, 1868 letter to Canon J. Walker:

> "It does not seem to me to follow that creation is denied because the Creator, millions of years ago, gave laws to matter. He first created matter and then he created laws for it — laws which should construct it into its present wonderful beauty, and accurate adjustment and harmony of parts gradually. We do not deny or circumscribe the Creator, because we hold he has created the self acting originating human mind, which has almost a creative gift; much less then do we deny or circumscribe His power, if we hold that He gave matter such laws as by their blind instrumentality moulded and constructed through innumerable ages the world as we see it. If Mr Darwin in this or that point of his theory comes into collision with revealed truth, that is another

certitude do not require demonstrative arguments.[52] Even though a proof may not be in the form of a demonstrative argument, it is not inferior, or of a lesser kind or quality.

Proofs, then, seem to have a relative character. Newman reminds his reader that "a proof, except in abstract demonstration, has always in it, more or less, an element of the personal" (GA 317), and that "without assumptions no one can prove anything about anything" (GA 410). Thus, though some of these presumptions may be very plausible – that our senses are generally trustworthy, our memory reliable, and so on (*Oxford Sermons* 11. 20-21) – still, Newman notes, the same facts may lead to different conclusions, given antecedent probabilities,[53] one's presuppositions (*Oxford Sermons* 11.13), and what we "implicitly" or intuitively believe (*Oxford Sermons* 11. 22ff).

Proof is, moreover, internal to a *practice* – of any practice: of law, of morals, of aesthetic appreciation, and so on. This description of the epistemic character of belief (as providing a framework for knowledge and belief) and of the relation between belief and argument (i.e., where belief provides the framework for and the limits of argument) has its roots in classical Aristotelian epistemology.[54] Newman reminds his reader of Aristotle's view that

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> matter — but I do not see that the principle of development, or what I have called construction, does. As to the Divine Design, is it not an instance of incomprehensibly and infinitely marvellous Wisdom and Design to have given certain laws to matter millions of ages ago, which have surely and precisely worked out, in the long course of those ages, those effects which He from the first proposed. Mr Darwin's theory need not then to be atheistical, be it true or not; it may simply be suggesting a larger idea of Divine Prescience and Skill." (Newman 1973a: 77).

[52] Newman writes: "by a like dictate we are not justified, in the case of concrete reasoning and especially of religious inquiry, in waiting till such logical demonstration is ours, but on the contrary are bound in conscience to seek truth and to look for certainty by modes of proof, which, when reduced to the shape of formal propositions, fail to satisfy the severe requisitions of science" (GA 412).

[53] Ker reports that Newman saw the argument for the fundamental character of antecedent probability was an important and original part of his view (Ker 2009: 620, see 329). As we have seen, Whately also refers to proof from antecedent probabilities (though, in my view, not exactly in the same sense) in his *Rhetoric*, and Paley complains in his 'Preparatory Considerations' to his *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (Evidences II, p 3) that there is a kind of "antecedent **im**probability" about miracles underlying the arguments of sceptics like Hume. (See also Whately's edition of Paley's *Evidences* [Whately 1859a: 17]).

[54] But it also has contemporary echoes in some non-foundationalist accounts of moral philosophy, such as that of Alasdair MacIntyre (see MacIntyre 1988). For a discussion of this view, see Sweet (2000). By 'non foundationalist,' I mean simply the view that a belief can be held reasonably *without* being either self-evidently true, an incorrigible report of experience, evident to the senses, or based on an argument that is deducible from such statements.

> "A well educated man will expect exactness in every class of subject, according as the nature of the thing admits; for it is much the same mistake to put up with a mathematician using probabilities, and to require demonstration of an orator." (GA 414)

So, overall, Newman is suspicious of ‘external proofs.’ He prefers ‘internal arguments’ and ‘internal evidences’ – which Paley and Whately also accepted, though they were not primarily interested in them. And this, perhaps, explains why Newman does not provide proofs for religious beliefs – for, presumably, there can be many proofs, given the antecedent probabilities of the individual, but no one proof fits all. Thus, while Newman did write on ‘miracles,’ he was not particularly interested in discussing issues such as the reliability of testimony – because this is part of an ‘external’ argument.

Despite this diffidence about proof, for Newman it is nevertheless important for believers to *understand* what they believe. Newman writes “We are not only to ‘sanctify the Lord God in our hearts’ [...] but we are [...] to understand what we do, [...] to recognize what we believe, [...] to trace out our ideas and impressions, and to contemplate the issue of them [...]” (*Oxford Sermons* 13.2). Here, reason – in the sense of reason reflecting on its reasonings – ought properly to be engaged in by believers. Thus, he states that, “in the case of educated minds, investigations into the argumentative proof of the things to which they have given their assent, is an obligation, or rather a necessity” (GA 192).

So, while faith is not reducible to “creeds and evidences,” neither should one hold that “it ought carefully to be disjoined from dogmatic and argumentative statements” (*Oxford Sermons* 13.4).

What Newman seems to be concerned about, then, are evidentialist claims of rational argument being able to bring about *any* kind of belief. As noted earlier, for Newman, proofs are not necessary for faith. Even though an act of faith has a reason – that is, one is led to it by a process from one truth to the ‘conclusion’ of faith – faith often (if not usually) arises and is sustained without an explicit dependence on evidence. Thus, Newman writes of faith as ”independent of what is commonly understood by Reason” (*Oxford Sermons* 10.5). Newman is not primarily concerned that reason does not go far enough to reach religious truth, or breaks down – although, given human cognitive weakness, it often does. Newman's point is that the 'rationalist' or evidentialist attitude, that goes back to Paley, Locke, and perhaps further, is simply the wrong attitude and approach.

When Newman rejects the importance or value of arguments of an abstract nature, such as those in Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* (see also GA 424ff), his reason is that "Modes of argument such as Paley's encourage" believers to "act, not as suppliants, but as judges" (GA 425). Arguments and proofs, then, encourage an attitude that he finds problematic for faith. Newman writes that "a Faith which generously apprehends Eternal Truth, though at times it degenerates into superstition, is far better than that cold, sceptical, critical tone of mind, which has no inward sense of an overruling, ever-present Providence, no desire to approach its God" (*Oxford Sermons* 11.27). Instead, Newman writes, to find the truth, we need an "improved heart" (Newman 1908: 8, 198) and "grace" and a "mind of holiness" (*Oxford Sermons* 12.6), not "more reasoning." (He even suggests that with 'the fall,' the reliability of some of our cognitive capacities has been affected – an effect that has been repaired, however, not through nature, but through the Gospel (*Oxford Sermons* 14.6).)

Finally, Newman confesses "I wish to deal, not with controversialists, but with inquirers" (GA 425)[55]; "I do not care to overcome [.....] without touching their hearts" (GA 425); he is not interested in providing 'external' arguments of *any* kind. Thus, in the *Oxford Sermons*, Newman writes of "Personal Influence, the means of propagating the Truth" (Sermon 5, though Sermon 4 in earlier editions). It is the disposition of the person that is primary for Newman – that one is an inquirer – rather than the putative rigor of an argument.

Interestingly, then, in a way Newman returns to the view of Chillingworth and Tillotson – that faith sets the standard for proof and reasonability. Newman remarks on this, in making a comment on Hume. Newman writes

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[55] Newman writes: "I say plainly I do not want to be converted by a smart syllogism; if I am asked to convert others by it, I say plainly I do not care to overcome their reason without touching their hearts. I wish to deal, not with controversialists, but with inquirers" (GA 425).

> “Hume, in his Essay on Miracles, has well propounded a doctrine, which at the same time he misapplies. … "Our most holy Religion," he proceeds, "is founded on *Faith*, not on Reason." This is said in irony; but it is true as far as every important question in Revelation is concerned.”[56]

It is through personal contact, and through having an appropriate attitude, that a productive discussion of faith is possible, and it is internal ‘evidences,’ such as conscience, that Newman finds more efficacious for assent and conviction. In Note II to the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman cites the defence of his work by W.S. Lilly, who writes:

> “the great argument which comes home to [Newman] personally with supreme force is that derived from the witness of Conscience — …The existence of God, ‘borne in upon him irresistibly’ by the voice within, is ‘the great truth of which his whole being is full’ (‘Apologia,’ p. 241).” (GA 500)

Newman seems also to allow for an ‘intuitive’ knowledge as a basis for assent. In the *Oxford Sermons*, he writes that “even in the case of intellectual excellence, it is considered the highest of gifts to possess an intuitive knowledge of the beautiful in art, or the effective in action, without reasoning or investigating; that this, in fact, is *genius*” (Oxford Sermons 5.12); it would seem that this could extend to religion, as well, in the example of prophets and saints. For Newman, intuition is "the realization… of a *general* fact…, without *assignable* or *recognizable* media of realization,"[57] and among the examples directly relevant to religious belief that he gives are “the being of a God, and the immortality of the soul” (GA 336). Such an intuition is not an instinct (which is the realization of a particular), or a result of the operation of illative sense.[58] Though Newman does not discuss intuition at length, if it is a way of coming to religious belief, it seems that he regards it as another vindication of his view of the possibility of properly being certain without an argumentative proof.

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[56] *Oxford Sermons*, 4.6. See Fairbairn (1885: 849).

[57] See letter to Charles Meynell of Aug 17, 1869, in Newman (1973a: 310f). For a discussion of this issue of intuition, see Casey (1984). Other such beliefs, in a non-religious context, would be the existence of an external world, or the general reliability of memory (*Oxford Sermons* 11.20-21). Gerard McCarthy says that such beliefs are the result of an inference from what we know by instinct, and does not mention Newman’s distinction between instinct and intuition (McCarthy 1981). It is more likely, however, that Newman would count these as intuitions.

[58] As Zeno points out, the illative sense uses premises, even if they are not consciously recognized as such (Zeno 1957: 136).

7.7 Conclusion

In this Chapter, we have seen Newman's effort to articulate what faith or religious belief is, as well as his analysis of different senses of reason and his concern about whether or how far 'external' arguments and proofs contribute to 'reasonability' in assenting to or adopting religious belief. Newman is writing at a time of controversy – controversy within religion and, particularly, the Anglican tradition, but also controversy concerning the place of religious faith within society and concerning its reasonability in view of the discoveries of the anthropological and natural sciences. It is no surprise, then, that what counts as an appropriate answer or response to these debates was – and is – contested.

In a number of respects, Newman adopts the model of religious belief found in Paley and Whately, with some resonances with Locke. (And, given his remarks about faith as the standard of belief, there may be echoes in Newman going back to Tillotson.) But Newman also wishes both to respond to this model and the evidentialism that it reflects, and to move beyond it.

Like Paley and Whately – and, arguably, Locke – Newman sees faith, and particularly articles of faith or dogmas or religious beliefs, as importantly cognitive. They must be, therefore, as Whately also recognized, intelligible – though neither Newman nor Whately go into the issue of the meaningfulness of religious belief or faith. Such beliefs putatively express facts and truths and have a rational weight; they are not uncertainties or just opinions or attitudes or expressions of feeling. Nevertheless, unlike his predecessors, Newman notes that one can assent to or profess a belief, and holds that, even though one may not fully understand it, if one professes something, one must profess all that it includes (GA 151).

Broadly speaking, religious beliefs are expressed in propositional form. Newman writes that they are not only 'real assents,' they are *certitudes*. In giving 'real assent' to such propositions, one is not simply affirming or asserting a proposition (as one might a scientific, but also possibly a theological hypothesis); this assent has a practical and dispositional character – though, to be precise, it is the act of assent, and not the proposition that one assents to, that has this dispositional character. (As noted above, Newman makes a distinction between a 'religious' assent and a 'theological assent'; it is the former, and not the latter, that is typically the real assent.) Moreover, Newman holds that the assent to a religious belief reflects one's 'antecedent probabilities' – what some might call a presumption or a 'way of seeing the world,' which is more than an attitude or feeling on the part of the one assenting.

As we have seen, Newman holds that one can have grounds or reasons and evidence for one's assent. Arguments and evidence are relevant, and one can have good, indeed sufficient, evidence for religious belief. In this sense, religious belief is reasonable. But while Newman says that he finds the arguments of evidentialists such as Paley to be 'clear and powerful,' he argues that, underlying any proof, is the operation of the 'illative sense.' Moreover, while there can be – and Newman thinks that there should be – progress in understanding (one's) religious belief, he believes that one must also acknowledge that there are limits to any proof.

Newman, then, insists that one can give reasons for faith, and that faith is something that can be justified and rationally defended, though what he understands by this and how he goes about doing this, are rather different from many of his predecessors – and successors. Newman appears to present a non- or anti-foundationalist and contextualist account of 'proof' – something which has significant implications for understanding the relation of reason to belief and, thus, about how discussions of religious belief, with fellow Christians but also non-Christians and non-believers, can take place.[59]

Thus, as we have seen, and despite stating that religious beliefs, and faith as a whole, can have reasons and justification, Newman holds that, ultimately, proofs fall short. The problem is not that the arguments are invalid or unsound, or that they do not go far enough, though they may. Indeed, Newman believes that there are ‘external’ proofs for religious beliefs. But he does not give such proofs himself. (Newman clearly has confidence in arguments involving testimony as providing good, even sufficient, evidence for some religious beliefs, but he does not explicitly employ them himself (GA 189).) The reason for not employing such arguments and proofs, as we have seen, is that Newman believes that focusing on providing proofs is the wrong way to engage an inquirer. Moreover, looking at proofs and then seeking to judge the adequacy or inadequacy of the case reflects, Newman writes, a wrong cast of mind; recall Newman’s remark that people should not act as judges (see GA 425) when it comes to testimonies about religious belief – and his suggestion that adopting a judicial model or attitude of reasoning and proof may lead one to deal with religious belief in too notional a way, and, in the end, to be susceptible to being led away from the truth that such arguments were supposed to establish. Finally, given that argument and proof are limited in matters of one coming to faith, in that proof can never engender the ‘disposition’ of faith, Newman suggests that one should not expect too much of arguments and proofs. Resort to evidences, then, is too intellectual and not sufficiently spiritual. Newman, therefore, is unconvinced that the ‘external’ proofs provided by the evidentialists are of service in his task – i.e., to persuade. While one can discuss religious belief and seek to prove it, where one starts, what counts as evidence, and what one appeals to, are things that Newman seems to hold to be contextually determined.

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[59] A similar point is hinted at by M. Jaime Ferreira, who sees Newman's approach as undercutting the earlier – especially, she says, Lockean – distinction between demonstrative and probabilistic proofs. See Ferreira (1986). It is also worth keeping in mind, as noted above, that Newman provides us with a phenomenology of religion different from that often assumed in, for example, classical apologetics.

A central issue in Newman’s discussions of religious belief concerns where discussion might begin. Given his underlying epistemology, Newman seems to believe that there is no ‘neutral’ ground where believers and non-believers can or must meet. Interlocutors can begin only from where they are. If all arguments are contextual in this way, if the modes of argument, kinds of evidence, and even the meaning of premises are in some way contextually determined, this must be recognized by everyone concerned – but one must also recognize that one’s arguments will likely not be successful with those who do not share their presuppositions or context. (What one might also do, instead, is attempt to grasp and enter into the perspective and approach of one’s interlocutors, to see others’ views ‘from the inside,’ as it were.) Newman seems to hold or assumes, then, that there can be no ultimately objective way of determining the intelligibility of religious beliefs, and no one method and no ultimately objective argument to prove them. Because of this, one sees that Newman's understanding of religious belief differs significantly from that of his immediate predecessors. Moreover, what this suggests is that Newman rejects the view that, for a religious belief or faith to be reasonable, it must be based on premises to which all can agree.

Newman holds that the argumentative model, and the insistence upon truth, may interfere with his putative goals of mutual understanding and seeking belief. Newman holds that discussion of faith is best entered into in a spirit of inquiry, and that is not normally one of seeking demonstration. Such discussion must begin with openness and an attempt by the interlocutors to enter into a relation. If proofs, arguments, and evidences have a place, then, it is *within* such 'practices' or inquiries, not outside of them. Only *within* a shared context, or once foundational questions or 'antecedent probabilities' are shared, can proof and demonstration have a role. Newman reminds us, for example, that, broadly speaking, what counts as evidence presupposes a more general agreement. Ideally, the product of such discussion is a real assent to religious truths. Such an assent is not, by definition, notional – that is, to abstract truths – but is something practical and is manifested in action. Thus, while reason and arguments are useful, they generally should stay in the background, to be drawn on once the inquirer shares some of the attitudes and assumptions of the arguments.[60] In Newman, then, one sees a shift from 'the external' to 'the internal,' from the intellect to conscience.

Thus, for Newman, the most appropriate way of dealing with challenges to religious faith or religious belief is through openness and inquiry at a personal level – i.e., through interpersonal exchanges. This no doubt underlies and is assumed in Newman's personal motto, *Cor ad cor loquitur* – "Heart speaks to heart." For, as noted above, Newman's key concerns were inquiry and coming to faith – i.e., spiritual – not primarily intellectual.

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[60] By recognizing these epistemic considerations, Newman's approach to faith, reason, and dialogue may address the concern that many today have about the applicability and putatively dominating character of some models of reason characteristic of 'Western' traditions.

Proof and demonstration are neither the beginning nor the end of dialogue, but simply a means to truth.

What we find in Newman, then, is a significant shift in the discussion of the relation of faith and reason and in the understanding of the reasonableness of religious belief. And while Newman offers an alternative to a foundationalist account of the truth of faith and belief, it does not seem to have been an option that tempted any of his critics.

Despite Newman's insights concerning the nature of faith and the relation of faith and reason, there are a number of puzzles in his project – e.g., his description of religious belief, his response to evidentialism, and the details of his account of the relation of reason and faith.

To begin with, there are some puzzles about the nature of religious belief. Even if one allows that one may not understand all the content of a proposition to which one assents, how can one be sure that that proposition is, in fact, intelligible, let alone true? And given that it seems that there is no one, or no preferred, method of proof or justification for belief, how can one know whether what one believes – that of which one is 'certain' and one's "certitude" – is in fact true? If the answer to these questions is that meaning, evidence, and proof are internal to religious belief, would Newman's view not lead to a privatization of faith or religious belief – the view that faith is purely personal and does not deal with anything objectively real or true about the world – with the consequence that there can be no public debate about the reasonableness of religion?

A related puzzle in Newman's view concerns the 'dispositional' character of religious belief. Does the disposition to act follow on one's assent to a belief, or does the proposition expressing the belief *itself* have a dispositional character – i.e., that is part of its meaning, as suggested by Chillingworth and Tillotson – with the result that, when a person of faith asserts certain beliefs, she may be asserting something different from the same sentence uttered by a non-believer? This issue is not whether commitments to religious beliefs are different from commitments to ordinary beliefs[61], but whether there is something in the nature of religious belief that makes it different from other beliefs.

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[61] Jay Newman takes note of J.H. Newman's apparent claim that "religious commitment… [is] very different from ordinary belief" (J Newman 1986: 98). This point affects not only religious beliefs, but all

Another puzzle concerns Newman’s response and alternative to evidentialism. While Newman was, in certain respects, sympathetic to the approach of the ‘evidences,’ he suggests that such an approach was to be put to one side. But might this not lead to a relativism? If we all reason ‘relatively’ to our existing state of knowledge, are all proofs, therefore, ultimately ‘relative’ to that context? And, if so, what, then, are we to make of Newman’s injunction that we have an obligation “to cast our religion into evidence” – what end would this serve? His discussion of proof and of the illative sense suggests an anti-foundationalist and contextualist account of reason and its relation to belief – an account not unlike some seen in contemporary epistemology. But such an alternative seems to undermine the usefulness of providing evidence at all.

One final puzzle might be mentioned concerning the reasonableness of religious belief. Has Newman provided an adequate response to those cases where there may seem to be a conflict between religious and scientific propositions? If Newman holds that a true religious belief cannot conflict with reason, because truth cannot conflict with truth, how can Newman show that a religious belief is, in fact, true? Can Newman respond to or avoid Locke’s challenge about how one knows that something is, in fact, an article of faith coming from the divine? And, more generally, does not Newman’s approach to religious belief being reasonable or true simply avoid the discussion of compatibility or conflict between faith and reason?

Notwithstanding such concerns, Newman’s philosophical work is one of the first ‘responses’ to evidentialism and provides a challenge to the foundationalist assumptions of some Enlightenment and early post-Enlightenment apologetics. His account of reason and religious belief has appealed to many, as it seeks to respond to the challenge of showing the reasonability of religious belief and the reasonability of believing.

But Newman’s was far from the only response to evidentialism and to the general issue of the reasonableness of religious belief. To see another way in which one might address

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beliefs – that, not only would religious beliefs presumably be proven in different ways than non-religious beliefs, but even different *individual* beliefs might be ‘proven’ in different ways.

the question of the reasonableness of religious belief, in the next chapter I turn to another, very different view of the relation of reason and religious belief, that of the late-19th century ‘evidentialist,’ William Clifford.

Chapter 8

Developments and Responses in the 19th Century: Extending Evidentialism

8.1 Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, the mid- to late nineteenth century, in Britain and, to a degree, in the English speaking world as a whole, has been characterised by some as the period of the 'Victorian crisis of faith.'[1] Religious doubt was beginning to take hold, especially in the middle classes, and it was occasioned by a number of factors (see Lightman 1987).

In part, as we saw in the preceding chapter, this 'crisis' was a consequence of scientific discoveries in geology and biology, the professionalization of science, and the presence of science in the public sphere – particularly concerning evolutionary theory, but also concerning the study of consciousness and its relation to the human brain. This was significantly due to the popularity of the work of Charles Darwin, but also John Tyndall and Francis Galton (1822-1911), and the influence of books such as the English-born American John Draper's (1811-82) 1874 *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*. In part, this 'crisis' was also influenced by the introduction of theological and philosophical ideas from the European continent into Anglo-American thought – e.g., the Biblical criticism of the theologians David Strauß (1808-1874), Ferdinand Baur (1792-1860),[2] and other figures connected with the Tübingen School, but also the philosophical ideas of Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel. This influence can be seen particularly in the Romantic and idealist movements in Britain. In his *God and the Bible*, Mathew Arnold, for example, referred to Baur as "the greatest and most famous of [the German Biblical] critics" (Arnold 1875/1884: 138). And, in part, this was also a product of the new fields of sociology (e.g., Herbert Spencer and H.T. Buckle [1821-62][3]), anthropology (e.g., E.B. Tylor [1832-1917], H.J.S. Maine [1822-88], and J.F. McLennan [1827-81]), and the comparative study of religion (e.g., Max Müller [1823-1900]; see his 1873 and 1878, as well as his work as director of the fifty-volume Oxford translation of *Sacred Books of the East*), which in their own way, challenged received ideas about Western civilization and culture.

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[1] For some influential studies of the 'Victorian crisis of faith,' see, for example, those mentioned in Ch 7, above, as well as, for example, Turner (1990), Butler (1990), Willey (1986), and Cockshut (1964), typified in Mrs Humphry Ward's popular 1888 novel (which drew on figures of the day), *Robert Elsmere*.

[2] Concerning Baur's influence, see Paget (2017). For Strauß' influence, see Dodd (1981). It is also worth noting the period translations by George Eliot of Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu* (*The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, 1846) and of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*, 1854).

Popular descriptions of such religious doubt appeared in novels such as William Hurrell Mallock's 1877 *The New Republic: Or, Culture, Faith and Philosophy in an English Country House*, and, later, Mrs Humphry Ward's 1888 *Robert Elsmere*.[4] Public interest in and discussions of the challenges to religious belief were on the rise. One of the iconic moments of the period was the popular reception of the discussion of evolution at a meeting in 1860 of the British Association for the Advancement of Science following a paper by John Draper – often referred to as the Huxley-Wilberforce debate – where the new evolutionary science and tradition publicly clashed – though it is worth noting that many Christians still saw no incompatibility between evolution and religious faith (e.g., Gay 2017).

In mid-century in the Anglo-American world, then, while, for some, faith was still a matter that could be defended by reason; while, for some – particularly evangelical and Broad Church authors – it was a matter of feeling; and while, for some, it was a phenomenon to be analysed and subjected to the discoveries of the sciences, the general atmosphere of the time was that famously presented in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," where the poet wrote:

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[3] Among Spencer's more important contributions are his *Social Statics* (*1851*); *The Study of Sociology* (1873); and the 3-*volume The Principles of Sociology* (1876-96). Buckle is not as well known as Spencer, but his *History of Civilization in England* (1857-61) was a seminal work in British sociology. In anthropology, for example, Tylor's *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (1865), *Anthropology: an introduction to the study of man and civilization* (1881), and *Primitive Culture* (1871), and Maine's *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (1861) had significant impacts on the understanding of culture and religion. Further, F. Max Müller made major contributions to the comparative study of religion, such as *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1873) and his four volumes arising out of his 1888–92 Gifford Lectures: *Natural Religion* (1889), *Physical Religion* (1891), *Anthropological Religion* (1892), and *Theosophy, or Psychological Religion* (1893). (For the influence of Müller, see Girardot (2002) and Chapter 9, below).

[4] Clifford was parodied in the first edition of Mallock's *The New Republic* (1877), though Mallock moderated the caricature in later editions, after Clifford's death.

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world. (Arnold 1994: 86)

This disarray or crisis of faith, then, is evident in the writings not only of writers, historians, artists, philosophers, and scientists, but of theologians and their critics. While the response of some theologians, such as Newman, was that, on matters of religion, argument, proof, and demonstration were beside the point[5], for others there was a clear and troubling conflict between the results of the sciences, reason, and evidence, on the one hand, and the truths of faith, on the other, that had to be addressed.

For example, some theologians saw the theory of evolution as providing evidence against – or, at least, removing evidence for – divine design of the cosmos and the existence of a Creator. Again, research in psychology and anatomy noted the dependence of consciousness and mind on the brain and the rest of the body, which suggested that, without a physical organism, there could be no afterlife.

Still, to speak of a conflict between faith and reason makes assumptions about the nature of faith or religious belief, and also about argumentative method and proof. The primary assumption, here, is that religious beliefs are on a par with other beliefs, such that empirical evidence can count for and against them. Second, there is an assumption that the truth of at least some religious beliefs can be discoverable by a (quasi-) scientific method. Both assumptions seem to have been made by Paley and Whately.

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[5] Further, some theologians argued that scientific method can provide only probability, and requires being open to revision and refutation. Such a method would be, therefore, ill-suited not only to dogmatic and doctrinal beliefs, but also to basic beliefs concerning the existence of a God.

In any event, what one finds in the mid to late nineteenth century, then, is that the emphasis on argument and evidence, in early writers such as Paley and Whately, comes to be turned against religion. Evidentialist principles are used to support agnosticism – which T.H. Huxley defined as the view that "In matters of the intellect, [one ought] not pretend that conclusions are certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable" – and even atheism. One of the better known exponents of the evidentialist view coming from this agnostic-atheist perspective is William Kingdon Clifford (1845-79).[6]

8.2 William Clifford[7]

William Clifford was born in Exeter, Devon, on May 4, 1845. He had a High Church Anglican upbringing, was well read in the classics, and showed an early aptitude for mathematics. In 1860, he won a scholarship to King's College, London, before gaining admission at Trinity College, Cambridge, in February 1863. He read widely, became a member of the elite secret discussion society, the Cambridge "Apostles,"[8] and was influenced by the writings of Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Clifford soon moved away from his High Church upbringing. He refused, in 1866, to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles, and developed a profound animus against Christianity, culminating in what a later member of the Metaphysical Society, James Sully, called, a "religious abhorrence of religion."[9] Clifford graduated as Second Wrangler (BA 1867, MA 1870), before becoming a Fellow and a Lecturer in Mathematics (1868) at Trinity. In addition to his work in mathematics, however, Clifford was interested in philosophical issues and in the implications of evolution for the explanation for morality. His friend and biographer, Frederick Pollock, reports, however, that Clifford's reading in philosophy was "rather select ... He had a high admiration for Berkeley, next only to Hume…" (1901: I, 49).

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[6] It has recently been claimed (Nottelmann and Fessenbecker 2020) that Clifford does not defend an evidentialist, or any other kind of epistemology, but is a kind of virtue ethicist. A close look at the evidence suggests that this argument is flawed or, at least, is less plausible than the authors believe. See my brief discussion below, in note 20, below.

[7] Little is known of Clifford's early life beyond the memoir by Pollock 1901. Clifford was also the subject of a short biography by a fellow member of the Metaphysical Society, R.H. Hutton (Hutton 1894). The sole book-length biographical study, which touches slightly on the change in his religious views, is Chisholm (2002). For more details and later biographical discoveries, see Chisholm (2009) and Chisholm (n.d.). Some biographical material may also be found in Madigan (2009). There is some interest in Clifford among mathematicians, particularly in his work on algebra. For a summary, see Power (1970). For a discussion of Clifford's work on religion and metaphysics, see Brown (1947) and Mander (2019). Clifford's papers are held at Trinity College, Cambridge: Fonds CLIF - Papers of William Kingdon Clifford https://archives.trin.cam.ac.uk/index.php/papers-of-w-k-clifford

[8] For a recent history of the 'Apostles,' see Deacon (1985).

[9] Clifford's animosity towards Christianity was so strong that, in his last words, he insisted that his children be "brought up without any knowledge of theological … hypotheses at all" (Chisholm 2009: 664). Similarly, in his review of 'The Unseen Universe', he describes Christianity as "that awful plague which has

In 1871, Clifford became Professor of Applied Mathematics and Mechanics at University College, London, where no religious tests were required. Clifford came to know the critic George Henry Lewes (1817-78), the biologist T.H. Huxley, and the humanist and historian Leslie Stephen (1832-1904); was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1874, and joined the exclusive discussion group, the Metaphysical Society, in 1874,[10] where he gave three papers. Clifford was notorious for working with very little rest, and his health quickly declined. Despite marrying in 1875, he continued to work long hours, and, in 1876, had to spend six months recuperating in Algiers and Spain. Upon his return to England he continued to overwork, and by late 1878, it was clear that he was dying from tuberculosis. In January 1879, he and his wife went to the Portuguese island of Madeira to attempt to regain his health, but he died on March 3.

Overall, Clifford's views seems to reflect a naturalism and a materialism, but some have claimed that they are close to an idealist monism.[11] Clifford wrote several essays bearing on religious topics, specifically challenging the necessity of religion as a basis for morality, but the one which sparked the most interest in his time is "The Ethics of Belief," and it has had a remarkable longevity.[12] The essay was first presented at a

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destroyed two civilizations" (Clifford 1901: I, 300).

[10] Clifford attended its meetings fairly regularly, though there is no record of him attending after January 1878 (see Brown 1947: 318-337).

[11] Frederick Pollock comments that "This leads to results which would in a loose and popular sense be called materialist. But the theory must, as a metaphysical theory, be reckoned on the idealist side. To speak technically, it is an idealist monism." (Pollock (1901: I, 50).

[12] "The Ethics of Belief" was first published in *Contemporary Review* (1876-77) and reprinted in his posthumously published *Lectures and Essays* (Clifford 1901: II, 163-205). The original version of the essay, privately printed before its presentation to the Metaphysical Society, consisted simply in a version of the first part of that published in the *Contemporary Review*. In this *first* version, Clifford refers explicitly to the relation of his paper to the papers in the preceding sessions (see Clifford 1876/1869). There, Clifford writes: "it seemed also that we could not appeal to reason in support of the supremacy of reason; that it was impossible to infer from anything else the ground of all inference, and that at bottom, this question must be treated as a moral question" (Clifford 1876/1869: 5).

meeting of the Metaphysical Society (April 11, 1876), following a series of meetings that had discussed papers by, among others, Huxley and Shadworth Hodgson, concerning evidence for and the presuppositions of miracles. (More broadly, the paper was given in the midst of a discussion at the Society about the possibility of intuition as a basis for (religious) belief.) While there is an allusion to these earlier papers in "The Ethics of Belief," and while the membership of the Society included the 'intuitionists' William Ward and Archbishop Henry Manning[13], Clifford does not explicitly respond to the preceding papers or to the issue of intuitionism. Instead, Clifford argued that not only was it a requirement of 'rationality' that one have 'sufficient evidence' for one's beliefs, but that one also had a *moral* obligation to believe only on sufficient evidence. Clifford's challenge, then, was one that obviously needed to be confronted by those theists of the mid 19th century who believed that faith alone was sufficient for reasonable belief, but even by those who believed that they had sufficient evidence.

The effect of Clifford's essay was significant. While there is no record of the response at the Metaphysical Society, once it appeared (in a considerably expanded form) in *The Contemporary Review*, in January 1877, it sparked a significant debate. The controversy over the publication allegedly led to a serious rift between the journal's publisher, Alexander Strahan, and its editor, James Knowles, and the subsequent resignation of Knowles.[14] The essay also led to responses in the *Review*, for example, by the Professor of Ecclesiastical History at University College, London, the Reverend Henry Wace (1836-1924), and there were substantive and lengthy criticisms within the next year, principally by William Ward (1812-82), Chair of Dogmatic Theology at St Edmund's College; by the future Fr. H.W. Lucas (1852–1933) who was, at the time, a young Jesuit in formation; by the religious philanthropist Francis Peek (1836-99); and by the religious writer, Anglican convert, and fellow member of the Metaphysical Society, Richard Holt Hutton (1826-97); the educator and author of *God and the Bible* (1897), Matthew Arnold, responded to Clifford's views as well.[15]

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[13] Unlike many of the meetings of the Metaphysical Society, there is, however, no record of who attended Clifford's lecture (see Brown 1947: 330).

[14] On this controversy and some of its effects, see Glasgow (1999) and Malone (2013).

[15] Among the major responses by theologians and theists were Peek (1876-77), Ward (1878), Hutton

Though there is no evidence that Clifford's essay moved many to reconsider their positions, it was a clear and concise version of the kinds of critiques that were being made by authors such as Huxley and Tyndall. And while Clifford was not proposing an approach or method that was particularly new – broadly speaking, it would have been accepted by at least some earlier defenders of religious belief, for example, Whately[16] – it is Clifford who became, and who is today widely considered the principal exponent of evidentialism.[17]

8.3 Reasonability, and epistemic and ethical duties of inquiry

While Clifford does not often use the term 'reasonable,' he was nevertheless interested, throughout his writings in science, philosophy, and psychology, in determining what it is reasonable to believe.[18] 'Reason' and what is 'reasonable' are 'what is under the purview of human thought' (as distinct from what is 'unreasonable': "to evade the process of human thought" ("On the Aim and Instruments of Scientific Thought" (1872), I: 151[19]) or 'unintelligible' (see I: 176, 178).) More specifically, for Clifford, reasonability

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(1879/1894); Wace (1877), Rands (1876-77), and Lucas (1877). Other, more general responses to Clifford are found in Arnold (1875: ix-x), where Arnold comments on Clifford's review of "The Unseen Universe." There were other contemporary responses as well (e.g., Romanes (1895), Hutton (1875), and Hutton (1894)). For a general discussion of the reception of "The Ethics of Belief," see Madigan (2009). For a general discussion of 'the ethics of belief' in general, and particularly the contemporary debate, see Chignell (2018).

Two of the lesser known respondents were Rands and Lucas. William Brighty Rands (pseud., inter alii, Henry Holbeach [1823-1882]), had been a reporter in the House of Commons and was a contributor to many literary reviews. He was author of *Student in Life and Philosophy* (1866), published by the publisher of the *Contemporary Review,* Strahan. Herbert Walker Lucas, SJ (1852-1933) received his MA at the University of London in 1878 and, after ordination, was Professor at Stonyhurst College, and a member of the so-called "Stonyhurst Philosophers" who influenced Gerard Manley Hopkins.

[16] See Chapter 6, above, on Whately.

[17] Not only was Clifford the target of William James's famous essay on the reasonability of believing, "The Will to Believe" (see James, 1979), but Clifford is still frequently mentioned in discussions of evidentialism (for example, in addition to the various references in this chapter, Zamulinski (2002) and (2013)), and also, as noted earlier, of foundationalism.

[18] My use of the term 'reasonable' here is influenced by the titles of some of the early critics of Clifford's views.

[19] **All references to the essays collected in the *Lectures and Essays* (Clifford 1901), will be included in the text, indicating volume number and page.**

involves ideas "justified by previous experience" (I: 178), and involves questions that "may be known *by the exercise of scientific thought*" (I: 179; emphasis his).

This understanding of 'reasonability' is consistent with his late (November 7, 1876) essay, "Right and Wrong: The Scientific Ground of their Distinction." Clifford writes:

> "if we study the history of those methods by which true beliefs and false beliefs have been attained, we shall see that it is our duty to *guide our beliefs by inference from experience* on the assumption of uniformity of nature and consciousness in other men, *and by this only*. Only upon this moral basis can *the foundations of the empirical method be justified*." (II: 160-161, emphasis mine)

Thus, like many of his predecessors – particularly Locke, Hume, Paley, and Whately – Clifford holds that our claims to knowledge and belief – more precisely, our 'reasonable believing' that these claims are true – require evidence; for Clifford, this evidence is uniquely from experience. This is a standard of which, he says, we are all also aware "*in foro conscientiae*" (II: 167) (i.e., intuitively). Further, Clifford says that we ought to have not just evidence but '*sufficient* evidence' for our beliefs. And when we fail to do so, we not only violate our epistemic duties, we violate a moral duty.[20]

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[20] In a recent article, Nottelmann and Fessenbecker argue that Clifford is not defending an evidentialist epistemology, but is applying a kind of virtue ethics to the realm of belief – "the doxastic realm" (Nottelmann and Fessenbecker 2020: 800). While a detailed discussion of this issue is not apposite to the aims and objectives of the present project, it raises a concern that should be acknowledged and briefly addressed. The basis for their view is that Clifford was interested in the relevance of evolutionary theory to ethics [Nottelmann and Fessenbecker 2020: 803ff]– which is certainly true – and that, in his essays on 'belief' and 'religion', Clifford is not really concerned about 'sufficient' evidence, but seems, rather, to be concerned about "(un)worthy reasons" (II: 173) and "unworthy grounds" (II: 201) and that this latter concern is fundamentally moral, and not epistemological.

That Clifford had a moral interest is indisputable, but the authors admit that their view is 'speculative,' and they overlook several issues. It is also worth noting that the authors never define what 'evidentialism' means, and seem to be unaware of the evidentialist tradition of the time – a tradition that had been influential not just in the preceding 75 years, but also in Locke (who also had an 'ethics of belief'). Among the other issues that the authors overlook or do not address are: i) Clifford's original essay of 1876 in fact explicitly raises the issue of 'sufficient evidence'; Clifford asks: "What is meant by "adequate evidence?" By what method ought we to inquire?" (Clifford 1876/1869: 7), and he offers an indirect – and rather vague – answer to this – and so it is likely that he saw himself as dealing with articulating an epistemological principle. Second, Clifford uses the terms 'sufficient' and 'insufficient' as often as he uses terms such as 'worthy' and 'unworthy' – and 'worthy' is as much an epistemic as a moral term; Third, Clifford notes that his discussion bears on the previous lectures of the year, which focused on evidence, proof, and testimony. Fourth, even where Clifford raises questions of moral character (e.g., veracity, in matters of testimonial evidence), he also continues to raise issues that are clearly epistemic – e.g., one's being 'mistaken' – and he asserts that, in the vast majority of cases, it is a matter of 'intelligence' ["no

Reasonability in believing, then, demands that we have acquired empirical evidence for our believing, for, Clifford argues, we have a 'duty of inquiry' concerning all claims to knowledge that we are presented with. Clifford's famous illustration of our epistemic and moral duties and the need to satisfy them by providing evidence, is that of a shipowner who is considering sending a ship to sea.

> "A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant-ship. He knew that she was old, and not overwell built at the first; that she had seen many seas and climes, and often had needed repairs. Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind, and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him at great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections. He said to himself that she had gone safely through so many voyages and weathered so many storms that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy; he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be; and he got his insurance-money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales." (II: 163-64)

Clifford argues that, in this case, our concern should not be simply that the shipowner's belief (i.e., that the ship was seaworthy and could reach its destination safely) was false.

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man of ordinary intelligence, reflecting upon the matter, could fail to arrive at them"], and not character, that explains the (epistemic) error of those who believe *without* (and not just with insufficient) evidence. Finally, the contemporary responses (by, e.g., Ward [1878] and Lucas [1877]) deal primarily with the epistemic rather than the moral issues.

At times, Clifford seems to hold that 'having reasons' is, ultimately, a moral matter (see "Right and Wrong: The Scientific Ground of their Distinction" [II: 96-162]) – that one cannot rationally justify the importance of rationality, so that recourse to morality is required. That being said, this does not entail that the holding of belief is a matter of ethics, rather than an epistemic matter of evidence and 'reason.'

Rather, it should be that it was unreasonable *for him* to hold that belief (to be true) and, further, that it was immoral for him to believe – and act on – that belief.

How is the shipowner unreasonable in his believing? Though the shipowner may have had some evidence of the ship's seaworthiness (e.g., that it had crossed the ocean successfully in the past), he also had some reasonable doubts. It was only by using a number of ingenious rationalizations, and not drawing on or acquiring any further evidence, that he was able to overcome these doubts and believe sincerely that his ship was seaworthy and could make the voyage successfully. The basis of his believing (and not just his belief), then, was predominantly 'wishful thinking,' and not empirical evidence.

Thus, even though the shipowner came to believe *sincerely* that the ship would make the voyage, his sincerity is irrelevant not only to the truth of the belief, but also to his epistemic and ethical responsibilities of believing. The shipowner *acquired* his belief without having or inquiring whether he had good or sufficient evidence, and by stifling his doubts. Therefore, he "*had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him*" (II: 164). As noted in Chapter 3 above, with regard to Locke, Clifford adds here that assenting or believing something has a moral character – i.e., that the shipowner's believing that the ship was seaworthy was not only unreasonable, but immoral.

Thus, for Clifford, we have an ethical, and not just an epistemic duty, to have evidence for our beliefs. Specifically, by believing without sufficient, or with insufficient evidence, we not only fail epistemically as reasoners (by not reasoning properly), but we morally "offend" ourselves, our community, and even future generations (II: 169; see II: 172). What is ethically objectionable is that we fail in our duties to ourselves and others, for how we come to our beliefs, Clifford believes, has an effect on our action and our character.

Specifically, believing on insufficient evidence, Clifford writes, increases one's susceptibility to accept other similarly dubious beliefs, and is a bad habit; "we weaken our powers of self-control, of doubting, of judicially and fairly weighing evidence" (II: 173). By developing a credulous character, we come to believe all sorts of ridiculous things, and, thereby, we injure and degrade ourselves. Further, by accepting a belief without sufficient evidence, we "wrong" or 'do injury to' humanity: one who acquires beliefs without due care or who accepts a false belief, or both, thereby risks increasing the stock of falsity that will be passed on to future generations, which will affect the lives of others (who may act upon our beliefs, or be affected by what *we think* is true). In addition, by developing a credulous character, we wrong humanity, and contribute to the degradation of society – e.g., by propagating credulousness, which leads to a reciprocal lack of care on the part of others.

More radically, perhaps, Clifford's concern is not simply with those propositions that we may be presented with in the future, but with the beliefs that we already have. For example, if a person already has a belief that is based on insufficient evidence, Clifford argues that that person cannot later inquire into it impartially; the chances are that when one later looks into the matter, one will find only reasons to confirm one's existing belief. Thus, one must stop believing such propositions until one has acquired sufficient evidence for them. To believe on insufficient evidence is to violate our duties towards others and to ourselves. Therefore, just as we have a duty not to *do* certain things, so we have a duty not to *believe* without sufficient evidence. We have, here, what is called 'Clifford's maxim': that it is "wrong" – i.e., it is not reasoning properly, and it is not acting ethically – "always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (II: 175).

Clifford likely did not think that he was proposing a view that was, at base, particularly new; as we saw in Chapters 3, 5, and 6, with Locke, Paley, and Whately, the importance and value of a person having (sufficient) evidence for belief was close to, if not an actual duty.[21] But, in another respect, Clifford was perhaps adding something still relatively unrecognised – that having sufficient evidence was not just an intellectual standard for, and expected of, all who had the requisite ability and capacity. It was a general *moral* obligation.[22] And, further, Clifford seems to hold that this duty applies to all believing and all claims to knowledge.

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[21] Whately argued, recall, that "the faith which the Christian writers speak of, is not blind credulity, but fairness in listening to evidence, and judging accordingly" (Whately 1838: 22), and that – in distinction of the view of some Christians of the time – we should "have *enough* evidence to warrant our belief" (Whately 1838: 58).

Reasonability in believing, then, requires having satisfied one's epistemic and ethical duties. But it also involves something more. As his biographer, Frederick Pollock notes, Clifford "believe[d] very decidedly that the difference between right and wrong method is everywhere important, and that there is *only one right method* for all departments of knowledge" (I: 35). We will return to this issue later.

8.4 Proof and evidence[23]

Given that Clifford insists that 'reasonability' in believing requires evidence, one might well ask what sort of evidence or proof Clifford would say is appropriate, and what exactly his insistence on 'sufficient evidence' entails.

In answer to this first question, as we have seen, Clifford holds that one must normally be able to provide *empirical* evidence for one's beliefs. Moreover, this evidence must be something that "holds good for others as well as for ourselves" (II: 172). One need say 'normally,' here, first, because some beliefs (e.g., mathematical propositions) can be demonstrated by reason alone, and so Clifford would undoubtedly acknowledge that there can be non-empirical proofs. Second, while he would almost certainly exclude "intuition"[24] as a basis for knowledge or reasonable belief – seeing as his papers delivered to the Metaphysical Society were written, in part, to challenge the views of the 'intuitionists' in the Society – Clifford seems to be open to something called 'instinct'

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[22] T.H. Huxley expressed much the same view in his January 11, 1876 lecture to the Metaphysical Society, as did J.A. Froude ["Evidence," May 16, 1871] and Leslie Stephen ["Belief and Evidence," June 12, 1877] in their lectures (see Marshall, Lightman & England 2015). Moreover, Huxley wrote in a September 1876 lecture on "The Direct Evidence of Evolution": "Scientific men get an awkward habit – no, I won't call it that, for it is a valuable habit – of believing nothing unless there is evidence for it; and they have a way of looking upon belief which is not based upon evidence, not only as illogical, but as immoral"(Bramwell 1876: 52). In addition to what we have seen concerning the 'ethics of belief' in Locke, in Chapter 3, above. The similarity to Clifford here is noteworthy, and suggests either that Huxley was borrowing from Clifford or that the view was 'in the air.'

[23] The next 12 pages draw on Section IV of Sweet 1999a.

[24] Rose Ann Christian argues that, in "On the Scientific Basis of Morals," Clifford sees the capacities of conscience and of moral sense as "purely intuitive" (Clifford 1901: II, 91; see Christian (2009) and Christian (2012: 362)).

(for which he has a naturalistic, evolutionary explanation). Thus, he acknowledges that some beliefs are foundational or primary for life – e.g., belief in the uniformity of nature, that other human beings are conscious, and in the fundamental principles of inference.[25] In general, however, one must provide evidence "earned by investigation."

One thing that would seem to count as appropriate or "worthy" empirical evidence for belief is the testimony of others. Of course, the quality (as well as the quantity) of the testimony must be assessed, and Clifford provides some criteria for determining its relevance and weight. Like Locke[26] and Whately,[27] Clifford asserts:

> "In order that we may have the right to accept [one's] testimony as ground for believing what he says, we must have *reasonable grounds* for trusting his *veracity*, that he is really trying to speak the truth so far as he knows it; his *knowledge*, that he has had opportunities of knowing the truth about this matter; and his *judgement*, that he has made proper use of those opportunities in coming to the conclusion which he affirms." (II: 178, emphasis mine)

These conditions are, presumably, appropriate to assessing *all* testimony. Whately distinguished between testimony to 'matters of fact' and testimony to 'matters of opinion'— the conditions that must be met for us to believe the former (i.e., the honesty and accuracy of the witness, and his or her means of gaining information) are not as stringent as those that must be met for us to believe the latter (i.e., all of the preceding, plus assurance of the ability of the witness to form a judgement).[28] Clifford does not – at least, not explicitly – differentiate between the two kinds of testimony but, as much testimony involves judgement (e.g., a person may judge that one thing caused something else), it is not obviously essential to make the distinction.

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[25] In "Philosophy of the Pure Sciences," Clifford writes: "Nature is selecting for survival those individuals and races who act as if she were uniform; and hence the gradual spread of that belief over the civilized world" (II: 351). Moreover, referring to the source of his belief in human "consciousness," Clifford refers to "the instinct which leads me to come to that conclusion" (II: 32). Finally, he writes that "We cannot infer that which is the ground of all inference" (I: 351).

[26] See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV. 15. §4.

[27] See Whately, *Rhetoric*, I ii 4 [pp. 63ff].

[28] Whately, *Rhetoric*, I ii 4 [p. 63].

That the person providing testimony is ‘sincere,’ however, is no evidence for whether that person *knows* the truth, or for the truth of what that person believes (in a particular case); it is at most evidence for the fact that that person speaks the truth ‘as far as he knows it’ (II: 178). For one to believe the content of another’s testimony, then, Clifford writes that one must also *have reason* for supposing that that person knows what he or she is talking about (II: 178; see II: 182), etc. Still, it is important to note that, when it comes to judgements (and to the extent that reports of sense perception may involve judgements), this is not so much a matter of intelligence or education as simply the ability to describe clearly what one has seen.

Though their sincerity is not a basis for reasonably believing whether those who offer testimony have knowledge or can provide good evidence, the reliability of what they have offered in the past, their authority, and facts about the subject matter may be. For example, Clifford writes that, if a person “for a long time gave me information which was found to be trustworthy, this would indeed be good ground for trusting him in the future as to such matters as fall within human powers of verification” (II: 182). Again, Clifford notes, if “I have reason enough to justify me in believing that the verification *is within the reach of human appliances* and powers and, in particular that it has actually been performed by my informant” (or, of all those who testify to it, that “some one person at least has the means of knowing what is true, and is speaking the truth as far as he knows it” [II: 192]), *and* if “there are those who question [the belief to which my informant has been led] and verify it” (II: 188), I can say that the person’s authority and testimony is “valid” (II: 188). Such considerations, however, do not constitute a “ground for trusting [that person’s] testimony as to any *other* matters” (II: 182).

Clifford holds, however, that there are a number of circumstances where testimony cannot serve as a basis for reasonable believing. As noted above, if one is to believe another’s testimony, one must be assured (at least) that such a ground or evidence lies “within the reach of [one’s] informant’s knowledge” (II: 190) – but “there can be no grounds for supposing that a man knows that which we, without ceasing to be men, could not be supposed to verify” (II: 187). Again, Clifford writes, “[n]o eminence of character and genius can give a man authority enough to justify us in believing him when he makes statements implying exact or universal knowledge” (II: 189), and “[n]o evidence [...] can justify us in believing the truth of a statement which is contrary to, or outside of, the uniformity of nature” (II: 204). The use of testimony as empirical evidence for reasonable belief, then, is limited not only by the conditions under which that ‘information’ was acquired, but also by characteristics of the content, and by the possibility that the informant has that (specific, or degree of) information or the “means and appliances” (II: 190) of knowing it. There is a limit Clifford insists, therefore, to what testimony can establish – what it “can justify us in believing” (II: 204) – which would seem to exclude, a priori, testimony concerning miracles, as well as certain “universal” knowledge claims, such as dogmas.

Still, testimony is not the only source of evidence that could serve as a basis for reasonable belief; there is also “direct observation” (II: 193). In some cases, Clifford notes, one can verify a belief through carrying out one’s own search for evidence. This is to be acquired, Clifford writes, by “patient investigation” (II: 164), pursued “with such fairness and completeness as if [the investigator] were really in doubt and unbiassed” (II: 168; see II: 172). And since the need for sufficient evidence is something that we become aware of *in foro interno* or through introspection, one could presumably verify certain beliefs (e.g., about oneself, one’s memories, etc.) in this way as well.

A third way that one can have for claiming that believing – and belief – are reasonable, is when they are based “on the assumption of a uniformity in nature” (II: 200; see 203) about what is and has been. Clifford writes that it is a “practically demonstrative inference” of the occurrence of an event if there is “a clear showing that in no other way than by the truth of this result can the uniformity of nature be saved” (II: 203). This is, it would appear, an implication of one of the conditions concerning the acceptability of testimony – that *no* evidence can justify one believing that which is outside the uniformity of nature. How Clifford can *justify* this confidence in this uniformity, such that it serves as a virtual *a priori* principle, is, however, not obvious. (I will return to this point in a moment.)

Believing, then, can have evidence in at least three different ways. In all three, Clifford would allow that it is possible to have evidence that is appropriate for reasonable believing and a reasonable belief, though one must also keep in mind the limits on the subject matter of propositions that can be reasonably believed.

8.4.1 Sufficient evidence

One can now address the question of what, specifically, might satisfy Clifford's demand for 'sufficient evidence.'

Admittedly, and in the first place, Clifford does not say precisely how much evidence is 'sufficient' or adequate. (In the first version of "The Ethics of Belief" he admits this.[29]) Nevertheless, Clifford does provide some suggestions and necessary conditions for sufficient evidence. We have seen, for example, that it is "earned by investigation" (II: 172). It is also attained only when and where enquiry is complete; where *no more* enquiry can be made (see II: 176). (Presumably self-evident and mathematical truths easily fit in this category; empirical propositions may not.) This requires that one has "examined the evidence on both sides with the utmost patience and care" (II: 167). Further, it seems that Clifford also holds that it is only when there is no room for doubt that one can claim that one has sufficient evidence; "[i]t is never lawful to stifle a doubt" (II: 176). In short, Clifford notes, an investigation into the evidence for a belief "is not to be made once for all, and then taken as finally settled" (II: 176). An investigation, then, is *never* completely closed.

Some, like Clifford's associate, George Romanes (1848-96), see Clifford's expectations here as excessive, and as virtually precluding our ability to say that we are ever reasonable in believing anything (Romanes 1896: 33). And some read Clifford as holding that sufficient evidence requires meeting a foundationalist standard.[30] Indeed, recall that, for some, the evidential view is that “no one has the right to believe until he has given a formal demonstration [in syllogistic form] of the doctrines *patterned after the proof* required in mathematics and natural science” – that is, a foundationalist argument (Collins 1961: 5, emphasis mine). Yet Clifford does not say that conclusions of arguments that do not meet a foundationalist standard should not be believed. Nor is there any evidence to say that he thinks ‘sufficient evidence’ for many of our beliefs – at least, for our ordinary empirical beliefs – will be especially difficult to get.

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[29] In the version presented to the Metaphysical Society, Clifford asks "What is meant by "adequate evidence?" By what method ought we to inquire?" (1876/1869: 7), but he does not give a direct answer to these questions; he responds "I shall not attempt to answer this question" – and, in the expanded, published version of this essay of 1887, he modifies this part of his text, and does not raise this matter explicitly at all.

[30] For example: Alvin Plantinga writes: "no doubt Clifford was a classical foundationalist" Plantinga (2000: 89); see also Plantinga (1981: 41). Similar views are found in Long (2001: 3); Phillips (1988: 3); Kenny (1983: 12); and Helm (1994: 93) – and are suggested in other authors, such as Fairlamb (2010) and Wainwright (1988: 153ff).

As noted above, where the conditions for the reliability of witnesses or of the content of their testimony are met, it would seem that we can have inductive or *a posteriori* arguments that provide ‘sufficient evidence’ for believing (see Zamulinski 2008). Clifford does not seem to claim that, for an argument to constitute sufficient evidence, it must establish or demonstrate that the conclusion is certain. (Though Clifford does, in any event, seem to think that one can arrive at “a practical certainty” on some matters, based on empirical test and evidence. [II: 177; see II: 26, 45])

In fact, from the illustrations that Clifford gives, the standard of sufficient evidence seems as if it could be (as we saw with Whately) that which would stand up in a court of law – and the language of the law appears periodically in Clifford’s essays on the ethics of belief and the ethics of religion. For example, in the story of the shipowner, the shipowner is criticized for (epistemic and moral) *negligence* – that is, for acting on a belief that was inconsistent with “such evidence as was before him” (II: 164). And, as in law, the source of the information used to arrive at a judgement and a belief is, frequently, testimony – and Clifford not only devotes considerable attention to determining the credibility of testimony, but holds that one can find a solution in many cases through turning to precedents. (For example, Clifford notes that, over time, the most important principles “have stood out more and more.” [II: 177].)

Still, Clifford’s standard is not simply a legal one. It is true that, *if* the standard of ‘sufficient evidence’ is that which would stand up in a court of law, *with* the appropriate consideration of burden of proof (as we saw in Whately), Clifford could well ask his reader why one *should* think it would be reasonable to believe on the basis of anything less? Nevertheless, in Clifford’s account of how the ship owner convinced himself that the ship was seaworthy, Clifford seems to reject the possibility that the shipowner could rightly think that the burden of proof was on those who should think that the ship was *not* seaworthy; Clifford insists that the burden was on the shipowner, who thought it *was* seaworthy. Clifford's account of the epistemic and moral failure of the owner, then, was that his reasons for believing did not meet the demands of the 'sufficient evidence' for holding such a belief in the first place. And it seems that Clifford would not allow that the established view had a prima facie plausibility, with the burden of proof being on the critic (see Rands 1876-77).[31]

Moreover, it seems that, for Clifford, 'sufficient evidence' is, at least in part, agent relative. Clifford refers to "the duty of private judgement"[32], and the examples that he gives (in "The Ethics of Belief") refer to an individual's responsibility for his or her believing and beliefs. Consequently, what may be 'sufficient evidence' for one may not be for another. While there are certain generic considerations to which one should be attentive in arriving at or maintaining belief, it seems that he might allow that what is sufficient for a tyro in a field may not be sufficient for an expert. And, in "The Ethics of Religion," he also seems willing to grant, in the education of youth, that it is good for people to believe fictions that are "adapted in the most perfect manner to the promotion of virtue" (II, 217, 222).

Further, Clifford's demand for sufficient evidence for a proposition may, as well, be dependent upon its content. Sufficient evidence for an unexceptional event is, presumably, much less than for an exceptional one. When Clifford says it is wrong to believe on insufficient evidence, he is not saying that the evidence must be sufficient to show that the belief is, in fact, true, but rather that it is adequate to show that *it is reasonable to believe that it is true* or that it is reasonable to believe or assent to it.

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[31] To alter the example, suppose that the ship owner were to have arrived at the belief that, given the evidence before him, the ship should not go to sea. It would be difficult to imagine that Clifford would complain that this evidence was not sufficient. In such a situation, on Clifford's own terms, it seems that one can have sufficient evidence for 'believing *not*', even if one does not have much positive evidence for this negative claim.

[32] In "On the Scientific Basis of Morals," Clifford writes: "The *duty of private judgment*, of searching after truth, the *sacredness* of belief which ought not to be misused on unproved statements, follow only on showing of the enormous importance to society of a true knowledge of things" (II, 94, emphasis mine).

In light of such considerations, Clifford’s standard for sufficient evidence is somewhat vague. Some have attempted to flesh out what the criteria are, and have also drawn attention to the fact that Clifford seems to allow that there are degrees of assent, and so the strength with which one affirms a belief is simply something correlative to the amount of evidence that one has. Whether one has sufficient evidence for believing, then, depends on the strength of one’s assertion of it. Care in articulating the proposition proposed for belief, and any conditions on it, might make it easier to determine whether one had sufficient evidence for believing it.

Thus, restricting one’s believing to those cases where one can investigate and acquire evidence of the kind described above, Clifford would hold, need *not* lead to scepticism and should not prevent people from believing and acting in a wide range of cases. He writes, first, that some of the most important principles we (tend to) believe “have stood out more and more clearly in proportion to the care and honesty with which they were tested” (II: 177), and so they will likely not be undermined by further investigation. And, second, he allows that “there are many cases in which it is our duty to act upon probabilities, although the evidence is not such as to justify present belief” (II: 177), *understanding*, for example, that “it is precisely by such action, and by observation of its fruits, that evidence is got which may justify future belief” (II: 177-8). Thus, Clifford’s commitment to evidentialism does not exclude the fact that we may sometimes act legitimately upon probabilities or on (one might say) less than sufficient evidence. Indeed, while it may not be appropriate or reasonable to believe a particular proposition, it may be reasonable to act on it.

In short, then, though Clifford’s standard for sufficient evidence is somewhat vague, he offers an empirical, naturalistic method for determining – or for one to determine – the reasonability of believing. Clifford’s commitment to evidentialism is not, however, necessarily tied to foundationalism. Still, an analysis of his views shows that, while *he* might wish to exclude certain kinds of believing, the evidentialist standard for sufficient evidence itself does not do so.

8.5 Belief, religious belief, and proof

Clifford does not explain what he means by belief or assent, but from the examples that he gives, belief is, perhaps obviously, propositional. An example of a belief is a hypothesis (having propositional form) based on evidence that can be marshalled for or against it. It is, then, like a scientific hypothesis supported by evidence (see II: 248). Moreover, a belief has to be intelligible[33] – e.g., it has to be the kind of proposition that is free of contradiction (see I: 175), and that can be known, at least in principle, by scientific thought.

Believing, then, is a mental state that, normally, is voluntary, and it leads to, or predisposes one towards action.[34] This distinguishes Clifford from Hume, who does not make any connection of belief with action – beliefs are just 'lively ideas' – and instead places him closer to theist evidentialists, such as Paley and Whately – although Clifford does not suggest that this 'dispositional' element is entailed by the meaning of the belief.

When it comes to *religious* belief, Clifford would presumably hold that such belief is akin to all other belief – that it is propositional, intelligible, and capable of empirical verification. He does not say, however, what, exactly, makes a religious belief *religious*. In "The Ethics of Religion," Clifford writes that, in one sense, religion means 'a body of doctrines, frequently involving the existence of a deity and an afterlife' (II: 206) – but, upon reflection, Clifford is not certain whether any specific doctrines (e.g., about a deity and its characteristics) are necessary. In another sense of the term, he writes, religion could involve "an organised priesthood and a machinery of sacred things and places" (II: 207). Or, finally, it could be a "body of precepts or code of rules, intended to guide human conduct" (II: 208). Consequently, in his later work, it is not clear whether there is anything that makes religious beliefs distinctively religious, other than perhaps their relation to a particular religious tradition.

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[33] In his essay on "Aims of Scientific Thought," Clifford notes the connection between intelligibility and *scientific* thought: "to every reasonable question there is an **intelligible** answer, which either we or posterity may know *by the exercise of scientific thought*." (I: 179; italics Clifford; bolding, mine).

[34] In "The Philosophy of the Pure Sciences," Clifford writes: "We believe a thing when we are prepared to act as if it were true" (I: 351).

Interestingly, however, early in Clifford's career, Clifford considered the possibility that religious beliefs were different from ordinary beliefs. Pollock reports that:

> "Religious beliefs he regarded as outside the region of scientific proof, even when they can be made highly probable by reasoning; for, as he observes in a MS. fragment of this time, they are received and held not as probable but as certain. And he actually defined superstition as 'a belief held on religious or theological grounds, but capable of scientific proof or disproof.' He also held that there was a special theological faculty or insight, analogous to the scientific, poetic, and artistic faculty; and that the persons in whom this genius is exceptionally developed are the founders of new religions and religious orders. He seems to have been always and equally dissatisfied with attempts at proving theological propositions, especially in the usual manner of Protestant divinity, and with the theological version of natural history commonly called Natural Theology. When or how Clifford first came to a clear perception that this position of quasi-scientific Catholicism was untenable I do not exactly know" (Pollock 1901: 40)[35]

By the time of "The Scientific Basis of Morals," "The Ethics of Belief," and "The Ethics of Religion," however, Clifford is focussing instead on applying "his philosophical ideas to theological conceptions" (I: 36), and aiming at what Pollock describes as "doing for dogmatic and natural theology something like what the Tübingen school in Germany have done for historical theology, namely bringing them to the light of unbiased common sense, including therein as an important element the healthy moral sense of civilised men" (I: 36). Here, we see a suggestion of there being only one method of proof in all departments of knowledge, referred to earlier.

Though he does not give a clear account of what religious belief is, Clifford does suggest that some religious beliefs are, at root, 'naturalistic' or 'ethical' beliefs. Further, some beliefs about the nature of God, Clifford holds, reflect ideas that come "from the moral sense of man,”[36] and he regards ‘The Sermon on the Mount’, as a moral teaching that "is the expression of the conscience of a people who had fought long and heroically for their national existence" (II: 228). Other putative religious beliefs, such as ‘there is a God,’ ‘there was a covenant made with the people of Israel,’ ‘Muhammad is the last Prophet of Allah,’ and ‘Jesus is the Son of God,’ would seem, however, to fall outside such a naturalistic interpretation, and presumably have little, if any, basis in experience. The issue, then, presumably, is whether such beliefs “fall within human powers of verification” (II: 182).

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[35] Nevertheless, Clifford seems to be open to a spiritual aspect of life. He held an account of "Cosmic Emotion," which suggests that Clifford may not have been entirely consistent in his materialism and naturalism. See Mander (2019).

Yet even if one can arrive at a clear understanding of what Clifford means by religious belief, Clifford’s primary interest is the reasonability of believing, which does not hinge simply, we will recall, on the truth or reasonability of the proposition, but on whether the one believing has (sufficient) evidence for believing it. This leads us to the question of the conditions for reasonable religious believing – believing religious claims.

First, for one to be reasonable in believing a religious belief, that belief must be (logically) coherent or consistent and the kind of thing that is open to argument and proof. Clifford argues, one will recall, that there are some matters – e.g., ‘non natural’ events, such as miracles, and dogmas declared to be definitive – which, he believes, one cannot appropriately or reliably hold. Moreover, he writes, certain religious beliefs (e.g., everlasting punishment and eternal torment [II: 221]) are indicative of an entity with a morally bad character and, thereby, are *a priori* inconsistent with the results of any argument that that entity might be worthy of worship. The reasonability of some believing seems challenged from the start, because of the putative unreasonability of the content.

Second, for Clifford, religious beliefs must be based on evidence and argument. In “The Ethics of Religion” he writes: “Religious beliefs must be founded on evidence: if they are not so founded, it is wrong to hold them.”[37] This, presumably, reflects his commitment to the view that there is only one method – the empirical method – in knowledge. Clifford holds that, without evidence, one has violated the duty of inquiry. One can be rationally and morally justified in holding a religious belief, then, only when the conditions and grounds for gathering and evaluating evidence (such as testimony), and for engaging in one's own investigation have been met.

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[36] In his essay, “The Influence upon Morality of a Decline in Religious Belief,” Clifford refers to James Martineau who, Clifford avers, talks of "a pure and noble theism... which learns what God is like by thinking of man's love for man." But, Clifford insists, “if men learn the nature of God from the moral sense of man, they cannot go on believing the doctrines of popular theology" (II: 255).

[37] In “The Ethics of Religion,” Clifford identifies some key (Christian) religious beliefs that, he holds, are not only epistemically unwarranted but unethical: “The rule of right conduct in this matter is exactly the

Whether Clifford is able to support or defend these conditions or criteria for the reasonability of religious believing has been contested; at the very least, Clifford's account of what is to serve as evidence, and sufficient evidence, in religious belief has its tensions. As noted earlier, Clifford seems to exclude certain kinds of testimony – concerning statements "contrary to, or outside of, the uniformity of nature" (II: 204) – from serving as evidence almost *a priori*, and it is not clear how he can do this without at least running the risk of begging a large number of questions. Clifford presumably wishes to exclude such testimony, not only to ensure that the uniformity of nature will always provide reliable, reasonable, and sufficient evidence for our ordinary beliefs but, presumably, also because he wishes to avoid the disruptive presence and force of miracle reports. Not only does this seem to exclude miracle reports *a priori*, but such an exclusion could also forbid revisions or reorientations of existing understanding of non-religious matters – for example, to the laws of physics (witness the shift from a Newtonian to an Einsteinian standpoint) – something which presumably Clifford would not want to exclude. Consequently, it is not evident that excluding testimony of events 'outside of the uniformity of nature' is consistent with his views or is adequately justified by Clifford. And since such an exclusion does not follow from the basic tenets of evidentialism, Clifford needs to provide additional reasons why he, and fellow non-theistic evidentialists, wish to do so.

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opposite of that implied in the two famous texts: 'He that believeth not shall be damned,' and 'Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed' […] Whoever wrote either of them down as a deliverance of one whom he supposed to be a divine teacher, has thereby written himself down as a man void of intellectual honesty, as a man whose word cannot be trusted, as a man who would accept and spread about any kind of baseless fiction for fear of believing too little" (II: 214-215).

Given Clifford's recognition of the impossibility of universal knowledge, that he – or any – evidentialist would or could have 'sufficient evidence' for evidentialism itself is not at all obvious. My interest here, however, is not to assess the consistency of the evidentialist model, but to see what, precisely, it involves.

Moreover, it is curious that Clifford does not explicitly deal directly with such beliefs such as the existence of God, the reliability of Sacred Scripture, and the reasonableness of Christianity – i.e., the kinds of beliefs that earlier authors, such as Paley and Whately, but also Locke, sought to address and establish.

Presumably, when it comes to whether a believer has good reason to believe in God, Sacred Scripture, Christianity, and the like, Clifford would undoubtedly ask how one could come to know such things, and what reasons one might have for believing them. Indeed, he would probably argue that, when believers consider such religious beliefs, it seems that they have *little* good reason for them. The reasons that believers generally offer look like the reasons that would likely not carry much weight in a courtroom, such as: 'I was brought up that way', or, "I had an experience that a voice told me that it was God," etc.

Nevertheless, Clifford does not make such an argument. Indeed, if the beliefs are logically coherent – i.e., non-contradictory – and if one has some evidence, it seems as though Clifford cannot rule out one being reasonable in believing religious beliefs. A causal argument, based on a principle in (and, at least in Clifford's time, believed to be uniform within) nature – that every event has a cause – could possibly establish some religious belief. Moreover, even Clifford's own definition of religion as "a body of precepts or code of rules, intended to guide human conduct" (208) would suggest that at least some religious beliefs could lie *within* nature and, hence, are open to argument and proof.

It is, therefore, arguably unclear what the relation of evidence is to religious belief on Clifford's account. Clifford seems, almost *a priori*, to reject the truth of religious beliefs: first, suggesting that many, if not most, religious beliefs are not capable of sufficient empirical evidence; second, holding that those which are intelligible might have a historical and naturalistic explanation (e.g., Christ's moral teaching"); and third, that the most that an empirical proof of such 'hypotheses' could provide is probability, whereas most religions insist that their doctrines are certainties.

In light of these putative consequences, then, it may be evident why religious believers – and, indeed, many people – might be chary about accepting Clifford's version of evidentialism as providing a set of criteria for ‘proof’ of religious belief and for ‘believing reasonably.’ Still, in order to understand the implications of Clifford’s view, I turn briefly to how Clifford’s arguments were received at the time at which he wrote.

8.6 Theological impact

Clifford’s views on the reasonability of believing were not only influential in his time[38] but, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, in the years since have perhaps become even more influential. Yet Clifford wrote relatively little on religion and religious belief as such, and many of his claims of a lack of evidence for the reasonability of religious believing are not explicitly stated and have to be inferred from his writings. Although the focus of the present study is not to assess the adequacy of Clifford’s, or of any evidentialist model, more clarity about what Clifford’s views were may be gained by noting the kinds of criticisms that were made of them at the time.

Many of Clifford’s contemporaries challenged the coherence and plausibility of his views on the reasonability of believing. They argued primarily that his views rested on a number of questionable assumptions, that his criteria for reasonable belief were inappropriate, and that any conclusions that one might draw from them about religious belief were, at least, overstated.

To begin with, Clifford clearly believes that his views apply to all belief, including religious belief. Clifford’s contemporaries point out, however, that this basic assumption – that there is no substantive difference between religious beliefs and scientific beliefs or knowledge claims – is unjustified. This assumption is perhaps rooted, as Henry Wace argues, in Clifford’s understanding of the concept of ‘belief,’ which fails to distinguish ‘belief’ from ‘opinion’ and ‘knowledge’ (Wace 1877: 44-45). Wace also notes that Clifford’s failure to distinguish religion and science – not recognising, for example, that the focus of religious belief and faith is about persons, whereas science is about truths (see Wace 1877: 52-53) – may be responsible for Clifford’s apparent failure to see that there is a substantive difference between religious claims and scientific claims (see also

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[38] See Huxley’s remarks on proper method (Bramwell 1876) and note 22 above.

Rands 1876-77: 745). Further, Ward and Lucas both allude to the account provided by J.H. Newman – to whom, curiously, Clifford does not refer – who recognises that there are different senses of ‘reason’ and different senses of ‘belief’ relative to different subject matters. Clifford’s apparent failure to make these distinctions – or, at least, his failure to show why they should not be made – led his critics to claim that Clifford’s use of his version of evidentialism to assess the reasonability of religious believing presumes too much.

Clifford’s contemporaries note a second, related assumption made by Clifford – namely, that there is just one method for adjudicating judgements in science, religion, and morality, and, therefore, that the reasonability of believing and of religious belief are subject to it. Wace (1877) points out, however, that this overlooks the differences in the nature of the activities involved in these areas: some have as their primary object action (e.g., religion and morality), others, primarily knowledge (e.g., science). Similarly, in his “Reasonable Faith,” Francis Peek notes that, on matters of religion, there seems to be something distinctive about what we today might call ‘the religious attitude’ – that words cannot express much religious truth, and that, ultimately, it is “with the heart” (Peek 1876-77: 672), and not primarily with reason, that human beings believe (see Lucas (1877: 290), on Newman).[39] Such critics argue that it is, therefore, an unwarranted assumption to think that religion and related matters should be subject to the same standard for ‘reasonability’ and truth.

A third assumption that, a number of Clifford’s critics wrote, Clifford seems to make is that even our most basic beliefs, such as our trust in our memories, must be based on evidence (Ward 1878: 533) – and yet there is little doubt that it is generally reasonable to depend on memory without such evidence. On a similar point, Henry Wace notes that Clifford’s approach to testimony is simply inconsistent with how human beings *appropriately* respond to and, *ceteris paribus*, *do* trust testimony – for example, in the way in which a child simply trusts and believes what her parents tell her, without looking for corroborating evidence.

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[39] Similar objections were raised by others, such as the anonymous author of “Essays and Notices: Professor Clifford and his Critics on 'The Ethics of Belief',” in *Contemporary Review* (1876-77). An investigation of contemporary periodical literature strongly suggests that the author was almost certainly W.B. Rands. See note 15, above.

Finally, some critics allowed that, while those working in the natural sciences might find Clifford's standard for reasonable believing useful, it is not obvious that this standard applies or should apply in other activities or spheres of life (Ward 1878: 536-7; Wace 1877: 43). For example, as we shall see in greater detail in the next chapter, William James held that sometimes one must, or can reasonably, believe without sufficient evidence – that the urgency of the situation may require one to believe and act on less than complete evidence,[40] that sometimes believing without 'sufficient evidence' can lead to the belief coming true, and that only if one first believes will one be in a position to get evidence for it.

Clifford's contemporaries also had broader concerns about his views. First, Clifford's evidentialist 'maxim' – that "it is wrong, always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (II: 175) – does not seem to meet the standard that it sets: as Ward points out, this 'principle' is not self-evidently true, and Clifford has not given 'sufficient evidence' for it (Ward 1878: 534). Moreover, the principle is vague: Clifford does not provide any satisfactory definition of what constitutes sufficient evidence, it is unclear to whom such 'sufficient evidence' is to be supplied (Ward), and Lucas (195) argues that Clifford's assumption that believing on insufficient evidence is immoral and blameworthy seems to presuppose that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on a utilitarian principle – and such an assumption is never justified.

Second, many of Clifford's contemporaries argued that his 'maxim' was unrealistic, and that he was inconsistent in holding that it was universal in scope. For example, in his response to Clifford's "The Ethics of Belief," entitled "The Reasonable Basis of Certitude," William Ward argues that Clifford's insistence that all human beings must give, or be able to give, sufficient evidence for all belief and, therefore, for religious belief, is simply unrealistic and impractical (Ward 1878: 531). Others, such as H.W. Lucas, and many critics since, argued specifically that, if one follows Clifford's version of evidentialism, the number of beliefs that one could have or could claim to be 'reasonable' in believing would be very limited. They responded to Clifford that one's believing can be reasonable, and one can have 'certitude,' even though their beliefs are not acquired in the way expected by Clifford. 'Believing reasonably,' they argued, is better seen as the result of a 'winnowing' or dialectical process; one acquires a belief, perhaps based on partial information or generalization or testimony, and then revises or rejects it gradually, as one encounters additional information. One does not wait until a threshold of sufficient evidence is reached, and only then believe. Even some followers of Darwin and those sympathetic to Huxley and other 'agnostics,' such as the physiologist George Romanes, wrote that Clifford's views here had the characteristic of "aggressive dogma", that went too far (Romanes 1896: 33).[41] Clifford's standard for reasonable belief, they argued, is simply unreasonably high.

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[40] Clifford would no doubt argue that he holds this view – that he recognises "our duty to act on probabilities" – though he would not say that one is reasonable *in believing* the proposition or hypothesis on which one acts.

A third criticism made of Clifford by a number of his contemporaries is that Clifford's conditions for believing reasonably are inconsistent: that, on the one hand, he insists on "sufficient evidence" for all beliefs while, on the other hand, he holds that it is reasonable to believe principles for which he provides, and can provide, no evidence – the basic uniformity of nature (see Lucas 1877: 50ff). Clifford himself admits that human beings can have no exact or universal knowledge, and so it is unclear how one could have sufficient evidence to hold that all nature *is* uniform. (Indeed, as we have seen above, Clifford suggests that this 'uniformity' is something that human beings believe by "instinct.") Lucas's point, however, is not just that Clifford is inconsistent. It is that Clifford is also being intransigent, for he suggests the belief in the uniformity of nature (which is based on 'instinct') is sufficient to exclude the credibility of testimony that challenges such a uniformity – and that Clifford is unwarranted in holding that *no* evidence could allow one to believe a statement that was inconsistent with our understanding of nature.[42] The issue would be different if Clifford were to say that testimony inconsistent with the uniformity of nature is to be scrutinised carefully. Or again, if Clifford's claim were that it is reasonable to believe the established view in the absence of significant contrary evidence – that is, Whately's view – Lucas would have no objection. But Clifford takes neither of these positions. Lucas suggests, then, that, if anything is to serve as a basic principle known by instinct, it is a belief that lies at the core of belief in the uniformity of nature, i.e., 'the principle of causality,' and that *this* can serve as a basis for an argument for the existence of a deity.[43]

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[41] Hutton also seems to be of this view (Hutton 1894). See also Romanes' comment contrasting Clifford with the lengthy list of mathematicians at Cambridge who were Christian, noting that: "Clifford had only just moved at a bound from the extreme of asceticism to that of infidelity – an individual instance which I deem of particular interest in the present connexion, as showing the dominating influence of a forcedly emotional character even on so powerful an intellectual one, for the *rationality* of the whole structure of Christian belief cannot have so reversed its poles within a few months" (Romanes 1896: 147). Cf. Turner (1974) cited in Madigan (2008: 95).

Thus, aside from making such criticisms, some of Clifford's contemporaries noted that there may well be 'sufficient evidence' for Christian religious belief. Peek, for example, argued that Clifford's evidentialism was not especially new, and that there have already been arguments that provide sufficient evidence for religious beliefs, in Paley, Butler, Chalmers, George Campbell, and others (Peek 1876-77: 670), that defend the basic beliefs of both natural and revealed religion (see Peek 1876-77: 662-3, 664-5; Rands 1876-77: 748). And Lucas argued that, given that the principle of causality is a more basic principle than, and is necessary to, the uniformity of nature, it can be used as the basis for the scholastic proofs for the existence of God (Lucas 1877: 53; 280-88).

Clifford's contemporaries were alert, then, to the claims and assumptions of Clifford's account of the reasonability of believing and the reasonability of belief. Though "The Ethics of Belief" dealt with much more than religious belief, its corrosive effect on the reasonability of religious belief was immediately evident to the theologians and the theists who responded to him. What we find in Clifford, then, is an extension of the evidentialism found in earlier authors such as Paley, Whately, and, arguably, Locke, that turns evidentialism against the religious belief or faith that it was at one time thought to support. Yet despite the issues raised concerning the cogency of Clifford's account, given its relative clarity and precision, and the imaginativeness of its examples, it became the model for evidentialism, and evidentialism came to be seen, primarily, as a critique of religious belief – which, no doubt, explains its continuing presence in philosophical theology today.

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[42] Lucas also argues that if, as Clifford suggests, people may legitimately act on unevidenced "immediate personal experience" and 'instinctual beliefs,' he is assuming that this is a satisfactory "metaempirical" (or "transcendental") foundation for believing (Lucas 1877: 55).

[43] Lucas and Ward hold, then, that if one grants Clifford's view that basic principles, such as 'the uniformity of the natural order,' can be affirmed without evidence and on the basis of 'instinct,' then other intuitions may serve as the 'basis' of reasonable belief as well (see Lucas 1877: 45-46). Indeed, intuitionism claims to offer a stronger basis. To avoid the response that such intuition is just as vulnerable to criticism as Clifford's view, Ward allows that, over time, evidence may 'accumulate' to support the reasonability believing a belief initially known by intuition (Ward 1878: 544).

8.7 Conclusion

By the latter part of the nineteenth century, in a number of theological and philosophical circles, the discussion of proof and external evidence for reasonable believing and for religious belief was no longer a principal concern. For example, as we saw in the previous chapter, John Henry Newman saw religious belief as more a matter of the 'heart' than a matter of intellectual proof. And while Newman did think that there were or could be arguments and proofs for at least some religious beliefs, and that faith did, indeed, have a reason, he also thought that a focus on these could miss what was important about religious belief.

Clifford reflects another important view of the latter half of the 19th century, subsequent to the writings of Paley and Whately. As we have seen, Clifford argued implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, for the unreasonability of believing, and for the falsity or unreasonability of religious belief. Although his approach to the reasonability of religious belief reflected the earlier evidentialism of Paley and Whately (though he does not refer to them), Clifford became quickly recognised, by theologians and philosophers (perhaps because his writings were more concise and less polemical than figures such as Huxley and Tyndall), as the archetypal 'evidentialist.'

From what we have seen in figures such as Paley and Whately, but also Locke and Hume, for one to be reasonable and morally justified in believing something, one must (normally) have evidence. Moreover, religious belief and religious beliefs are much the same as other kinds of belief – they are propositional in form and largely, if not entirely, descriptive in character. And so, they held, for *religious* belief and faith to be reasonable, they must have a relation to evidence and proof. Clifford holds similar views and makes similar assumptions as well.

But, unlike Paley and Whately, Clifford suggests that these characteristics in fact show that religious believing, as well as religious belief and faith, are rationally *un*acceptable – not because religious beliefs are false (though he seems to think that many are) or meaningless, nor even because they are improbable, but because the justification for believing is insufficient; this is not a matter of the truth of the belief but, rather, of one having sufficient evidence for believing. Where one lacks evidence, even if the belief is true, it is unreasonable to believe.

Clifford does not directly attack specific dogmas or articles of faith, but his approach – his version of evidentialism – clearly calls into question the reasonability of people believing many, if not all, of them. Aside from those beliefs that are problematic, those that may have some truth – for example, some of the moral teachings of Christianity – have, Clifford believes, a naturalistic explanation, rooted in human wellbeing and social practice.

It is curious that Clifford does not directly respond to or mention, virtually anywhere in his writings, Paley, Whately, or, even his contemporary Newman, though he would have had familiarity with their writings.[44] This is particularly curious because Paley, Whately, and Clifford generally concur on the relevance and value of evidence, on the importance of argument and proof, and on the kind of evidence and argument that would be relevant to reasonable belief. For example, one point on which Clifford's evidentialism may seem to differ from that of Paley and Whately, but arguably does not, concerns whether one can rationally believe on less than sufficient evidence. Clifford holds that, for one to believe without any evidence at all or on the basis of irrelevant evidence is unreasonable and immoral. Yet this seems to be much the same as Whately's view – that lacking evidence for one's beliefs is, at the very least, undesirable – and that one should try to rectify this. Again, if there were irrefutable evidence against a belief, no doubt Whately and Paley, consistently with Clifford, would hold that one should not believe it or should abandon that belief. Conversely, if the evidence for what one holds is less than sufficient, while one does not have justification for 'reasonably believing' it,

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[44] One can only speculate what this is so. Arguably, this enables Clifford to avoid getting into 'exegetical' questions about what these figures 'really said,' and would make his positive argument more readable by a general public.

Clifford, like Paley and Whately, would seem to allow that, in certain circumstances, one may legitimately act on it.

Another point on which Clifford's view may seem to differ from that of Paley and Whately, but perhaps actually does not, concerns the standard of evidence for reasonable believing. Recall the words of James Collins, cited in an earlier chapter, that evidentialism putatively requires "a formal demonstration [in syllogistic form] of the doctrines patterned after the proof required in mathematics and natural science." And some have (e.g., Plantinga) held that this 'foundationalist' standard was the standard of evidence for all evidentialists.

As we saw earlier, however, for Paley and Whately, sufficient evidence is not (as it seems to be in Locke) foundationalist.[45] Rather, it appears that the model or standard of a good argument or of sufficient evidence is that which would stand up in a court of law. As we know, in the law, legal decisions in criminal cases are arrived at, given the presence or absence of 'a reasonable doubt.' It is also important to recognise that a verdict in a court case does not guarantee that a particular event or offense had occurred, but only that it would be reasonable to believe that it had occurred. Indeed, the law recognises that a verdict can be overturned should the evidence be tainted or because of the discovery of new evidence. Further, how much evidence is sufficient for reasonable belief is impossible to determine in advance and independent of context. When Paley and Whately speak of the reasonableness or rationality of belief in Christianity, i.e., the 'received view,' they did not hold that the believer had to establish with certainty that all the events in scripture did in fact occur – any more than, as in a criminal case, that a defendant had to establish her innocence of the charge – but, simply, that there was some reason to believe that some such events did occur, and that there was no good reason to doubt it. And, as we have seen, Clifford seems broadly sympathetic to much the same method. He claims that his standard for believing is that of having evidence acquired by observation, but not that this is productive of

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[45] I have noted through this study that the definition of 'foundationalism' is contested. While I take it in the sense of 'for one to have sufficient evidence to hold a belief (i.e., to hold a belief rationally), this belief must be either self-evident, an incorrigible report of experience, or evident to the senses, or deducible from such beliefs,' it is worth noting that it continues to be a matter of debate. For example, Susan Haack argues that Richard Rorty uses the term in three different senses. I cannot enter into this discussion, here. See Haack (1993) and (1996).

‘mathematical certainty.’ Nowhere does Clifford indicate that he holds a foundationalist view, in the sense defined above.

That being said, there are a number of respects in which Clifford clearly extends or goes beyond the criteria for reasonable believing that we find in earlier evidentialists such as Paley and Whately.

To begin with, there seem to be significant differences between a standard legal model of ‘proof’ and the method of justification offered by Clifford. For example, in criminal law, ‘sufficient evidence’ does not require that both parties provide evidence of their respective claims; rather, there is a presumption in favour of one party – in the ‘status quo’, e.g., in favour of the innocence of the accused – and the burden of proof is on whoever challenges this presumption. It seems clear, however, that Clifford would be far from accepting any ‘presumption of innocence’ or ‘presumption of truth’ for existing beliefs. Moreover, Clifford expects individuals to canvass “the evidence on both sides [of an issue] with the utmost patience and care” before arriving at a decision to believe, and that people must suspend believing or be indifferent to the truth of the beliefs they have presently, for which they have insufficient evidence. This seems to go far beyond the standards of evidence envisaged by law and by Paley and Whately.

Another difference that one finds in Clifford is that he applies the evidentialist standard of reasonable believing to almost every subject matter and every statement. Why Clifford does this, however, is not obvious, particularly given Clifford’s youthful view that religious beliefs were different from non-religious beliefs – a view perhaps influenced or suggested by Newman. That evidentialism should extend to *all* matters of doctrine goes beyond what earlier evidentialists seem to have held. And, further, Paley and Whately seem to allow for context in discussing ‘reasonable believing’ – that what counts as ‘sufficient evidence’ can vary according to the subject matter. Clifford’s approach, however, appears more rigid – i.e., it does not obviously take context into account, or consider the possibility, that there may need to be different kinds or amounts of evidence in order to determine the reasonability of believing certain kinds of beliefs. Finally, Clifford’s insistence on a single method – an empirical proof or demonstration – for the reasonability of believing any and all beliefs, that no enquiry is ever finished, and that one’s obligation to inquire is a constant, ongoing one, are assumptions that need justification. The ‘rationalistic’ character and corrosive effect of Clifford’s standard for ‘reasonable believing’ led William James to refer to Clifford as that “delicious enfant terrible”, and also led James, in his “The Will to Believe,” to challenge the universality of the demand that believing must await ‘sufficient empirical evidence.’ In these ways, then, Clifford extends the earlier evidentialist understanding of what is necessary for reasonable believing.

Clifford’s version of evidentialism, then, leads to the result that, while there is a relation between reason and religious belief – that reason and evidence bear on the reasonability of religious belief – there is a fundamental incompatibility between them, and, so, since religious belief has no reason or evidence, it is unreasonable and wrong to believe.

Given this expanded role of evidence and proof in Clifford’s view, it is not surprising that some concluded that Clifford sets a standard of truth and rational belief that is ‘too high,’ and that few, if any, beliefs – let alone religious beliefs – could meet. Indeed, one might argue that Clifford’s evidentialism is not so much a standard *for* proof and reasonable believing, as a standard that aims at *limiting* what can be proven or reasonably believed.

Clifford’s view reflects an important trend in late nineteenth-century Anglo American philosophical theology – a trend that not only expands the sphere of evidentialism, but applies it against religion. The role of reason in Clifford, then, as in Locke, is that of the “underlabourer” – i.e., in Clifford’s case, to show that religious beliefs are either unreasonable to believe, or are false, or have a simpler, naturalistic explanation.

But there were, of course, other reactions or responses to the issue of the role of proof and evidence for reasonable believing. Many thought that, in adopting Clifford’s approach, something valuable would be lost. I turn to one such response in the next chapter, that of the American psychologist of religion, William James.

Chapter 9

Developments and Responses in the Nineteenth Century: The Limits of Evidentialism

9.1 Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth, throughout much of the Anglo-American world, discussion of the reasonability of religious belief and of the relation of faith and reason had either ceased to reflect the concerns of earlier debates, or had gone in a very different direction. Interest in the bearing of reason and external evidence or argument on articles of faith either had been replaced with a focus on internal evidences, or had moved from directly engaging theological propositions to a discussion of the phenomenon of religion and religious belief. At the beginning of the twentieth century, then, one finds five principal lines of analysis or reaction, most of which suggest that the earlier discussion was effectively at an end. A brief survey of these five reactions will provide some context for an analysis of the work of the American psychologist and analyst of religion, William James, who makes a major contribution to the discussion of the reasonability of religious belief and who, at the same time, challenges many features of the earlier discussion.

First, one finds that many of those who had been involved in the Oxford Movement or, later in the century, in the English Catholic revival[1], came to consider the provision of argumentative proofs and evidence as largely unproductive. John Henry Newman, recall, wrote of his lack of interest in “smart syllogisms” to attract converts, and his wish to speak to one’s ‘heart,’ and not to one’s intellect. Somewhat similarly, Newman’s colleague John Keble, who did not follow Newman into the Roman Catholic church and who remained a staunch Anglican, held that, while recognising that it “is as much the duty of the unlearned as it is of the educated” to “make up their own minds upon sufficient grounds” (Keble 1847: 55), it was important, at the same time, to have the “right desire” in religious matters (Keble 1847b: 11). Even where reason has a role in religious belief, it need yield to the judgement of one who has both “right understanding and right desire”, that is, one who possesses an “implicit faith.” Keble insisted that

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[1] See, for example, Thureau-Dangin (1916).

> “We must be stubborn in a good sense – abiding by what we know to be right, though we cannot prove it nor defend it in words. And this, both in doctrine and morals: in doctrine, clinging to the ancient uncorrupt Creed, with a childlike dependence on what we have heard from the beginning; with an *implicit faith*, such as children have in their parents; not able to say why, but knowing and feeling that they are right” (Keble 1849: 6, emphasis mine).[2]

While this faith or unity of desire and understanding has an intellectual element, it nonetheless calls for a prior “child-like submission,” or trust, in the basic doctrines and practices (Keble 1847b: 50; see also Keble 1847a). And while later religious figures, such as Charles Gore (1853-1932), J.R. Illingworth[3] (1848-1915), and H.S. Holland (1847-1918), engaged in popular apologetics that attempted to accommodate religious faith with then-contemporary science and philosophical trends (e.g., idealism), their efforts were aimed more to assure believers than to convince an increasingly secular public. In short, by the beginning of the 20th century, many in the High Church and Anglo-Catholic traditions had little interest in evidentialist-style arguments and proofs.[4]

A second reaction, smaller in numbers, can be found in Catholic religious circles. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, for many Catholic theologians, clergy, and lay leaders, providing empirical evidence to prove the truth of scripture and the existence of God after the fashion of the evidentialists, seems, again, to have been of relatively little interest. It is true that one finds theological apologetics particularly in manuals of study for Catholic seminarians, and some figures, such as Newman’s disciple

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[2] See the discussion in Poggi Johnson (2006).

[3] F.R. Tennant, for example, refers to Illingworth’s apologetics as offering “a solution of their problems more plausible than satisfactory, and may, perhaps, sometimes proclaim peace where there is no peace.” See Tennant (1908: 612).

[4] An exception, perhaps, is the Anglican theologian James Bowling Mozley (1813–1878), who was related to Newman and who was a member of the Oxford Movement. Mozley sought to defend the “intrinsic credibility” of miracles in his 1865 Bampton lectures, *Eight Lectures On Miracles Preached Before the University of Oxford* – i.e., whether they are ruled out a priori by laws of physics, or by the fullness of Christian revelation – but only offered minimally “evidences of them” (Mozely 1865: vii). Mozely subsequently engaged in debate about the credibility of miracles with the physicist John Tyndall.

John Dobrée Dalgairns (1818-76) and the historian Walter Waddington Shirley (1828-66), were influenced to greater or lesser degrees by 'neo-scholasticism,' so that interest in rational arguments for basic religious beliefs was not lacking altogether (see Rickaby 1908). Still, in Anglo-American Catholicism, there was initially only a modest revival of interest in the writings of St Thomas Aquinas after 1879, the year of the papal encyclical of Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, and most Catholic writers did not focus on apologetics. Newman, as we have seen, was interested more broadly in epistemology and phenomenology of religion issues than in the provision of proofs of religious belief, and this approach continued well into the early twentieth century with authors, such as the Jesuit, M.C. D'Arcy, who focused on the phenomenon of religious belief (D'Arcy 1931). Similarly, the influential Austrian-English theologian and religious writer, Friedrich von Hügel (1852–1925), was concerned primarily with inward evidences and the mystical, rather than proofs, and von Hügel opposed the 'rationalism' of scholasticism, seeing it as "a dead system which obscured true religion" (Sweet 2014: 4, 2830).

Figures such as William Ward and Archbishop (later, Cardinal) Henry Manning who, like Newman, were converts to Catholicism, explored the role of intuition in knowledge and religious belief, rather than proofs (Manning 2015; Sweet 2019). Against 'empiricists', they argued that not all knowledge is based on sense data (or, as Hume would say, "impressions"), and that through "the intuition of the Reason" (Manning 2015: 58), one can know "truths anterior to those of sense" (Manning 2015: 54). Among these intuitively-known truths seem to be some religious beliefs. Manning wrote that he was "more certain that there is a God" than any claim based on sense perception (Manning 2015: 54-55) – and that such intuitions were rational and reasonable (see Sweet 2019: 236). Similarly, in an essay "On memory as an intuitive faculty," Ward held that "intuitive faculties furnish [people] with primary premises" (Ward 2015: 79; Ward 1884: 1: 304). Thus, for Manning and Ward, there can be a grasping of certain facts and truths through natural "intellectual intuition", such as the fact (but not the proposition) of "the being of a God," but this intuitive knowledge did not extend to articles of faith or dogmas (see Manning 1845). (Instead, one has "spiritual intuition" or "spiritual faculties" – the light of faith [Manning 1850: 22, 108], infused by God – which can know or grasp articles of faith and provide certainty.) This knowledge at the level of intuition, Manning held, is more trustworthy than natural theology, and ‘proofs’ are only secondary (see Manning 1839: 46). Thus, while one may seek to acquire some knowledge of faith through the laborious and unreliable process of discursive reason, intuition is more reliable (see Sweet 2019: 237). In short, here, too, the reasonableness of religious belief, in terms of arguments and ‘evidences’ for it, was not a primary concern in these circles, and discussion was focussed on broader concerns about knowledge and on questions of internal evidences and the effects of faith.

A third reaction, reflecting a similar view on the relevance of evidence and argument for religious belief, came out of the ‘Broad Church,’ the Evangelical, and some of the ‘dissenting’ traditions – specifically, in successors to the Anglican churchman, writer, historian, and Christian socialist Charles Kingsley (1819-75), and the Anglican churchman and biblical scholar, Fenton Hort (1828-92),[5] such as Edward Caird (1835-1908), T.H. Green (1836-82), and Frederick (1821-1902) and William (1881-1949) Temple, both Archbishops of Canterbury. What these figures shared was a latitudinarian view when it came to doctrine and religious belief. For them, the key to faith was found in social engagement – building ‘the Kingdom of God on Earth’ – and not apologetics or natural theology (see Hawley [1991: 462] and Hawley [1992]).

Kingsley was a leading social reformer and “one of the most prominent men of his time.”[6] He had, at times, an interest in natural theology, so far as he sought to reconcile science and religion. Nevertheless, he was not interested in arguments and proofs for religious belief. Instead, Kingsley argued for the legitimacy of “two sorts of faith”: “experimental faith”, “the faith that comes from our experience [of living] and reason” (e.g., reflection on one’s life), but also – similar to Keble – “implicit faith – blind faith – the sort of faith a child has in what its parents tell it” (Kingsley 1880: 68). It is this latter, fundamental trust that, Kingsley held, is the foundation of mature religious belief. Kingsley’s attitude towards faith, therefore, focused on individual experience, the place of God in the believer's daily life, and the living out of such a life, and not evidences or proofs. The issue, Kingsley wrote, was not "whether there be a God, but whether there be a Living God" (Kingsley 1873: 182), a God who animates one's life. Thus, Kingsley states: "*I want a faith past arguments*; one which, whether I can prove it or not to the satisfaction of the lawyers, I believe to my own satisfaction, and act on it as undoubtingly and unreasoningly as I do upon my own newly rediscovered personal identity. I do not want to possess a faith. I want a faith which will possess me" (Kingsley 1869: 199).

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[5] Interestingly, Wedgwood writes of Hort and his colleagues: “they seem to me to echo the stately and temperate measure of that seventeenth century English theology which may be taken as the perennial type of all Broad Churches”; see Wedgwood (1896: 319).

[6] For general biographical information on Kingsley, see Chisholm (1911). Kingsley was also the author of vicious attacks on Newman and on Catholicism in general, which led to Newman writing his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864).

Other figures, such as the Unitarian theologian James Martineau (1805-1900), were similarly uninterested in, or became suspicious of, external proofs and evidences. Martineau held that while "the last appeal in all researches into religious truth must be to the judgments of the human mind," "no force of external proof can elevate it into a certainty" (Martineau 1853: 68). Instead, Martineau advocated a "religion based on feeling, which emphasised worship and devotion in Christ" (Waller 1986: 34). People's feelings, Martineau held, "must be changed in detail." Through "the feeling of awe", "their perceptions [must] be awakened in fresh directions, their tastes be drawn by new admirations, before any reasoning can avail to establish an altered system of religious thought" (Martineau 1848: vi). Martineau's focus, then, was on "the religion of the Spirit" that serves to bridge the Divine and the human personality" (Martineau [1869: 75-76]). Doctrine was less important, and the proof of such doctrine less important still. 'Intuitive' conscience, however, provided a basis for "moral obligation, and [Martineau] held that there could be an intuitive apprehension of God" (Sweet 2019: 232).[7]

The result of this Broad Church, Unitarian, and Evangelical thinking, then, was a turn to and a focus on faith as "trusting and loving God," rather than being concerned with arguments that such a being existed. Religious doctrine and dogma were also less and less important. Building on this 'latitudinarianism' and the de-emphasis of doctrine, informed by the results of Biblical criticism and the adoption of a more hermeneutical approach to religion, taking into account discussion of 'new' scientific theories such as evolution, and drawing on the philosophies of Hegel and Kant, 'Reason' was brought to bear on ‘faith’ through the medium of a speculative or idealist philosophy and theology.[8] Thus, figures such as T.H. Green and Bernard Bosanquet, who were children of the manse, as well as Edward Caird and Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison (1856-1931), came to see faith and religion as distinct from religious traditions and dogmas. Their approach, often referred to as British Idealism, is found in a number of theologians, philosophers, classicists, historians of the time. On this view, Christianity is presented as a stage in the development of ‘religious consciousness,’ and religious ‘truth’ is seen as independent of, and perhaps passing beyond, particular articles of faith. While there were those idealists who remained close to orthodox Christianity, such as Pringle-Pattison and Frederick Temple, others, such as Green, Bosanquet, and F.H. Bradley (1846-1924), moved away from it. Overall the reasonability of religious belief was, at best, a matter of understanding religion as a stage in the development of human consciousness, and not something to be argued for, or proven, through empirical evidence, reason, and argument (Sweet 2014).

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[7] See, here, Martineau (1889: 217, 219) and Martineau (1872).

Green, for example, insisted that there had to be a rational (re)interpretation of Christianity (Sweet 2014: 571). Whyte Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford from 1878 until his death, Green held that many traditional Christian or religious claims were misleading, suspect, or false, and it was the “moral force” of religion that was of primary importance. Drawing on his evangelical roots – he was the son of an evangelical clergyman – and the influence of Kingsley, but also on the ‘new’ German philosophy as mediated through his teacher, Benjamin Jowett (1817-93), Green offered an ‘idealist’ account of religious faith that was independent of doctrine and dogma, and that sought to uncover the underlying meaning or reasonableness of Christian concepts, such as ‘incarnation,’ ‘faith,’ and ‘justification by faith,’ in order to thereby retain what is important in religion. As society goes forward, Green held, religious concepts need to be rethought into philosophical categories.

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[8] Timothy Gouldstone reminds that “Idealism appeared a godsend to an Anglican Church increasingly aware of the diminishing influence of clerical leadership in the rapidly changing educational and social world of late Victorian culture” (Gouldstone 2005: 184).

Thus, for Green[9], faith is not as a "collection of propositions" (Green 1997a: 161) but "an attitude or disposition" (Green 1997b: 260). And while Green writes of faith as a "spiritual relation" to God (Green 1997a: 179; see Sweet 2019: 228), it was not God in any conventional or doctrinal sense, and Green shows no interest in apologetics or arguments for the reasonability of articles of faith or religious belief. Green did hold that there was an Eternal Consciousness – sometimes called 'the Absolute' or "the eternal Spirit or self-conscious subject" (Green 1883, sect. 184) – which was sometimes identified with God. But this "Eternal Consciousness," Green writes, is something already present in individual consciousness. Moreover, Green says that, while this consciousness 'carries' individuals beyond their finite, private interests, it remains an "inward principle" (Green: 1997c: 196). This Eternal Consciousness is an "ideal of a best" (Green 1997b: 270). Religion, then, is rooted in a metaphysics of consciousness, and becomes a kind of morality. Green writes: "God has died and been buried, and risen again, and realised himself in all the particularities of a moral life" (Green 1997a: 184).

Still, Green insisted that faith was important. It is 'rational,' in that it is a form of rational consciousness or a rational point of view, even though it is not based on evidence.[10] Indeed, it determines what counts as evidence in rational discussion (see Green 1997b: 258). While Green and these idealists often used religious language and terminology in their writings, there was little relation to conventional religious belief, and many of the idealists were regarded as agnostics, though they generally repudiated the description.[11] Green had a profound effect on his students, many of whom moved to assume leadership positions not only in politics, but religion and in social reform[12], and the idealism of Green and his colleagues was regarded by some as a means of enabling the Christian religion to engage and respond to the challenges of the time (Gouldstone 2005).

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[9] For general biographical information on Green, see Tyler 2019. Green's theological and religious works covered a significant range – from 'Christian Dogma,' to 'Faith' and 'Justification by Faith,' to 'Incarnation.' While Green could be said to provide a philosophical interpretation of key concepts in Christian theology, he may also be seen as representing the shift from a mainstream Christianity to a more Unitarian view. Green figures in Mrs Humphry Ward's 1888 roman à clef, *Robert Elsmere*, where he appears as the Unitarian-like academic, Professor Grey. For a lengthy discussion of Green's role in mid-19th century religious thought, see Loader (2019). See also T.L.S. Sprigge's unpublished paper, "Professor Green and Mr Grey" (Sprigge 2002).

[10] According to Green, what is essential to Christianity has to be rationally expressed, so that 'religion,' in his sense, is subordinate to reason.

[11] See, for example, Bosanquet's article, "Are We Agnostics?" (Bosanquet 1889). See also Bosanquet 1902 and Bosanquet 1920..

The understanding of religion and of reason that influenced Green's writings also influenced the future Archbishop of Canterbury, Frederick Temple (Gouldstone 2005: 94, 105), and Green's work itself strongly influenced Temple's son – another Archbishop of Canterbury – William (see LeRoy 2015). Sympathetic to the Broad Church but also to the writings of Coleridge and the continental philosophies of Kant and Hegel, Frederick Temple was an academic and teacher, as well as a churchman. He was the son of a soldier and colonial administrator but, early in life,[13] became a friend of Matthew Arnold (1822-88) and Benjamin Jowett. Temple was supportive of the Broad Church view of historical criticism and the role of historical inquiry in understanding scripture and doctrine, and he contributed to the 'manifesto' of the Broad Church, *Essays and Reviews*, in 1860. Temple was also moved by the idealist vision of transforming society, and so sought to engage contemporary science, but not to argue with it. In short, Temple was a theological liberal who, like Green, held a "non-dogmatic, moralized faith" and for whom "action takes precedence over dogma" (Gouldstone 96, 94).

This latter characteristic comes through in Temple's rather thin account of religious belief. In his essay, "The Origin and Nature of Religious Belief," Temple presents religious belief as 'the intuitive recognition by one's spiritual faculty of an (external) moral law – and a revealed religion – that is a person's duty and that that person makes his or her will.' "Faith," then, is to believe and to obey this law (Temple 1884: 55). Most traditional dogmatic claims are not mentioned in Temple's account of religious belief, and he says little about doctrine here, other than mention the command to live according to 'the moral law.' While Temple writes that this "Moral Law" possesses "personality, that is, a purpose and a will" (Temple 1884: 57), he acknowledges that "there is a sense in which we cannot ascribe personality to it" (Temple 1884: 57). Moreover, Temple acknowledges that the external evidence for a God is not sufficient – that "Science by searching cannot find out God" (Temple 1884: 59), and that arguments from design and the like are secondary and not "demonstrative" (Temple 1884: 214). Instead, one needs to turn to one's inner voice (Temple 1884: 56) or conscience (Temple 1884: 214) for assurances of the truth of religious belief.

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[12] For example, Green's students Arnold Toynbee (see Parker 1998), F.H. Bradley (see Bradley 1914), and Bernard Bosanquet (see Sweet 2015).

[13] For biographical information on Frederick Temple, see, for example, Hinchliff (1998) and Sandford (1906).

Unlike idealist thinkers such as Bosanquet and Bradley, other idealist philosophers, such as Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, sought to retain some of the leading characteristics of Christianity – e.g., the metaphysical reality of the finite world, the importance of the individual human person, the personality of God, and the relation between humanity and the divine.[14] Pringle-Pattison, however, did adopt the general idealist view that nature could not be separated from the divine, though he acknowledges that any effort to demonstrate this would likely be circular.[15] He also acknowledged that "To reach any credible theory of the relation of God and man we must… profoundly transform the traditional idea of God" (Pringle-Pattison 1920: 399). While Pringle-Pattison held that the existence of a God was necessary as a kind of teleological explanation of the world, God was not separate from it, and can be expressed only through it. Pringle-Pattison also rejected the standard philosophical arguments that profess to prove basic religious doctrines, including that of God's existence, but – at the end of his *Idea of God* – he argues that, if there are to be any universal ethical values[16], at their root there must be an acknowledgement of the value of self-sacrifice – an ideal that one finds in Christianity. This, Pringle-Pattison seems to suggest, provides a kind of argument for the existence of a God, who is "not an Absolute living in solitary bliss and perfection, but a God who lives in the perpetual giving of himself, who shares the life of his finite creatures, bearing in and with them the whole burden of their finitude, their sinful wanderings and sorrows, and the suffering without which they cannot be made perfect" (Pringle-Pattison 1920: 411). Thus, while there is a kind of argument for the reasonability of believing in God, the God that is being argued for is far from that of the ordinary believer and, to the extent that Pringle-Pattison can be said to be arguing for the reasonability of religious belief, his views seem rather distant from traditional Christian religious doctrines.

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[14] See Sweet (2014: 577-579) and Pringle-Pattison (1920).

[15] In his Gifford Lectures, 1912 and 1913, published as *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy*, Pringle-Pattison notes this element of 'reasonability.' He writes: "It is not so much an argument perhaps as an absolute conviction, but it is, I think*, a conviction whose reasonableness* is sustained by the unreasonableness of the opposite hypothesis" (Pringle-Pattison [1920: 200, emphasis mine]).

[16] Pringle-Pattison writes: "it is to the moral and religious man himself that we must go, not to the philosopher weaving theories about him, if we are to understand his experience aright" (Pringle-Pattison 1920: 252).

The net result of this Broad Church influence on late 19th and early 20th century theology and philosophical theology – an influence that was substantial – was that the reasonableness of religious belief was no longer understood in the sense of earlier generations, and that there is little question of providing argument and evidence for basic religious beliefs. References to a deity by many of these authors were often to an ‘Absolute’ that had no descriptive character and, for some like Bosanquet and Bradley, no (real) agency and no ‘personality.’ ‘Religious belief’ or ‘faith’ was simply a step in the development of human consciousness, and faith was no longer a commitment to certain creeds or dogmas, but the realisation of a consciousness or law or principle already present in oneself, and immanent in the world. Issues such as the relation of faith and reason, or the providing of evidence for the proof of a divinity or of an afterlife, became at best unimportant, if not relics of a bygone era and, even, unintelligible.

A fourth reaction concerning the reasonability of religious belief that one finds at the end of the 19th century is one that reflects the trend of religious scepticism. While secularist movements continued to grow, particularly in the middle classes, at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th, agnosticism and atheism still remained minority views, and there seems to have been little active engagement with questions of proof or disproof of religious belief beyond that earlier in the 19th century, with Clifford, Huxley, and others, such as W.S. Ross (1844-1906).

On this view, recall, Clifford, Huxley, and others argued that there is no warrant for religious belief. At the very least, there is insufficient proof and, in some cases, religious beliefs were held to be meaningless because there was nothing to which they intelligibly referred. As we saw in the previous chapter, for Clifford, it was epistemologically but, perhaps more importantly, ethically wrong to believe anything without sufficient evidence, and his contemporaries saw this as an explicit challenge to religious belief. Huxley made a similar critique, holding that it was “immoral” to hold that “there are propositions which men ought to believe, without logically satisfactory evidence; and that reprobation ought to attach to the profession of disbelief in such inadequately supported propositions” (Huxley 1894: 310). Some other leading scientists, such as John Tyndall (1820-93) and Francis Galton (1822-1911), were also critical of religion, ridiculing miracles, with Galton providing a ‘statistical’ refutation of the power of prayer – that was itself ridiculed.[17] Overall, however, Huxley and other “agnostics” saw themselves primarily as advocates for science rather than critics of religion and religious belief. In part, arguments ‘for’ agnosticism and atheism were seen as unnecessary beyond reiterating a call to their opponents for proof; all the agnostic or atheist need do was to underline the unreasonability and immorality of believing on insufficient evidence. The relative absence of any original or systematic critique of religious believing or of articles of faith, however, may also be due to the fact that religious belief and doctrine had increasingly less official influence on public life. Organised religion, particularly in Britain, was no longer as powerful as it had been. Religious tests had been discontinued, the Oaths Act of 1888 allowed for those previously required to make an oath ‘before God’ to ‘solemnly affirm’ instead, and public positions were open to dissenters, agnostics, and secularists. Universalist and secular movements, in Britain and the United States, promoted the establishment of ‘ethical societies,’ advocating ‘freethinking’ and ‘secular humanism.’ Christian theology was increasingly ‘liberal,’ not focussed on dogmatic questions, and less and less part of public debate. As a result, there was little new for critics of religion to challenge concerning the reasonableness of religious belief.

Finally, and perhaps most noteworthy, by the end of the 19th and start of the 20th century, one finds a major shift in how scholars interested in theology, and academics as a whole, looked at religious belief. Research was moving away from theological discussion to the study of the phenomenon of religion.

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[17] For Tyndall, see Tyndall (1867). On Galton, see Galton (1872). For the debate, see the discussion in Waller (2001). According to Waller, Galton's "intention was … to ridicule the idea of miracles and, more broadly, to discredit theological epistemology" (Waller 2001: 105). See also the discussion in Mullin (1996), DeYoung (2011), and Ferngren (2020).

It is true that there was still some interest in natural theology, but the specifically theological dimension had, in many circles, become nominal. The famous 'Gifford Lectures,' established by Lord Adam Gifford in 1887, to be given at the Scottish Universities of Glasgow, St Andrews, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen, is one example.[18] The lectures had as their putative aim 'Promoting, Advancing, Teaching, and Diffusing the study of Natural Theology' in the widest sense of that term, in other words, 'The Knowledge of God…'," and featured eminent scholars from throughout the English-speaking world. Yet, the terms of the foundation of the lectures indicated that the lecturers "may be of any denomination whatever, or of no denomination at all … they may be of any religion or way of thinking, or as is sometimes said, they may be of no religion, or they may be so-called sceptics or agnostics or freethinkers." Further, Gifford expressed a wish for "the lecturers to treat their subject as *a strictly natural science*, … without reference to or reliance upon any supposed special exceptional or so-called miraculous revelation" (Gifford 1887, emphasis mine). Not surprisingly, then, many of the speakers were historians, anthropologists, psychologists, or theoretical scientists. There were but a few theologians, and interest was more on scholars who might contribute to the new field of comparative studies of religion or who argued for a social science of religion. Interestingly, perhaps the largest single category of lecturers were Idealist *philosophers*, such as John Caird (who gave the lectures in 1892-96); Edward Caird (in 1890-92 [The Evolution of Religion] and 1900-02 [*The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers*]); James Ward (in 1896-98 and 1907-09) – and in the early 20th century, Richard Haldane (in 1902-04); John Watson (in 1910-12); Bernard Bosanquet (in 1911-13); Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison (in 1911-13 and 1921-23); and William Ritchie Sorley (in 1914-15). The discussion of the reasonableness of religious belief, however, was rarely in the foreground.

One finds this shift of focus from a theological and philosophical investigation of the meaning and arguments for the reasonability of religious belief, to the beginning of a social scientific study of comparative religion, in many places. F. Max Müller (1823-1900), a German-born comparative philologist who spent his entire academic career in

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[18] For the history and place of theology and the science of religion in the Gifford lectures, see Jones (1966).

Oxford, was the author of volumes on 'the Science of Religion,' and established and served as editor of the extensive series of translations entitled *Sacred Books of the East*; this latter project provided a new perspective on the scholarly approach to religion. Müller argued that "Sacred books must be 'judged from within,' and never from without" (Girardot, 2002: 241). Other events and projects, such as the 1893 Parliament of (World) Religions, and the production of scholarly resources such as the Hastings *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (1908-26), suggested that questions of proof were no longer primary in the minds of many who were interested in religion. Scholars from the European continent, such as Cornelis P. Tiele (1830-1902), of the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, who attended the Parliament of Religions and who gave the Gifford Lectures in 1896 and 1898, were read and commented in academic circles in Britain and the United States.[19]

Nevertheless, while some of these scholars were interested in seeking to understand what conclusions may be drawn from a 'science of religion,' and not in defending particular theological doctrines, many were interested in responding to critics of religion as such, arguing that religious belief was not to be dismissed out of hand. An illustration of this is provided by William James, particularly in "The Will to Believe" (1896) and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). James clearly thought that one could say something about the transcendent as it appears in many religious traditions, and that it was at least not unreasonable to believe it. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, but also in earlier work, James suggests arguments for the reasonability of some religious belief from the perspective of a psychology and a social scientific approach to religion. He engages, particularly, the evidentialism of Clifford, but also what he would consider to be the narrow empiricism of earlier critics of religious belief.

To see his contribution to this novel stage in the study of the reasonability of religious belief, I turn, now, to James.

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[19] There is some suggestion, by authors such as Tiele, that such a comparative study could or would serve as a way of coming to religious belief. See Molendijk (1999) and his (2000: 88-89). (The idealist theologian and philosopher, William Hastie, initiated a lawsuit against Tiele over Tiele's 'emendations' of Hastie's

9.2 William James[20]

William James was born in New York City on January 11, 1842, the son of Henry James, Sr. – an independently wealthy man and a theologian, deeply influenced by the writings of the religious visionary, Emanuel Swedenborg – and the brother of the author Henry James, Jr. William James was educated at home and, between 1855 and 1860, mostly in Europe – changing countries, tutors, and schools many times. He had an eclectic education, learning French and German, studying Latin and Greek, but also history, mathematics, anatomy, and geography, and it is interesting that James' reading notes of the period contained a number of texts of Indian philosophy, literature, and religion (Richardson 2006: 15). Aside from science, James had a particularly strong interest in art, and trained, for a time, as an artist. In 1861, James entered the Lawrence Scientific School that had recently been established at Harvard. It was an institution of advanced applied sciences which also offered some humanities subjects, and, while there, James studied engineering, chemistry, anatomy and natural science (Ireland 2010). In 1864, James entered medical school at Harvard, but his studies were interrupted by travel and illness. He received his medical degree in 1869, but never practiced medicine. He was, however, offered a position to teach psychology (1874) and, later, philosophy (1880) at Harvard.

Though his training in the sciences led him to empiricism, James was also influenced by the religious interests of his father and his own feeling for art and nature. It was this, perhaps, that made him conscious of the limits of science, and that led him to be sceptical of naturalism, 'positivistic materialism,' and the sometimes "superstitious

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translation of the Gifford Lectures, see Molendijk [2000: 89].) For more on Tiele's 'study of comparative theology,' see Hintersteiner (2007).

[20] There is an extensive scholarly literature on James. An early, and still valuable biography with excerpts from James's letters, is that of his fellow pragmatist Ralph Barton Perry (Perry 1935). Two other recent general or biographical studies which draw out James's views on religious belief are Suckiel (1996) and Gale (2004).

In what follows, I refer primarily to James's *Pragmatism* (James 1975; henceforth abbreviated as Pr and included in the text); *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James 1985; henceforth abbreviated as VRE and included in the text); *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (James 1979; henceforth abbreviated as WB and included in the text).

reverence" for science (Perry 1935: 502). James was concerned that science sometimes cuts itself off from important aspects of reality, and he also recognised that underlying science were metaphysical presuppositions. While James was, for a short time, sympathetic to idealism[21], he came to find some of its 'rationalist' claims too speculative, uninformative, unhelpful, and moralistic, and he rejected it along with the empiricism of Hume and Clifford. He turned to 'pragmatism,' developed by his colleague and friend C.S. Peirce and by the German-British philosopher, F.C.S. Schiller, which he found more effective in settling "metaphysical disputes," by its focus on practical consequences rather than matters of first principles. James still considered himself a kind of empiricist[22], but he came to hold that, in the search for evidence, one ought not restrict oneself to only certain kinds of evidence; that, while one must have evidence for one's beliefs, sometimes evidence was not sufficient; and that sometimes "truth is to be had only by venturing to believe" (Perry 1935: 529). Thus, when James reviewed William Clifford's *Lectures and Essays* in 1879, he found "mere subjective capaciousness" in Clifford's "fundamental ideas" (James 1879a: 312), and an "inadequacy" in providing anything "fit to form a 'creed' for modern life" (James 1879a: 312-313). James also saw an inconsistency between Clifford's challenge to "dogmas" and Clifford's apparent indifference to his own evidentialist ones. In later work, James criticized Clifford's 'monism' and his account of 'body and mind', but it was not until 1896 that James provided a more complete account of his objections to some of the assumptions of the 'positivistic materialism' that he found in Clifford, T.H. Huxley, and others, and where he defended at length a 'right to believe' certain hypotheses 'at one's own risk.'[23]

Although James adopted an empiricist and pragmatist approach to the phenomena of religion, and while he was in no way devout, he was sympathetic to claims concerning religious experience, such as accounts of a ‘transcendent.’ Indeed, James maintains that religious experience – including putative encounters with the ‘transcendent’ – can be discussed intelligibly, and that it can be an appropriate ground for some religious belief.

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[21] See, for example, his early essays on "The Sentiment of Rationality" and "Rationality, Activity and Faith"; these were later included in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (James 1979).

[22] James sees his empiricism as drawing on a broader and richer account of experience than that of classical empiricists, such as Hume and Clifford, though, like them, he would insist that "beliefs verified concretely by somebody are the posts of the whole superstructure" (Pr 100). See also VRE 51 and lecture 10.

[23] For example, James (1979), his 1901-02 Gifford Lectures (James 1985), and *A Pluralistic Universe* (James 1977). There are elements that bear on grounds for religious belief in his *Pragmatism* (1975).

Overall, James saw his work on religious belief as providing a basis, not for an apologetic or any “dogmatic theology”, but for a genuine “science of religions” (VRE 433, 455-6, 488-90, 513)[24], and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* “effectively launched the psychology of religion as an area of study” (Taves 2009: 416). In this work, James presented religion and ”facts of personal [religious] experience,” though some scholars of the time considered the *Varieties* as a work of theology, and James as a theologian (Taves 418). Indeed, there has been significant debate about some of the details and principles of James’s views on religious belief. He has been accused of being a somewhat vague and inconsistent writer, and biographers note that “His vacillating terminologies, his shifting and often untenable arguments, his vigorous popular style, bristling with polemic and ambiguity, have often irritated the philosophical critics” (Reck 1967: 11)[25] – a feature that extends to his works on religion. James’ later work, such as *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) and “A Pluralistic Mystic” (James 1910), were significant late contributions to James’s reflections on religion, but his attempt to produce a ‘system of philosophy’ was cut short by his death on August 26, 1910.

James’ account of the reasonableness of religious belief is twofold. First, James argues, that given the characteristics of religious or mystical experience, and given a pragmatist theory of justification (which provides a general structure for determining the reasonableness of a belief and of believing), one can have evidence, and make an argument, for the reasonableness of some religious belief. But, second, James argues that, where such a justification cannot be given, or where there are problems with it, in certain cases it may still be reasonable to believe – i.e., it may be reasonable for one to believe, or to make a decision to believe, where evidence is not conclusive. This latter dimension of James’s view responds specifically to, and seeks to undercut, the ‘evidentialist’ account provided by Clifford.

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[24] See Proudfoot (2004); see also Rorty (2004), e.g., on James’s use of the term ‘religion.’

9.3 Religious experience, religious belief, and belief[26]

James, as noted above, was no defender of any particular religious tradition, and he was critical of many mainstream, orthodox religious beliefs. Still, as an empiricist – what James called a 'radical empiricist' – James believed that one ought to be attentive to all experience, and this included experience that empiricists such as Hume and Clifford had generally dismissed, such as religious experience. In his Gifford Lectures of 1901-02, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James's focus is not on religious beliefs, dogmas, or doctrines, but – as his title indicates – on what underlies them, i.e., religious experience. Such experience is central to religion and is, at least indirectly, the source of religious *belief(s)*.

What is religion? In Lecture 3 of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, "The Reality of the Unseen," James writes that, concerning "the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of *the belief* that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto" (VRE 51, emphasis mine). More specifically, 'religion' means

> "*the feelings, acts, and experiences* of individual men in their solitude [not in community], so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine. Since the relation may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations may *secondarily* grow."[27]

James's interest here is on people's "immediate personal experiences," and he pays little attention to "theology or ecclesiasticism" (VRE 34), except in the final chapter of the *Varieties*.

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[25] Similarly, James's sister Alice wrote "He's just like a blob of mercury. You cannot put a mental finger upon him," cited in Menand (2001: 76).

[26] The next four sections of this chapter are a restructured and significantly revised version of my "William James, the Transcendent, and the 'Right to Believe'" (Sweet 2016).

[27] VRE 36, emphasis mine. But see Rorty (1997: 204), for the argument that James has different, and inconsistent, definitions of religion.

What, then, is religious experience? James presents "personal religious experience" as having "its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness."[28] Such a state is characterized by four 'marks': ineffability (i.e., it must be directly experienced, and "defies expression" to others); having a noetic quality (i.e., it is an authoritative insight or state of *knowledge*); transient; and passive (i.e., one's own will is not active; a superior power is in control). One should also add a fifth characteristic implicit in the above: that religious experience is a 'perception'; James writes that "mystical experiences are as direct *perceptions* of fact for those who have them as any sensations ever were for us. [… that] they are absolutely sensational in their epistemological quality [… and] face to face presentations of what seems immediately to exist" (VRE 336).

One of the key 'marks' or features of religious experience, then, is that it is noetic – it provides knowledge. The cognitive content of such an experience, by itself, seems, however, limited. For example, as just noted, James writes that such experience "defies expression" to other individuals; it is "inarticulate" and "imperfectly … reproduced in memory" (VRE 303). Moreover, what remains, after the experience, is not so much the content of the experience, but rather "the profound sense" of its "importance" and "significance" (VRE 336). Nonetheless, the experience has some content (VRE 357). James emphasises that, as part of its noetic character, religious experience is also 'authoritative.' By authoritative here, James does not seem to mean – at least, not explicitly – 'rationally authoritative,' but, rather 'psychologically authoritative' (e.g., he describes it as "a force" [VRE 335]). In other words, this authority normally leads one into action; religious experience is, therefore, as it were, dispositional. James notes as well that its authority is primarily, and perhaps only, over "the individuals to whom they come" (VRE 335). But as "thinkers," James continues, we cannot "possibly upset" (i.e., controvert) those who believe.

Moreover, James states that religious belief is not just subjective; there is "a positive content of religious experience which… *is literally and objectively true as far as it goes*" (VRE 405). While the putative occurrence of these experiences does not place any "duty" on others who have not had these experiences to regard them as in any way authoritative, they do seem to have a general value. James writes that the sceptic – the "rationalistic critic" (VRE 338) – can have no legitimate cause to deny the possibility of religious experience, or to disallow others from believing its object, as they are "direct perceptions of fact" (VRE 336). Neither can the sceptic argue that one must believe *in* it, "for there never can be a state of facts to which new meaning may not truthfully be added, provided the mind ascend to a more enveloping point of view" (VRE 338). Further, religious experience provides the same general basis for belief as other experiences do. James states that "Our own more "rational" beliefs [underlining mine] are *based on evidence exactly similar in nature* to that which mystics quote for theirs" (VRE 335-6) – namely, perceptual experience – and so we have no reason to reject the beliefs of the mystics that could not be used against us and our own beliefs.

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[28] His account is, as James says, "second hand"; he writes: "my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely" (VRE 301).

What, then, does James mean by belief? While he does not give a direct definition or explanation, he provides a number of characteristics. He pairs 'beliefs' with 'thoughts' and "feelings,"[29] and calls beliefs "rules for action" (VRE 351): beliefs are mental states that give rise to action and, presumably, are dispositional. But beliefs are also (at least sometimes) propositions, or expressed in propositions, that can be verified, and can be true. In *The Will to Believe*, James suggests that to believe something is primarily cognitive, and that belief is believing propositions or hypotheses.[30] Beliefs also have an effect – they "work" – and can be made sense of in terms of what they give rise to. We can, in at least some cases, choose to believe, and so beliefs are, in that sense, volitional. Still, it is not obvious that such epistemic states are entirely under our control for, as James's remarks in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* suggest, belief can be the product of mystical religious experience. As one commentator writes, "we cannot create a belief out of whole cloth," nor can one 'will a belief into existence' (Brown 2000: 24).

James rarely uses the term 'religious belief.' Still, it seems that religious belief(s) are an intellectualization of religious experience (VRE 458). Experiences – mystical states, for example – "tell of the supremacy of the ideal, of vastness, of union, of safety, and of rest. They offer us *hypotheses*, hypotheses which we may voluntarily ignore, but which as thinkers we cannot possibly upset" (VRE 339). Such beliefs, then, are propositional and have, as their object, something greater than the individual, as noted above: a reference to "whatever [one] may consider the divine", a "belief that there is an unseen order," and that "our supreme good lies in … adjusting ourselves" to it (VRE 51). These hypotheses may have some "local" elements, but are predominantly generic.[31] They may contain certain "formulas" (VRE 457),[32] and James writes that we can see them in "creeds" (VRE ftn 290). And while they have an effect – e.g., on happiness (VRE 24, see 331) – what truth they have depends on their use to the individual, and the use of the individual to the world (VRE 458). What makes religious beliefs *distinctively* religious, however, is unclear.[33] James certainly would reject many of the traditional religious beliefs that are rooted in dogma or doctrine. He writes that such statements of divine "metaphysical attributes" (e.g., divine simplicity) seem to make no difference to how we act – they "call for no distinctive adaptation of our conduct" (VRE 352) – and are "destitute of all intelligible significance" (VRE 445).

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[29] James writes: "This feeling, forced on us we know not whence, that by obstinately believing there are gods" (WB 31). See also James (1898).

[30] Pacē Hunter Brown, who writes that beliefs are not (just) "hypotheses" (Brown 2000: 35).

This affects the issue of how one can say that religious beliefs are meaningful. For James, as we have seen above, to say that a belief is meaningful involves, at the very least, that one knows how to act on it – perhaps, how acting as if it were true is different from acting as if it were false. In general, then, to understand the meaning of a belief, one must know its cognitive content and how it bears on action. Now, consider such putative religious beliefs as "God is love," "Brahman is atman," or "Jesus is the Son of God." If we say that we know what these propositions mean, we not only need to be able to show that they are logically coherent, we need to be able to explain, presumably, which actions or activities follow from them, and how. If we cannot do this, on James's account, it is difficult to understand whether they are, in fact, meaningful, or how one might be said to *believe* them.

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[31] While James allows that these beliefs have both 'local' and "common and essential" elements, the ones that he refers to do not seem to be distinctive of any particular major religious tradition.

[32] H.S. Thayer (1923–2008) raises the question of whether there is an openness to the divine, in James. He writes, of James, that "To say, as James does, that through one's persevering in the belief that there are gods one is doing the deepest service to the universe, is to designate the central object of religious belief as neither gods, nor God, but the universe." See Thayer (1983: 102).

[33] Whether James had any religious beliefs in the sense of belief in something transcendent has been debated (see Thayer 1983). That being said, it is still open, pacē Thayer, whether he might have such views.

The notion of religious belief may, however, be related to James' notion of 'overbelief'.[34] This latter term is used sparingly in James's writings, and it has not been consistently – or, arguably, clearly – understood. Some have called overbeliefs, simply, "unproven personal opinion" (Suckiel 2010). Others (e.g., John Whittaker) suggest that they are 'supervenient claims' – i.e., that "Overbeliefs supervene [factual] evidence in much the same way as judgments of value go beyond judgments of facts" (Whittaker 1983: 208) – and that they are necessary for "making ultimate judgments of meaning or purpose" (Whittaker 1983: 209). Still others see overbelief as a kind of intellectual conceptualisation of the fact of one's orientation to the transcendent (e.g., Brown 2000: 121). James himself calls them "faith ventures" (Pr 144), "high-flying speculations" (VRE 341), and "interpretations" that are "buildings out" and "religious construction," sparked primarily by religious feelings (VRE 341). Overbeliefs seem to be, on such readings, "intellectual beliefs" that one may add to religious feeling – such as the notion of God as an absolute ruler, or a (philosophical or theological) theory such as 'monism' (VRE 330, 454). Such remarks, however, raise many questions.

James writes that overbeliefs are beliefs that are not based simply, if at all, on external evidence, but emerge from other beliefs or feelings that one has. They carry – rightly, James would say – epistemic weight, and allow an individual to situate his or her other beliefs. James describes religion (which contains or is constituted by these overbeliefs) as a "postulator of new *facts*" (VRE 407, emphasis mine), and these overbeliefs, Whittaker writes, "go beyond matters of natural fact in order to institute judgements of value and cosmic purpose"(Whittaker 206). But James also suggests that overbeliefs are 'provisional,' in the sense that they can and do change – presumably in response to other beliefs that one has – though James does not say how this occurs (e.g., whether it is a working out of internal coherence) and whether *all* overbeliefs are subject to this.

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[34] John Whittaker argues that the notion of overbelief comes from Matthew Arnold, and that such overbeliefs help to maintain a state of faith in the believer. See Whittaker (1983).

Yet James suggests that there is – as well – something already in place or already assumed for one to make sense of one's beliefs and convictions, and the evidence for them – a kind of 'conceptual framework.' James writes, for example, that "our non-intellectual nature does influence our convictions" (WB 20), and that "Most of us pretend in some way to prop it [i.e., our faith or overbelief] upon our philosophy, but the philosophy itself is really propped upon this faith [i.e., religion or overbelief]" (VRE 407). This suggests that something 'prior' to our ordinary beliefs affects the nature or understanding of the world. Thus, James writes: "the world interpreted religiously… must have… a *natural constitution* different…. from that which a materialistic world would have" (VRE 407).[35] It seems here, then, that one must already have some more fundamental 'belief' in order for one's other beliefs to be intelligible. If this, or this, too, is overbelief, this might be analogous to what was described in earlier chapters as 'antecedent probabilities.' And if religious belief is an example of 'overbelief,' it would suggest that it has a fundamental epistemic role for religious belief for the believer – and, correlatively presumably, as positivistic scientific belief would have for the positivistic scientist – and may explain, in part, why believers do not readily give up beliefs that they have.[36]

While James says little about religious belief as such, what we find in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and in some other texts is a recognition that religious belief ought not be readily dismissed. Against some opponents of religion, James seems to be claiming that basic religious beliefs are, in a sense, on a par with non-religious (e.g., empirical or even sceptical) beliefs. And James believes that the *subject* of religious experience has evidence – indeed, overwhelming evidence – for one's belief, viz., the experience itself.

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[35] On this issue, see Slater (2008) and Lambeth (1999). James writes: "Although the religious question is primarily a question of life, of living or not living in the higher union which opens itself to us as a gift, yet the *spiritual excitement* in which the gift appears a real one will often *fail to be aroused* in an individual *until certain particular intellectual beliefs* or ideas which, as we say, come home to him, are touched. These ideas will thus be essential to that individual's religion; – which is as much as to say that *over-beliefs in various directions are absolutely indispensable*, and that we should treat them with tenderness and tolerance so long as they are not intolerant themselves. As I have elsewhere written, the most interesting and valuable things about a man are usually his over-beliefs." (VRE 515, emphases mine).

[36] James does not provide any clear examples of overbeliefs, but one might raise the question whether the belief in the 'reality of an unseen order' might be an example of an overbelief. See Slater (2009: 158).

Still, one may ask how good such evidence is. Is it sufficient to justify or warrant believing? Are the beliefs that the believer has, in such cases, reasonable, warranted, or true? Or, given the apparent subjective and personal character of religious belief, is such believing reasonable or warranted only for the believer? To see how James would determine whether believing religious beliefs is reasonable, warranted, or true, requires some understanding of James's pragmatism.

9.4 Truth and verification

James's 1907 *Pragmatism* provides his readers with a general account of his theory of meaning, his theory of truth, and his theory of justification or warranted belief. Before one can understand how James determines truth, however, one must see what the term means. To begin with, for James "to develope a thought's meaning, we need only determine what *conduct* it is fitted to produce" (Pr 29); in other words, we know what a proposition *means* when we know what its effects are and what "practical difference" in concrete experience the proposition would make if it were true.[37]

James's 'pragmatic' view of truth follows from this. Truth is "what proves itself to be good in the way of belief" (Pr 42), which includes what is "helpful in life's practical struggles" (Pr 42). Truth is not 'static' or 'eternal'; the "truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it" (Pr 97). It is an "affair of leading" (Pr 101, 103), and "that is useful," "to consistency, stability, and flowing human intercourse" (Pr 103). For James, then, the truth of a proposition is determined by its efficacy in practical action. (This is the sense of James's much misunderstood phrase that "'the true'... is only the expedient."[38]) An idea or belief is true, then, so far as the idea "pays" (Pr 110) – i.e., there is a "practical value of true ideas" (Pr 98) – and so far as it proves "to have a value for concrete life" (Pr 40). Thus, a belief is true when it enables one to function or act in an effective way – when it "works well" (VRE 361) – so far as it 'leads one through the acts and the other ideas it instigates' (Pr 97).

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[37] James insists that "There can *be* no difference anywhere that doesn't *make* a difference elsewhere – no difference in abstract truth that doesn't express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in conduct consequent upon that fact" (Pr 30).

[38] In *Pragmatism*, James explains what he means by saying that the true is the expedient: *"'The true,' to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as 'the right' is only the expedient in the way of our behaving*. Expedient in almost any fashion; and expedient in the long run and on the whole of course; for what meets expediently all the experience in sight won't necessarily meet all farther experiences equally satisfactorily. Experience, as we know, has ways of *boiling over*, and making us correct our present formulas" (Pr 106).

But truth also involves a relation to other truth. The truth of ideas "depend entirely on their relations to the other truths that also have to be acknowledged" (Pr 41). Thus, James writes that truth is "made largely out of previous truths" – for example, "as it gratifies the individual's desire to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock" (Pr 36), and "just in proportion to its success in solving [the] 'problem of maxima and minima'" (i.e., so far as it has a minimum of 'jolt,' and a maximum of continuity, with existing truth) (Pr 35).

This connection with other truth is illustrated in James's account of verification. James writes: "true ideas are those we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those we cannot" (Pr 97), and a belief is justified or verified when it in some way 'agrees with reality' (Pr 96).[39] By 'agreement', here, James does not mean a simple correspondence theory; rather, it is that the belief 'fits' with (our understanding of) the way the world is.[40] Another way of saying this, James says, is that a belief is verified when one acts on it and it does not lead to surprises.[41]

James does not, however, provide any specific method of verification in *Pragmatism*. Nevertheless, one can say that a proposition is, at least indirectly, verified if it is consistent with other truths one holds – and, James says, "completed verifications [are] seldom needful" (Pr 96). That being said, James does not deny that there is a role for evidence and proof, or that proof may involve external evidence. Indeed, James writes that pragmatism “will consider any evidence” and will “count the humblest and most personal experiences,” so far as they “have practical consequences” and fit “with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted” (Pr 44). It is just that what counts as evidence and the way in which evidence is relevant are determined by the context or activity in which one is engaged, as well as by the established propositions within that context.

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[39] There is some debate about whether James is a realist. See Putnam (1996) and Rorty (1997). Rorty writes "Our responsibility to truth is not, for James, a responsibility to get things right. Rather, it is a responsibility to ourselves to make our beliefs cohere with one another" (Rorty 1997: 85).

[40] To see what is meant by this notion of 'agreement,' which might initially suggest a 'correspondence' theory, see James's *Pragmatism*: "To agree in the widest sense with a reality can only mean to be guided either straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it as to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed. Better either intellectually or practically. . . . Any idea that helps us to deal, whether practically or intellectually, with either the reality or its belongings, that does not entangle our progress in frustrations, that *fits*, in fact, and adapts our life to the reality's whole setting, will agree sufficiently to meet the requirement" (Pr x-xi).

[41] See Putnam (1998: 65). See James's remark on rationality as the "transition from a state of puzzle and perplexity to rational comprehension," in "Sentiment of Rationality" (James 1879b: 317).

One should note a few things about this pragmatic approach. Claims to truth and to justification are always contingent; they must enable people to act productively in the world but, when they cease to have this character, they are, presumably, to be abandoned. Moreover, in principle, any belief or knowledge claim is fallible. James says that pragmatism recognizes this, but that it itself provides criteria for correcting our beliefs and claims to knowledge including, presumably, our beliefs and claims about pragmatism itself.

But there is one further feature of James’s pragmatism (vis-à-vis his account of meaning, truth and justification) that should be noted – and that is that all people have a “primary duty” to pursue the truth.[42] Thus, when it comes to the experiences and beliefs of others, one ought not simply say that these are just matters *for them* – for example, that they are true ‘just for them.’ The beliefs and views of others are things that, presumably, *all* should investigate.

9.5 Meaning and truth in religious belief

From the preceding account, one sees how James can provide a means by which one can determine whether a belief, including a religious belief, is cognitively meaningful. Beliefs, in general, are meaningful when one is able to see how one is to act on them – ‘what conduct they are fitted to produce’ – and, presumably, so also *religious* beliefs (and overbeliefs). Still, for beliefs that are very abstract and have no clear relation to acting in one particular way rather than another – e.g., some religious dogmas or metaphysical claims – it may be the case that they are *not* meaningful.

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[42] On this ‘duty to pursue the truth,’ see James’s remark that “Ideas that tell us which of them to expect count as the true ideas in all this primary sphere of verification, and the pursuit of such ideas is a primary human duty” (Pr 98).

One also sees how it is that religious belief(s) can be said to be true. Given his pragmatist account, particular religious beliefs can be true *if* such beliefs 'fit' with other beliefs (Pr 41), *if* one can act on them, and *if* they "pay" or are 'expedient. Recall that a proposition (or a theory or an idea) is true, for James, if it allows one to engage in practical activity; if it is "helpful in life's practical struggles" (Pr 42); if it proves to have a value for concrete life, and in proportion as it is successful in solving problems (Pr 35). (Admittedly, James *also* says that the truth of beliefs "will depend entirely on their relations to the other truths that also have to be acknowledged" (Pr 41).) Thus, "***if*** [religious beliefs and overbeliefs and] *theological ideas prove to have a value for concrete life, they will be true*" (Pr 40; italics are James's; the bolding is mine). And so, if a theological idea "fits every part of life best, and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted," presumably pragmatism "could see no meaning in treating as 'not true' a notion that was pragmatically so successful" (Pr 44).

Now, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James speaks of some religious beliefs as having, perhaps (just), a 'subjective' truth (see VRE 399-401). (He seems to suggest the same concerning 'overbeliefs'.[43]) He writes that one can say that a religious belief is properly authoritative in one's own life when one can act on it. However James also seems to hold that at least some religious beliefs can be more than subjectively true – that there is "a positive content of religious experience which… *is literally and* ***objectively*** *true as far as it goes*" (VRE 405, bolding mine) – and presumably, as the case may be, false or meaningless. For example, even in the case of a putatively subjective belief – namely belief in the theory of the Absolute, held by his erstwhile colleagues, the British idealists – it seems that James thinks there are clear criteria to show that this theory *fails* the 'pragmatic' tests of truth. For example, James says that such a theory of the Absolute: tells one nothing about life; allows people to avoid responsibility and take a moral holiday (though he acknowledges that sometimes taking such holidays is not altogether a bad thing); is associated with a false logic; and entangles one in metaphysical paradoxes (see Pr 41-3). And, later, he writes that this “notion of the Absolute” “clash[es] with other truths” (Pr 43).[44] So, given these ‘public’ considerations, and given that one’s “hypotheses”[45] “carry supernumerary features,” their truth will involve or be supported by, or collide with other truths. And since this is the case for metaphysical beliefs, such as beliefs about the Absolute, then it plausibly is equally so for religious beliefs. For James, then, it seems that one can say that religious beliefs can not only be meaningful, but true – or, as the case may be, false.

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[43] In letter to L.T. Hobhouse of 1904, James says that overbeliefs are "private" – which may suggest that they are purely subjective; "the license to indulge in *private* over-beliefs" (Hobhouse, cited in Perry (1935: 2, 245, emphasis mine.)

9.5.1 Religious belief and evidence

On James’s account, there can, in principle, be argument and evidence for religious belief, as there is for all belief – evidence that is sufficient and, presumably, as far as pragmatism allows, conclusive. One might wonder, however, what kind of evidence James could have in mind, and whether having evidence is necessary for being reasonable in believing.

James allows that one can have evidence for religious belief – for example, for those beliefs which are the product of, or are related closely to, religious experience. And this evidence is empirical or experiential. Recall James’s comment that “Our own more "rational" beliefs are *based on evidence exactly similar in nature* to that which mystics quote for theirs” (VRE 335, emphasis mine) – namely, perceptual experience. Thus, religious belief can have empirical evidence.

James presumably also holds that one cannot be indifferent to the need for some evidence in holding a religious belief; the general pragmatist duty to seek the truth is also a duty to seek evidence where it can be found. And, of course, most major religious traditions would allow that there *is* evidence of some kind for belief, if only the evidence of authority.

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[44] Though James writes that this is a theory that simply does not ‘fit’ for him, it seems clear that he believes that others ought to find it at least false, if not meaningless.

[45] James writes: “it is only when they forget that they are hypotheses and put on rationalistic and authoritative pretensions, that our faiths do harm.” (WB xiii).

But exactly which religious beliefs or what kind of religious beliefs can have evidence? Recall that, for James, ‘religion’ is “*the feelings, acts, and experiences* of individual men [… as individuals…] in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” – but not the propositions of “theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations” (VRE 34); these latter, recall, are, at best, *derived* from one’s “experiences,” and “secondary.” Believing that there are mystical experiences is obviously supported by one having had such an experience. But, James writes, the more specific one’s interpretation of that experience – that it involved, for example, a certain kind of being, with particular attributes, and which ‘revealed’ certain truths, and so on – the more distance there is from the actual perceptual evidence provided by the original experience itself. And so, the creedal beliefs of most religions (e.g., doctrines or dogmas concerning the nature, characteristics, and especially the personality of the Divine – being ‘abstract,’ possibly entangled in ‘metaphysical paradoxes,’ being inconsistent or clashing with other claims, and so on) would not be able to derive much support from such (empirical) perceptual evidence. James is also rather sceptical about ‘rationalist’ arguments for religious belief (see VRE, lect. 18), in keeping, it would seem, with his comments on the rationalism of theories of the Absolute, and he is rather dismissive of philosophical theology.

That being noted, it may still not be clear whether the evidence that one might have – for example, from religious experience – is *sufficient* to establish anything about the content of a religious belief or establish its truth. It may seem that the evidence of religious experience is sufficient only for the one who experienced it to be ‘reasonable’ in believing it. From what we have seen, James says that evidence provided by religious experience normally is relevant only to the one who has had the experience – mystical experiences “usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come” – but they have little argumentative force to one who has not had that experience.[46] While it does not follow from this that such experiences are inconsequential and do not have some ‘evidential’ value for others – in fact, as noted above, James seems to allow that they may do so (see VRE 336, and the discussion above) – there is no epistemic “duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically” (VRE 335).

In general, then, there are grounds for saying that, for James, religious experience constitutes evidence relevant to some religious belief *and to believing* (see, for example, Wall [1995]). And a belief is justified – or, to be more precise, a believer is justified in holding the belief – when that belief makes a “practical difference” in life, or when it fits the criteria for truth, presented in *Pragmatism*. So, given James’s account of meaning, truth, and justification, and given the nature of religious experience, it seems that, not only can a religious belief be meaningful and psychologically, noetically, and dispositionally authoritative, but it has at least some of the properties of truth: one can function effectively on it, it is consistent with (at least some) other truths, and so on, and, so, believing it can be reasonable.

It is not clear, however, how far James thinks ‘reasonable believing’ holds concerning other religious beliefs – e.g., those based on ‘ordinary’ (i.e., non-mystical) perceptual experience or on testimony. For example, some religious beliefs seem to be based on perceptions – e.g., witnessing putative miracles. Here, the content of the belief may be more specific than that arising from religious experience, and one who has such an experience may say that she has as strong an evidence as can be supplied – i.e., direct perceptual evidence. Now, some critics might say that such a claim is question-begging; is it a miracle that one is witnessing (which supposes the existence of the Divine, and a series of beliefs about how the Divine acts), or simply an ‘extraordinary event’? Or, consider those religious beliefs that one has are neither the product of a mystical experience nor based on sense perception – e.g., that ‘Jesus changed water into wine,’ or that ‘Muhammad was transported at night from Mecca to the site of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem’ – but are, rather, beliefs based on testimony (e.g., learned from reading scripture or from traditions passed down from one’s ancestors). Here, the content is putatively cognitive, although scholars might claim that such descriptions of events were more allegorical or ‘spiritual’ than descriptive. Perhaps because James is primarily interested in religious *experience*, and because such beliefs are parasitic on more fundamental beliefs derived from religious experience, such issues are of little concern to him.

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[46] See note 45 above and VRE 335.

Still, James does seem to be open to the possibility of the meaningfulness and truth of some religious beliefs which do not have direct or “sufficient evidence” – e.g., those which are not directly the product of “mystical states.” Presumably, some such beliefs could be held reasonably *if* at least some of the preceding criteria of truth were met – e.g., if such a belief makes a “practical difference” to life, if it ‘pays,’ if it “fits with other truths that also have to be acknowledged,” or is productive of some advantage or benefit, and so on. And perhaps some could have a justification of a consequentialist (or abductive) kind – i.e., when the belief itself is seen to be the best explanation of an event or ‘the best answer’ to a problem. James, however, does not pursue these issues. Nevertheless, he does consider the question of the reasonability of believing beliefs for which, he says, there is not ‘sufficient’ evidence. One may well ask, then, whether it can be reasonable to believe such beliefs.

9.6 Reasonability beyond evidence[47]

From what one reads in James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*, then, religious belief – and, more precisely, believing such beliefs – can be reasonable at least so far as there is evidence (e.g., religious experience) that supports or entails the belief or the believing. Yet James also seems to be convinced that it could sometimes be reasonable (in the sense described above) to believe on incomplete evidence.

As we saw in Chapter 8, William Clifford argued for the evidentialist principle that ‘it was wrong everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence.’ So, to be reasonable in believing something meant that one had ‘sufficient evidence’ for it – indeed, evidence such that one did not have any reasonable doubt about the belief that it supported.

James rejected Clifford’s view. He held that there is no justification for Clifford’s ‘evidentialist’ principle, and he believed that there were also good reasons not to take it as a general or universal rule. But, aside from his arguments against Clifford, James offers a ‘positive argument’ for the reasonability of believing in *some* cases where one does not have sufficient evidence.

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[47] Madden argues that “James was genuinely misunderstood in his will-to-believe doctrine, though he must bear some of the responsibility himself for that state of affairs. … He made far less use of his right-to-believe religious hypotheses than his ardent defense of this right would suggest” (Madden 1979: xxiii).

James’s argument in “The Will to Believe” begins by noting that there are some situations where one *must* make a decision – where one is presented with a live, momentous, and forced option. And, second, in some of these situations, evidence is not sufficient to allow one to decide; for example, perhaps one option is just as plausible as the other. So, James concludes, while our ‘rational nature’ cannot make a decision, our ‘passional nature’ can or must. It is, therefore, reasonable to decide – indeed, James writes, one has a right to decide (for example, to believe something) at one’s own risk – in some cases where reason and evidence are insufficient. By extension, in the matter of religious belief, it may be reasonable for one to decide, and to opt for, religious belief on incomplete evidence. James’s argument, however, needs some unpacking.

James is methodical in articulating his view, and he is careful to note that it applies only in certain situations – i.e., where one is ‘forced’ to decide between two (competing) momentous and live hypotheses. To begin with, James explains to his reader that he is dealing with a choice of “hypotheses” – and by “hypothesis,” James means “anything that may be proposed to our belief” (WB 14). Now, a hypothesis, James writes, may be either ‘live’ or ‘dead.’ By *live*, James means that it is a hypothesis "which appeals as a real possibility to [the person] to whom it is proposed" – i.e., it makes an "electric connection with [one's] nature" (WB 14). A live hypothesis, then, is the sort of thing that actively engages a person’s interest; how ‘live’ it is, is determined by a person's willingness to act on it. (Note the obvious relation to the pragmatist conception of ‘truth.’) Its ‘liveliness,’ then, is relative to the individual. A ‘dead’ hypothesis is one that a person has little interest in or inclination to act on. A hypothesis being live or dead does not depend on whether it is true; generally, the only thing that counts is whether one *feels* that it is *worthy* of acting upon it and, so of being believed. For many of us, then, hypotheses such as: ‘There will be a major ecological crisis in the next 15 years’ and ‘There will be no social welfare programmes in 20 years’ are live ones, but they may not be live for all people (say, in the first case, for the very old and, in the second, for the very young). Live hypotheses are contrasted with those that are *dead*. Hypotheses such as: ‘The world was created in 4004 BCE’ or ‘The number of grains of sand on the beach at Durban, South Africa, is greater than the number of grains of sand on the beach at Yanliao Seaside Park in Taiwan’ are likely dead hypotheses for most, but they may not be so for all.

A second term that James uses here is “option”, by which he means simply “the decision between two hypotheses” (WB 14). There are options of different kinds: living or dead; forced or avoidable; and momentous or trivial. A 'living option' is one where both hypotheses are live ones – for example, a student who has been accepted into law school and into graduate school may be confronted with the option: ‘Either go to study law or go to graduate school.’ A 'forced option' is one where a person *must* act on one or the other of the alternative hypotheses: for example, “Speak now or forever hold your peace” (said during a wedding service) or (as in the colloquial expression) “Fish or cut bait.” (Here, making a choice cannot normally be delayed. By putting off the decision, one has effectively made a decision – i.e., has said “No.”) A 'momentous option' occurs where the opportunity is unique, what is at stake is significant, and where one's decision is irreversible (WB 15). James gives the example of the option of participating in an expedition; we might think of the opportunity to take part in the first expedition to Mars. (Here again, if one seeks to put off the decision, one has effectively chosen to reject the opportunity.) A living, forced, momentous option is what James calls "a genuine option." He asserts, then, that, when one is in such a situation, i.e., is confronted with a “genuine option,” one recognises the importance of making – indeed, one arguably must make – a decision.

If one has sufficient reason or evidence that supports one hypothesis or makes the reasonability of one hypothesis clearly superior to the other, our ‘rational nature’ may, or will indicate what to decide. For example, if one is interested in space exploration, believes that one might fit the criteria for engaging in such an activity, recognises the momentousness of such a choice to be part of the first expedition, realises that to delay making such a choice is effectively to say ‘no’ to it, and one’s other choices in life pale in comparison, one’s choice is clear.

But James was well aware, as noted above, that there were situations where evidence for a hypothesis was insufficient or lacking – such as belief in an objective moral order

(WB 27–33; 80–89). In the absence of evidence or reasons that clearly (or, on Clifford's view, 'sufficiently') support one view over its contrary, James says that a "passional" element is appropriate – even necessary – in making up one's mind (WB 20). Indeed, further, James writes:

> "Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but *must*, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds." (WB 20, emphasis mine)

In other words, in a situation where we are confronted with a genuine option, and there is an absence of sufficient evidence[48] – "we have *the right to believe*[49] at our own risk any *hypothesis* that is live enough to tempt our will" (WB 32, emphasis mine). (It is worth reminding ourselves that James is referring to all manner of options and hypotheses, and not just religious ones.)

Such a passional decision is a decision of the will, i.e., not made purely on the basis of evidence or argument, or even on expected utilities (i.e., on the consideration of costs and benefits arising out of the situation). Moreover, it is not merely that one has a right to believe, in the sense that one has the power to do it, but it is "lawful" – i.e., reasonable – to decide on insufficient evidence[50]. This is clearly a conclusion that Clifford, and allied 'evidentialists 'of his kind, would contest.

James had struggled with this idea of a 'right to believe' for some time.[51] Early in his writing, he writes of a '*duty* to believe' (see James 1875); in his 1896 essay, the title of his talk was of a *will* to believe; in the essay, but also in later discussion, he concedes that he was, in fact, talking about a ‘right’ to believe. What exactly does it mean to have such a right?

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[48] James writes of Pascal's wager that, whatever weight it has, depends on the hypothesis of Catholic Christianity being a live hypothesis. Why "take to masses and holy water" unless there is some pre-existing tendency in the individual to believe that they might produce the desired effect, and why would one even wager, unless one thought that the outcome had some appeal? Thus, Pascal's wager does not, James thinks, stand on its own, but is dependent upon making the kind of distinctions that James is presenting.

[49] For a discussion of the history of James's view on this 'right,' see Thayer (1983). For a discussion, see Axtell (2013) and Proudfoot (2013).

[50] Thayer has argued, plausibly, that this reflects James' views on the role of sentiment in, for example, his "The Sentiment of Rationality" (Thayer 1983: 93).

[51] See Kauber (1974). In his PhD thesis (Kauber 1972), Kauber provides an historical account to some of the background to James's essay, as does Thayer (1983).

First, one will note that such a right is something that one may have or may exercise only when evidence alone does not settle the matter – e.g., when relevant evidence is missing, or when the weight of the evidence available cannot be determined, or when the evidence for each option is judged to have about the same weight. Such a right is not a ‘carte blanche’ i.e., a matter of one just doing what one wants; e.g., one does not have a right to believe something one knows to be false, or to reject a hypothesis simply because one does not like it. James is not defending credulity. This right exists where one has *some* reason to choose either hypothesis, but *no sufficient* reason. Our religious overbeliefs generally do not arise in this way.

Second, James does not explain how this right is, in fact, a right – he does not explicitly give his readers an indication of the source or the basis for such a right. What this right could mean, then, is that one has a power or moral claim, e.g., to believe, or ‘to *have* a believing attitude in religious matters’, simply because it is not ‘unlawful’ or ‘wrong’ to do this. But it could also mean that one has such a power or moral claim because of its consequences – i.e., one has a right to believe because it is (morally) correct, appropriate, or right to believe. (It is, admittedly, not clear which explanation or justification for the existence of such a ‘right’ it is that James has in mind.)

Third, if one exercises this right – which James says our passional nature “must” do – one does so, nevertheless, at one’s own risk. Having and exercising the right does not mean that it is right to do it, for one (still) bears responsibility for doing it.

Why might James think that one may or should *exercise* such a right? James mentions some cases where he thinks that such a right exists and where it presumably could be right to exercise it. For example, James argues that this right is necessary to scientific activity – e.g., the eagerness, the passion, of scientists to make decisions expeditiously and to act on them has, James points out, probably promoted the development of science. (The scientific approach *itself* – that is, the insistence on the correction of false belief, and the ascertaining of truth – is, also, James holds, something passional.) This right is also necessary to, and should be exercised in addressing, some moral matters.

James says that some moral beliefs are not easily known to be 'true' or 'false,' given available evidence; these, too, can be matters for our passional nature (WB 28). As well, general evaluative claims – that thing X *is better than* thing Y – may *not* be able to be decided on the basis of evidence alone. (James writes also about the practical value of some belief, e.g., that having some religious belief leads to human flourishing, and makes morality simpler.) And, finally – and, for some, scandalously – James writes, "Faith in a fact can help create the fact" (WB 29); sometimes "believing" without evidence leads to the belief coming true – or, to put it slightly differently, 'believing makes it so.' For example, James notes, if I believe that someone likes me, then my behaviour towards the other might contribute to bringing it about that that person likes me – or, again, my believing that the world is improving through individual effort, may motivate me to act in certain ways that, thereby, improve the world (WB 28).[52] (We see this approach in mundane situations where people say, for instance: 'Dress to be the person you want to be'.) If one waits to act (or tobelieve) until he or she has 'sufficient objective evidence', the result may never occur. For these reasons, if believing would make a practical difference, and should one not be able to decide on intellectual grounds, James says that one has a right to believe or (what is presumably the same) "a right to adopt a believing attitude," that it is *reasonable* to exercise this right, and, perhaps, that one, reasonably, *must* exercise it.[53]

James's account of the right to believe and to exercise that right, beyond evidence, applies to "genuine options." Recall, however, James's discussion of 'overbeliefs.' These, he writes, are without evidence, and yet not only is it the case that one has them, it seems appropriate or reasonable that one have them – and that one have a right to believe them. Indeed, there is some evidence that these 'overbeliefs' are (at least among) the beliefs that James has in mind in ”The Will to Believe.”[54] Is believing such ‘overbeliefs’ also reasonable or justified by the ‘right to believe’?

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[52] James says that, on Clifford's view, it seems that we should not do any of these things – for example, we should not cooperate with others unless we already have proof that they will cooperate with us. James's concern is that, if so, then nothing will get done. If James is right, then, there may be a large class of cases where one may lack sufficient evidence and yet have a "right to believe" – and perhaps more.

[53] In his Review of "The Unseen Universe," James writes: "We for our part not only hold that such an act of trust is licit, but we think, furthermore, that any one to whom it makes a practical difference (whether of motive to action or of mental peace) is in duty bound to make it (James 1875: 293).

Recall that, for James, “overbelief” is a ‘building out’ of religious feeling, which ‘adds facts,’ but which is itself not proven. What exactly these overbeliefs are, as noted earlier in this chapter, is unclear. James does say that some religious beliefs (e.g., belief in God, or belief ‘that there is a God’ [VRE 518], though it is unclear exactly which) are overbeliefs, that (as he writes in VRE) such overbeliefs are ‘chosen,’ and that some overbeliefs ‘bring in evidence’ about what works (Pr 144). In this sense, then, the ‘right to believe’ may be, in part, a justification for one’s religious, and other, overbeliefs.

I would offer one further – perhaps Jamesian – argument for the reasonability of holding overbeliefs, reflecting how overbeliefs work, and what they do. Some overbeliefs may not be chosen, and, perhaps may already need to be in place or already assumed in order to make sense of coming to hold beliefs, and the evidence for them, in the first place. After all, if one is to think of ‘truth’ as ‘what pays,’ one must already have in mind, as a kind of dominant idea or ‘overbelief’, what this standard means (i.e., what it means ‘to pay’), what makes this the right standard, and what this would require of us. In this sense, such foundational beliefs are akin to ‘antecedent probabilities.’ (This seems to be the case with the religious beliefs of most people, particularly those whose belief is not the product of an explicit decision to believe.) Such beliefs are without evidence and, yet, they can – as James says overbeliefs can – change. For, as the other beliefs one has change, or as one has new beliefs, one’s overbeliefs – which apparently keep one’s beliefs overall in coherence – could change. Given their place and function, then, such overbeliefs may be described as reasonable, and one may be reasonable in believing them, even though they are not based on ‘sufficient evidence.’

James’s argument for a right to believe without, or with insufficient, evidence, is supplemented by his explicit criticism and rejection of Clifford’s view. Much of James’s argument in his essay, “The Will to Believe,” is a critique of Clifford. In it, James makes two basic points: first, that Clifford’s view, requiring all beliefs to have sufficient evidence, is arbitrary or unjustified and, second, that Clifford's evidentialist principle – that 'it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence' – is unreasonable.

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[54] James’s remark to Hobhouse that the aim of WB is to argue for "the license to indulge in private over-beliefs", cited in Perry (1935: 2, 245), suggests that ‘overbeliefs’ are much more important than many have recognised.

James argues, first, that Clifford is arbitrary in holding this principle – that Clifford has not offered any reason to adopt this criterion for legitimate (e.g., reasonable, ethically justified) believing. To Clifford's view that it is "better go without belief forever than believe a lie" (WB 25), James counters that one could just as well claim the contrary – that 'it is better to be in error many times than lose the chance at getting the truth.'[55] So, whichever principle or standard for legitimate believing one adopts – Clifford's or James's – is not, James is saying, based on argument or evidence, but is itself the result of a 'passional' decision. Clifford's refusal to allow one to decide, or believe, or choose, because one lacks "sufficient evidence," is, therefore, arbitrary or unjustified. James agrees that, in general, evidence is required for believing reasonably but, he holds, Clifford gives no reason to show that sufficient evidence is always required. So, at the very least, then, there is no good reason to adopt Clifford's standard for reasonable believing over James's.

Second, James suggests that there are good reasons *not* to adopt Clifford's view – in other words, that Clifford's position is unreasonable. To begin with, it seems to James that "a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent [one] from acknowledging certain kinds of truths if those kinds of truths were really there [but evidence for them was inconclusive] would be an *irrational* rule" (WB 31-32, emphasis mine) – but, James says, Clifford's evidentialist maxim does exactly this. Moreover, it seems to James that running the risk of believing error is not always something to be avoided; James writes that "It is like a general informing his soldiers that it is better to keep out of battle forever than to risk a single wound" (WB 25). Further, James writes, adopting Clifford's approach would effectively prevent or undermine people from holding at least many of the beliefs they have. James would point out that most of what people believe or claim to know has a very slim basis in evidence, and that there is sometimes a diversity of opinion or lack of agreement on what would constitute sufficient evidence in most fields of human activity (e.g., art, ethics, the law). (James's pragmatic view of truth – of 'truth' as 'what enables one to function' or 'what works well' – then, is evident throughout.) Clifford's demand that one always have "sufficient evidence" is, in James's view, unreasonable.

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[55] More precisely: James writes that "You … may … be ready to be duped many times in your investigation rather than postpone indefinitely the chance of guessing true." (WB 24-25).

James holds, then, that these considerations challenge, if not refute, Clifford's insistence on requiring "sufficient evidence" for legitimate believing. Indeed, James writes that Clifford's standard for reasonable belief is "the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophic cave" (WB 32).[56]

James concludes, then, that Clifford's evidentialism is, at best, too high a standard for reasonable believing and, by extension, for reasonable religious believing. As noted above, for James, if the use of Clifford's evidentialist standard would prevent one from acknowledging certain kinds of truth (assuming that it could be present), then that standard is itself unreasonable**.** James's view is that Clifford's standard is not impartial. It takes a side – effectively determining certain beliefs, such as religious beliefs, to be a priori illegitimate – and it goes against the pragmatist's duty to seek truth. In short, James would claim that he and Clifford are *not* just offering competing standards of reasonable believing; James's approach is more reasonable.

Defending the legitimacy of believing without sufficient evidence, albeit qualified, may be worrisome, but James would likely note that his own view is not as extreme as it might appear (and as some have since taken it). As noted above, James holds that, i) if strong evidence is available for a belief, then one should seek and get it (though what counts as strong evidence may, admittedly, be a matter of debate), and ii) if it is not a momentous issue – i.e., where "the need of acting" is not so urgent – then one need not make a choice until additional evidence has come in (WB 26). In other words, where the matter is trivial (e.g., the consequences are not irreversible); where the hypotheses involved are not 'live' (e.g., we are indifferent to them); and where the choice is not forced (e.g., where we can wait and continue our investigations), we do not have a 'right to believe.’ This may be the case with, for example, decisions concerning many scientific questions; must one decide now, *at this moment*, for example, whether Richard Leakey's theories on the origin of the human species, or those of his opponents, are true? As James writes, “the need of acting is *seldom* so urgent that a false belief to act on is better than no belief at all” (WB 26, emphasis mine). And James suggests that this latter situation applies to most decisions – that the circumstances warranting the ‘right to believe’ do not arise all that often. (Recall Madden’s comment that James was far from credulous in his arguments.[57])

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[56] Madden argues that the vagueness or misunderstanding of James here was also due to James's wish "*to put the Cliffords and Huxleys in their place***,** so to speak, and hence [he] pushed his stronger version of the will to believe to the extent that his weaker version, also present, was likely to go unnoticed." (Madden 1979: xxiv, emphasis mine).

Thus, James concludes that, in some situations, it is reasonable – it ‘pays’, it ‘works well,’ and so on – for one to adopt or continue believing certain beliefs, perhaps very basic religious beliefs[58], for which one has no conclusive external evidence, provided that they are ‘live’, momentous, and forced, **or** that they ‘fit’ with other beliefs that we have.

It is, however, unclear whether this right or reasonableness extends to many specific, more doctrinal or dogmatic, religious beliefs. Many of the more theological religious ‘hypotheses’ may not be fully understood or grasped or acted on by those who hold them. And, as we have seen, James has raised questions about their intelligibility and has little time for “dogmatic theology.” Still, any exclusion of dogma, here, cannot be based on James’s conditions for a right to believe.

Whether James is right about there being such a right to believe, and whether he is right about believing on less than sufficient evidence, have been challenged by many – but such a discussion would bring us away from the focus of this study. All that I wish to show here are what James means, and why it seems that he holds that it can reasonable for one can believe without sufficient evidence.

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[57] Madden argues that “Far from being credulous, James suffered from incredulity. He made far less use of his right-to-believe religious hypotheses than his ardent defense of this right would suggest. Anyone who has read the biographies of James, and his letters, is struck with the fact that, far from jumping to conclusions he wanted to believe, James could scarcely make up his mind on any issue” (Madden 1979: xxiii-xxiv).

[58] James writes, for example, that “the practical needs and experiences of religion *seem to me sufficiently met* by the belief that beyond each man and in a fashion continuous with him there exists a larger power

9.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided the context for a very different way of looking at the reasonability of religious belief. Most theologians and writers on religion, in the late 19th and early 20th century, largely abandoned the use of arguments and proofs based on 'external evidence' in order to establish the reasonableness of religious belief. And when William James approached the question of the reasonableness of religious belief, he did so from an unusual perspective – from the phenomenology of religious experience, not from any theological or religious perspective.

This chapter focused on what seems to be a positive argument for the reasonableness of religious belief, based on: James's account of religious or mystical experience; his articulation of a pragmatist theory of justification which provides a general structure for determining the reasonableness of a belief and of believing; and his critique of evidentialism and its implications for a 'right to believe.'

In comparison with what we have seen in earlier chapters, James provides a striking alternative approach to the meaning, truth and reasonability of religious belief, and in several respects. Interpreting James's views is, as noted earlier, challenging – in no small part because there are a number of tensions in his writings, and James seems frequently hesitant to state his considered views clearly and unambiguously.[59] For example, what, exactly, James believed in matters of religion is not clear. He does seem to believe that there is 'an unseen world', and that it can be reasonable to believe in matters beyond the purely natural or physical. His approach was to look at experience – all experience – and what this suggests, or should suggest, to the independent observer. But what the content of religion is, as we have seen, is not obvious.

Nevertheless, there are several respects in which the distinctiveness of James's views is clear, and in which new perspectives on religious belief or on reasoning come into the

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which is friendly to him and to his ideals. All that the facts require is that the power should be both other and larger than our conscious selves" (VRE 413, emphasis mine).

[59] As Edward Madden has noted, as indicated earlier, "Anyone who has read the biographies of James, and his letters, is struck with the fact that, far from jumping to conclusions he wanted to believe, James could scarcely make up his mind on any issue. He vacillated constantly and required much convincing" (Madden 1979: xxiii).

foreground. In many of the authors discussed in this study, the focus was on the nature of belief, especially on particular religious beliefs – what such beliefs mean, how they could be known to be true, and whether and how it can be reasonable to believe them. In this chapter, however, and unlike the other authors studied, James's views on religious belief and the reasonability of believing do not directly address articles of faith or religious traditions. James's focus is on the phenomenon of religious experience, and not – at least, not primarily – about matters of what can and cannot be proven about religious belief. And James proceeds, as we have seen, by offering a distinctive and new approach to truth, to proof, and to religious belief.

For example, first, James's pragmatism, with its alternative to the correspondence theory of truth that one finds in earlier authors, focuses on truth and proof as 'what is consistent', 'what works,' and 'what fits.' Thus, truth – the truth of a proposition – can be seen, not as a matter of mirroring or representing reality, but as the outcome of an activity or practice. The criteria for truth reflect, then, the ends of the particular practice in which one is engaged. But, of course, practices can change. And to the extent that a proposition or a belief is useful or productive, James writes, it may be true – without insisting that it will always be true. James also argues that the evidentialist, particularly Clifford's evidentialist, view is too abstract and too broad – setting one standard for all practices and activities, and not paying adequate attention to differences among them. His view, to be precise, is not that Clifford's view is 'false', but that it is not always useful and does not always 'lead' one forward – in other words, it does not reflect what James would say is a more 'pragmatic' approach to reasonability and truth. But James was similarly critical of views that held broad, abstract standards of reasonability and truth – Absolute idealism, but also theologies and religions such as Catholicism, which insist on speculative doctrines.

Second, James exhibits a different understanding of the nature of religious belief. Sometimes, religious belief (and what makes religious belief, religious) is simply a matter of origin – i.e., that a religious belief is something that follows on religious experience. Thus, James writes that "Religious experience… spontaneously and inevitably engenders myths, superstitions, dogmas, creeds, and metaphysical theologies…" (VRE 342). Sometimes, religious belief appears to be defined in terms of its function – that it is an 'organising' or a comprehensive claim, or, arguably, an overbelief or 'faith venture' (Pr 144). James is not, as we have seen, interested in articles of faith or theological dogma, presumably because intellectual articulation of religious experience falls far short of the initial experience, but also because it is not clear, at least to James, how far many doctrines or dogmas genuinely "lead" "to consistency, stability, and flowing human intercourse" (Pr 103). While James defends the reasonability of believing some religious beliefs, he is not interested in all religious beliefs, and his account of religious belief itself is, as noted in this chapter, rather thin.[60] It is not so much the content of a religious belief that interests James (for the content of religious experiences is sometimes rather difficult to describe), but what one does with that belief.

And so, third, when it comes to the truth of, and the reasonableness of believing, James's primary interest is not whether religious belief is proven, but whether it is useful – not simply where or how it fits, but what it does and where it leads. James acknowledges that religious belief, and perhaps some particular religious belief***s***, can be reasonable to the individual who has certain (e.g., religious) experiences. But James is not a subjectivist. He suggests that there is a kind of non-subjective truth for some religious beliefs so far as the believer engages in the world. (He even seems to hold that one may seek evidence for one's overbeliefs [see Pr 144, and Hollinger (2015: 133)].) He also holds that some doctrines are "scientifically absurd," though it is possible to have "mediation between different believers" and a "consensus of opinion" (VRE 359) about whether certain beliefs are true. In this way, it seems that it is reasonable to believe some propositions, e.g., concerning the "reality of an unseen order" (see VRE 51), if one can function effectively on them. Given this emphasis on the usefulness of religious belief, James also calls on contemporary 'philosophy of religion' to "abandon metaphysics and deduction for criticism and induction, and frankly transform herself from theology into science of religions" (VRE 359). In David Hollinger's words, James advocates for “practical religion,” “pluralistic and moralistic religion,” and especially a science of religion, understanding a science of religion to be “an empirically oriented, publicly warranted inquiry” – but drawing on individual, private religious experience (Hollinger 2015: 118) – “that James envisaged as a successor discipline to ‘philosophy of religion’” and theology (Hollinger 2004: 9). Reasonableness, therefore, can mean having passed the demands of such an enquiry, such that one will have "eliminate[d] doctrines that are now known to be scientifically absurd or incongruous" (VRE 359) – though, if this is so, it is not clear how far one may be able to retain a belief in something divine.

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[60] Some may object that James's view of the relation of religion and evidence 'reduces' the status of religious beliefs to 'empirical hypotheses.' This, however, would entail that they are subject to general empirical criteria for truth and falsity (which James seems to deny), but is also inconsistent with what James recognizes as their own epistemically 'authoritative' and dispositional character. James's view of the relations between belief and evidence, then, clearly needs a more careful working out.

Finally, unlike many of the authors treated in this study, James insists that ‘reasonableness’ may require an intelligent, but also personal move beyond the evidence, and here James rejects the views of evidentialists like Clifford who seem to restrict reasonability to the possession of sufficient evidence. Still, as shown above, James’s view does not give one carte blanche to believe what one will, and the restrictions on the ‘right to believe’ are more significant than some recognise.

In comparison with earlier discussions of the reasonability of religious belief, however, some of the features of these accounts have receded from view in James’s analysis. No longer is one to focus on particular doctrines or articles of faith, and the relevance of religious traditions – Catholic, Anglican, dissenter, even Christianity as a whole – also seems to recede. Similarly, matters of proof and sufficient evidence, where applicable, are no longer issues that do or even need engage all theologians or people of faith, or are generally either internal to practices or activities. At best, then, one has an argument for religious belief (or perhaps overbelief) in broad terms, and for the reasonability of believing. Such arguments for reasonable believing, however, lead at best only to a rather modest set of particular religious beliefs. Even latitudinarian accounts would seem to go too far.

Where, then, does the preceding discussion leave the theologian and scholar of religion? By the early 20th century, the issue of the reasonableness of religious belief in the Anglo-American world seems to have become, at best, something that is private or internal to a religious tradition or denomination or faith, and the cognitive content of such belief something that is generic and non-doctrinal. Discussion overall is far removed from the arguments by Tillotson and Hume, or by Paley and Clifford. Not only has what counts as proof changed, but what counts as religious belief – how it fits with the popular understanding of it, and whether it has a dispositional character that is part of its sense – has changed so much, that one may well wonder whether many of the figures discussed in this volume would be seen as participating in the same debate.

It should be no surprise, then, why it was that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, proofs of religion and religious belief were no longer central in theology and philosophy. Not only is such discussion of reasonableness no longer a key concern in theology and philosophy, but it is not clear what, exactly, the content of religion can be. And when criticism of religious belief arises later in the 20th century, it shifts from being focussed on lack of proof and 'insufficient evidence,' to the more fundamental issue of whether it is even cognitively meaningful.

It is time, then, to take stock of what has been shown throughout the preceding chapters.

Chapter 10

Evaluation and conclusion

10.1 Introduction

Today, when people talk about the reasonableness or unreasonableness of religious belief or religious believing, or about religious beliefs being reasonable or unreasonable, it is often taken for granted that religious belief (or at least some religious beliefs) should be provable. The criteria for provability have frequently been taken to be, or reflect, an epistemology that is evidentialist and, it has sometimes been claimed, foundationalist. And further, some argue, if religious belief(s) cannot be so proven, it is unreasonable (and, perhaps, also unethical) to believe them or, if one believes them already, one ought to stop.

This latter view is that of the so-called ‘New Atheists’. For example, Richard Dawkins writes: “Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is the belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence” (Dawkins, cited in Ruse 2010). Similarly, Andrew Johnson holds that “all religious beliefs are based on insufficient evidence.” Those who hold them, then, are guilty of “intellectual sloth” (Johnson 2013: 18). And Sam Harris holds that “atheism is … [simply] reason and a demand for evidence in the face of religiously sanctioned false certainly [sic; it should read ‘certainty’]” (Harris 2007).

Yet, as we have seen in the present study, the discussion of the reasonability of religious belief and, more broadly, of the role or place of reason and proof in religious belief, has a long history. It is one that can be traced to antiquity, but it is also one that is present within theology itself.

The aim of the present study has been to look at a part of this discussion that occurred in Anglo-American theology and philosophical theology from the mid 17th to the early 20th centuries, and to ask: What did it mean to speak of the reasonableness of religious belief and of religious believing? What was the role of reason and evidence in relation to reasonability? and Was this influenced by how the notion of religious belief was understood? In the process, a number of subsidiary issues were raised: Were reasonability, proof, and religious belief always seen in the same way – or as they are often seen today? If not, then in what ways *were* they seen, and might this tell us something important about religious belief, but also about reason, proof, and evidence, and their role in the reasonability of religious belief?

The present study also invites the question of whether this earlier discussion gives any guidance for discussion today – for it seems that discussion of the reasonability of religious belief is today often intractable. Might this earlier discussion provide insights or options that have been overlooked, ignored, or forgotten, in the current debate? Does one need today, for example, a broader account of religious belief, or a more careful account of the nature of reasonability and proof?

In this study, I have argued that, when we look at some of the principal figures in the history of Anglo-American philosophical theology, while they address the theme of the reasonability of believing religious belief(s), they are not all doing the same thing. From the mid 17th to the early 20th centuries, religious belief and the roles of reason and proof were not always seen in the same way. What we find instead, I have claimed, is that, underlying these differences are further differences in presuppositions and parameters.

In order to provide an evaluation of the preceding discussion of the reasonableness of religious belief from the mid 17th to the early 20th centuries, I begin by offering a short summary of the earlier chapters. I then enter into a brief analysis and discussion of the key similarities, differences, and shifts: How has the 'reasonableness' of religious belief been seen? How does this reflect understandings of religious belief, argument, and proof? and What is the significance of the various shifts? Following this, I make some comments on the relevance of the results to systematic theology, and conclude with some remarks on where discussion may go from here.

10.2 Summary of chapters

I began, in Chapter 1, by providing some background on the problem motivating this study, indicating the method and theoretical framework, and providing a review of the literature, noting how this study fits within the scholarship on the Anglo-American theological tradition.

In Chapter 2, I turned to a presentation, analysis, and discussion of two of the major figures in early Anglo-American theology, William Chillingworth and John Tillotson. At a time of significant theological and religious controversy, Chillingworth sets out the issue of the reasonableness of religious belief by seeking to discern what beliefs are necessary for one to be a (good) Christian, and how religious beliefs had both a descriptive and dispositional character. Readers will have noted that Chillingworth argues that reason and the evidence of one's senses can be used *within* theology at least to exclude some beliefs as unreasonable, but also to show which articles of faith or beliefs may need to be affirmed by Christians. Tillotson adopts a similar approach, drawing, again, on reason within the limits of Christian faith, in order to identify or determine the reasonableness or unreasonableness of key theological beliefs.

Chillingworth and Tillotson both influenced John Locke. In Chapter 3, therefore, I turned to Locke's account of belief, reason, and proof in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, but also in his writings on 'the reasonableness of Christianity.' What was found in Chapter 3, on Locke, is greater care in defining and explaining key concepts, but also an argument that the existence of God can be demonstrated, and that Christianity, understood as those beliefs that are necessary to salvation, is 'reasonable,' based on a balance of probabilities. In the process, we saw that Locke showed, at least indirectly, that, given the limits of human knowledge, one ought to take care in speaking about what was required for Christian religious belief – supporting the claim that Locke was a latitudinarian, though not a Socinian, in his theology.

In Chapter 4, we saw how David Hume adopted and adapted some of Locke's epistemology, but then apparently used it against religion and articles of faith. We saw that Hume reinforced the Lockean view of religious belief as primarily propositional, descriptive, but not dispositional. While his views on belief and proof build on those of Locke, we saw that it was his analysis and critique of theological and religious claims, more than his positive views, that had an impact both in his own time and in later theology. Altogether, then, in the period from the mid 17th to the later 18th century, reason and proof are recognised as having an important role in theology in determining what one should or should not believe, but gradually also what religious beliefs one can or should believe in general.

Although the 18th century is generally regarded as a period of scepticism and sustained critique of religion, it was also a time of increasing efforts within theology to explain and reinforce religious belief. Two of the important theological writers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries were William Paley and Richard Whately. On their view, basic theological claims, and the Christian religion as a whole, could have a justification such that, on a balance of probabilities, it was reasonable to believe them; these accounts were called ‘evidences,’ and those who gave them, ‘evidentialists.’ In Chapter 5, we saw how Paley understood belief, religious belief, and proof, and how it was that Paley believed he could show, even to those outside of religion, the reasonability of basic theological claims – e.g., the existence of God, the internal coherence of scripture, and the reliability of testimony concerning Christian origins. Readers will have noted that, to a greater degree than his predecessors, Paley lays out the evidence that he believes makes it reasonable to hold key religious beliefs, and holds that such evidence is easily within the reach of most people of faith – though he admits that his arguments do not extend into matters of dogma. (Indeed, Paley admitted that they could not.) In Chapter 6, I turned to Richard Whately, who provides a robust evidentialist account, though Whately takes greater care than many of his predecessors on matters of argument and proof. Whately insists that sufficient evidence can be given for at least basic beliefs, and that, in fact, it ought to be able to be given. Through the medium of popular books on Christian evidences, but also through writings on logic and rhetoric, we saw how Whately constructed arguments for basic theological and religious beliefs in a way that could not only assure believers but, presumably, convince anyone with an open mind. In the discussion of Paley and Whately, then, we saw a modern statement of evidentialism – of the claim that religious belief and, more importantly, religious believing, was reasonable, based on criteria external to religious belief – but that there were other ways, consistent with reason, that led as well to basic religious belief. (The two also reminded their readers and listeners that to believe is not just a state of mind, or to hold that a proposition is true, but is dispositional – indicating the relevance of acting on the belief.)

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 provided three responses to this evidentialism and, indirectly, to some of the earlier figures discussed. The first response was that of John Henry Newman. As we saw in Chapter 7, Newman not only knew well Whately's evidentialism, but had been deeply involved in the writing of Whately's *Logic* and, though to a lesser extent, his *Rhetoric* (Corbett [1980: 402]; cf Corbett [1982]). Newman's response, though, was not so much to challenge Whately's presentation of methods of reasoning and proof, but to question whether and, if so, how far Whately's methods contributed to understanding the grounds that people in fact had for religious belief, and whether these methods were effective in bringing people to religious belief. Newman offered, instead, a more nuanced understanding of religious belief and, particularly, assent. Newman also supplies an analysis of different kinds of reason, and a robust account of the 'illative sense' that provides a non-formal means of acquiring reasonable belief and of believing reasonably.

Another response, noted in Chapter 8, was to embrace evidentialism and to extend it – to make it a norm for coming to belief and for reasonable believing in general. We saw how William Clifford, for example, not only embraced evidentialism as a method for reasonability in all spheres of enquiry, but used it against religious belief. Clifford does not direct his criticisms explicitly against theistic evidentialists, but we saw from the theological response to his writings that such theists are among his targets. Admittedly, Clifford does not and need not see his version of evidentialism as setting standards that are unduly onerous, and he presumably embraced the 'judicial-like' model that one finds in Paley and Whately. That being said, given Clifford's unduly narrow and limited account of religious belief as descriptive and propositional, if such belief cannot meet the evidentialist standard, it is unreasonable to believe.

A third response of the 19th and early 20th centuries, however, was to go beyond evidentialism – that, again, while evidentialism was certainly appropriate to belief, including religious belief, it was not the only means of acquiring religious belief reasonably, and not the only ground for believing reasonably. In Chapter 9, then, I looked at William James, identifying a distinctive approach to the reasonability of religious belief, not through or in order to engage theology, but through a phenomenology of religion. James's effort to engage religion and religious experience empirically belies the assertions of those who claim that he is a fideist. As noted in that chapter, while James does not support or defend dogmatic and abstract theological claims, he does provide a ground and an empirical method for holding that some religious beliefs are reasonable. James also provides a mechanism – using his notions of overbelief and the right to believe – by which one may, arguably, go further than James did in defending Christian doctrine.

With this short summary in mind, I now move to an analysis and discussion of the principal results of this study, identifying some of the differences in the ways in which the 'reasonableness' of religious belief has been seen, showing how this reflects differences in understandings of religious belief, reason, and proof, and briefly summarizing the significance of such differences and shifts.

10.3 Discussion

As described in the second chapter of this study, in the Anglo-American tradition of systematic and philosophical theology, among the very first questions to be raised was: What beliefs must one hold in order to be a Christian? In early Protestant theologians, such as William Chillingworth and John Tillotson (and, perhaps, in John Locke as well), when it comes to the question of what beliefs a religious believer must or can hold, the issue was not the reasonability of believing as such, or whether religious beliefs as such were reasonable, or whether it was reasonable to be a Christian. Rather, the primary issue was: What, specifically, is it that one must believe in order to be a Christian? Reason, it was claimed, is useful here – understanding that reason is a *tool*, and not *the judge*.

In this 'formative phase,' the term 'faith' was used in various contexts to refer to an assent, to that to which one assents (i.e., "the faith"), and to a disposition of trust in it. Religious beliefs were generally 'articles of faith.' They were cognitive, conceptual, and descriptive, and generally required, as part of what they meant, the believer acting on them. Not acting on a belief generally implied that one did not, in fact, believe it. Understanding religious belief, then, involved understanding what it meant in scripture, tradition, and practice, and more. Chillingworth and Tillotson, however, distinguished matters of religious practice or convention from matters of faith.

In this context, Christianity was taken for granted by the various interlocutors, and so Christian belief in general was considered to be reasonable. But the question for these early theologians, such as Chillingworth, was *which* particular propositions should be believed by a Christian, and these theologians argued that reason has a role here. These authors held that tradition, by itself, was not reliable or sufficient, and hence recourse to reason and empirical evidence were necessary. While these authors did not say, explicitly, what ‘reason’ is, they meant something like ‘the capacity to see what is true, based on the evidence of the senses.’

Reason, then, has the role of a tool for settling certain theological disputes. Thus, Chillingworth and Tillotson held that certain religious beliefs or doctrines (e.g., purgatory) were without evidence or reason, and others (e.g., transubstantiation) were unacceptable (incoherent) because they were inconsistent with what one knows by sense. Moreover, although reason is supported by religion and revelation and, therefore, is not independently authoritative, for Tillotson, for example, some religious beliefs or articles of faith can also be proven. Such proofs, using the standard of the prudent or reasonable person, and with argument and proof as proportional to the subject, are productive of *moral* certainty, and are reasonable to believe, though they are not “demonstrable” (i.e., are claims of which one can be logically certain). This being said, there was nevertheless some hesitation about how far the role of reason extended – for Chillingworth and Tillotson insisted that reason occurs within the limits of revelation and faith, and is subordinate to them. Recall that many divines took care not to claim that reason was the standard for all religious truth, for to do so was viewed as Socianism.

These theologians did not claim to be beginning from some ‘neutral starting point’ in making such arguments. Religion, specifically Christianity, was the context and the basic world view that set up the parameters in which reason had sense and a function –

arguably similar to what later were called 'antecedent probabilities.' Moreover, which beliefs were subject to reason were not, in fact, many; the aim was not to make religious belief overall reasonable; and which particular religious beliefs needed to be believed in order for one to have faith was not clear. Religious belief was held to be cognitive, related to what can be found in scripture, and to have an essential relation to action. All the same, Tillotson, for example, was reluctant to expect one to, or to force one to, believe anything that one does not understand or will, and also held that one cannot be dogmatic in insisting that one explicitly believe all the beliefs associated with Christianity.

In short, reasonability is not only *not* to believe what opposes reason and sense, but also not to be obliged to believe that which one does not understand. In a way, the integrity of one's believing takes priority over 'orthodox' teaching about 'the faith.' Further, reasonability does not require that one believe only that which one can prove, for some religious beliefs cannot be proven (e.g., concerning the Trinity), and yet one may be called to believe them. What is particularly noteworthy at this early stage of the discussion of the reasonableness of religious belief, is that reason is seen to be (at least in part) within the limits of faith, and involved in ensuring the consistency of religious belief with what is known by sense. Moreover, articles of faith carry with them a dispositional or normative character – i.e., that one must act on them or else one literally does not believe them.

What is missing from these early views, however, is that what makes a religious belief or article of faith *distinctively* religious is not explained. Moreover, the criteria for 'reason' and 'proof' are not fully developed, and when and how reason is to be brought to bear on articles of faith are not fully laid out, so that, in the end, the reasonability of religious belief is more a presumption than something that is grounded on explicit evidence.

Soon, however, as seen in Chapters 3 and 4, there was a shift in the understanding of the reasonability of religious belief. While Locke is not generally regarded as a theologian, his interest in theology was, as noted earlier, substantial and nuanced. He was greatly influenced by Chillingworth, and was close to Tillotson as well (recall Locke [1979: 5:237-238]). But there were differences. For example, while Locke did address the question of which beliefs it is necessary for a Christian to believe – and also, in some cases, which one should not – his principal objective was broader, to determine what beliefs in general human beings are ‘fitted’ to believe, and, by extension, to provide clear criteria for reasonable believing. In addition to addressing some of the concerns of Chillingworth and Tillotson, then, Locke also made a sustained effort in identifying which religious beliefs one can demonstrate, which one can prove, and what the characteristics are of those which one cannot.

Unlike Chillingworth and Tillotson, Locke did not approach the reasonability of faith and religious belief simply from within the Christian religion, and he did not see reason as lying within (or being tempered by) religion. Moreover, his professed objective “to discover what kind of things God has fitted us to know” included whether one could know (and, hence, be reasonable in believing) that there was a God, and whether one could be reasonable in believing articles of faith and in believing Christianity. Faith he regarded as an assent to propositions revealed by the divine and, hence, certain. But many or most religious beliefs are not revealed directly by the divine, but are interpretations of and conclusions drawn from Biblical texts and religious traditions – and so they enjoy at best a ‘probability.’ The extent to which one is reasonable in believing them was to be determined by recourse to probabilistic reasoning, with the result that, on Locke’s view, it was not strictly necessary that many articles of faith be believed by anyone, including those claiming to be Christians. However, while this latitudinarian view about what one reasonably must believe may not be too far from Tillotson’s, Locke is clear that, to have confidence in one’s faith, and to know that something was a proposition revealed by the divine, faith itself was not enough – one had to use reason. Faith, then, was ultimately subject to reason and evidence.

Locke is also more rigorous than his predecessors in articulating the criteria for reasonable believing; he is more careful in identifying the standards for demonstration and proof, and the criteria for degrees of probability. Moreover, his standards for demonstration are more demanding – for Locke seems to have held what was later called ‘foundationalism,’ i.e., the view that ‘for one to have sufficient evidence to hold a belief (i.e., to hold a belief rationally), this belief must be either self-evident, an incorrigible report of experience, or evident to the senses, or deducible from such beliefs.’ In the end, for Locke, only God’s existence can be “demonstrated”; other religious beliefs had, as noted above, only probability or varying degrees of certainty.

Another important difference from Locke’s predecessors is that the concept of faith or religious belief, here, is narrower than what one finds in Chillingworth and Tillotson (i.e., it seems to be simply an assent to particular propositions as the product of, or based on, certain relations of ideas or evidence or reason. There is nothing that makes such beliefs distinctively religious). An exception, arguably, is faith; faith is an assent to a proposition based on an authority and which one knows as coming from God. Other than that, however, there seems to be nothing fundamentally distinctive about, for example, the epistemic status or character of most religious beliefs. Thus, while there is, in Locke, a clearer account of religious belief in relation to proof, there is also a shift from his predecessors.

So while Locke is interested in some of the same issues as Chillingworth and Tillotson, and while his precisions sustain many of their conclusions, his discussion goes far beyond theirs – to knowledge and belief in general. Locke takes more care in stating what can be known and reasonably believed. At the same time, he also has a narrower understanding of religious belief or articles of faith – what they are and what they expect of the believer (e.g., action). This arguably affects how one is to understand their meaning.

It is worth noting here that, as we have seen through much of this study, Locke’s views had a powerful influence on later writers in Britain and the American colonies concerning the standard for reasonable believing and on the relevance of argument and evidence to belief. While many did not follow Locke’s views rigorously, they did take account of his understanding of demonstration and proof and his view that statements of religious belief are not just theological matters but are subject to a more general epistemological standard and proof.

As we saw in Chapter 4, David Hume introduces further distinctions into the understanding of argument as well as into the concept of belief. Moreover, not only religious belief, but reasonability itself, is subject to analysis and critique. As we have seen, in some respects, Hume seems simply to be extending Locke’s epistemology but, in so doing, he challenged claims and conclusions concerning the reasonability of believing religious beliefs that Locke likely would have allowed.

Hume’s role in the discussion of the reasonability of religious belief is paradoxical. On the one hand, on Hume’s view, religious belief and faith fail. This is largely a consequence of Hume’s additional or new criteria for what is required for the reasonability of believing *any*thing. Hume introduces several precisions or changes about what probabilistic arguments can prove; about causality and what any inference from a putative effect can establish about its ‘cause’; about arguments from experience and testimony; and, arguably, about the meaningfulness of religious and metaphysical claims. Little, strictly speaking, seems to meet Hume’s standard of what counts as reasonable believing, although there are arguably tensions, if not inconsistencies, in his account of belief. One also finds in Hume a thinner account of religious belief and faith than that found in his predecessors – even Locke. ‘Faith’ itself is not defined, and what makes a religious belief religious is also unclear; at best, it is that it is simply a belief called an article of faith by a religious group or sect, or a belief held by believers as part of their religious views. All articles of faith or belief, then, are understood simply as putative descriptive propositions, and Hume’s analyses of miracles, the existence and characteristics of a designer of the universe, religious dogmas such as transubstantiation, and the content of ‘volumes of divinity,’ leave the possibility of reasonable belief in religious beliefs radically limited, if not entirely eliminated.

Hume does seem to allow for the reasonability (though he does not call it such) of certain ‘natural beliefs’ or beliefs based on custom. But his underlying explanation or justification for believing in such cases is not clear, and, in any case, it does not seem to extend to religious belief.

Hume’s ‘positive’ account of belief, proof, and evidence, as described in Chapter 4, were not particularly helpful in understanding whether and when one might be reasonable in believing religious belief or in having faith. One may, arguably, fault Hume for not describing accurately what believers were, or thought they were, doing in believing and in uttering religious beliefs. In any event, his analysis of belief, proof, and evidence seem to have had little direct influence on later discussion. Hume’s *criticisms* of religion did, however, have a significant impact on how many later writers engaged the discussion concerning the reasonability of believing, and those criticisms arguably determined and further shifted the conditions for discussion: empirical evidence, and what one can infer from such evidence, became the focus of argument and proof; anything non-natural or not knowable by experience was appealed to less and less in the discussion of the reasonability of believing religious beliefs. Similarly, for Hume, believing something became more clearly taken to be a matter of simply holding cognitive, descriptive propositions; any connection with one acting on such beliefs seems to have become immaterial to what they meant. (This is no surprise; recall that Hume held that no normative propositions could follow from a descriptive proposition.) By reaffirming the need for empirical proofs, and narrowing the concept of what a religious belief is, the reasonableness of religious belief became simply a matter of looking at the amount of empirical evidence for it.

By the end of this ‘formative phase’ of the discussion of the reasonableness of religious belief and of religious believing, the present study has shown, there had been several shifts in the meaning of terms and the criteria for argument and proof. Moreover, Locke’s articulation of the criteria or standards for knowledge and reasonable believing, and Hume’s identification of some key criticisms of religion, were taken up by subsequent generations of theologians in a way that effectively continued to shift not only the discussion of the reasonability of belief, but the meaning of key concepts.

For William Paley and Richard Whately, ‘evidences’ became the central concern in the discussion of the reasonability of believing and in the reasonability of religious belief – and these men and some of their associates came to be regarded as *the* evidentialists.[1] While intuition is not excluded as a means of acquiring religious belief, it had little or no direct role in their approaches – Paley stating explicitly that the evidences are so clear, that intuition is not needed. One found some continuity in approach and method with earlier authors; for example, Paley and Whately engage the discussion of the reasonableness of religious believing and belief and, more broadly, the relation between faith and reason and evidence, largely on the terms laid out by Locke. Paley and Whately also have in mind the same public as Hume and, arguably, Locke – i.e., a public larger than the audience ‘internal’ to Christianity, engaged by Chillingworth and Tillotson.

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[1] See Chapter 5, note 5, above.

Yet Paley and Whately do not follow closely many of the earlier distinctions about the forms of argument and the nature of believing, and their focus is on the “foundations of faith” – i.e., the truth of Christianity (as a whole) and the reasonableness of believing the accounts of the New Testament Apostles, recorded in scripture, rather than all religious and theological doctrines and dogmas. Further, they also seem to allow that some religious belief is *sui generis* – that there are some truths, particularly doctrinal truths, that ought properly to be dealt with independently of ‘empirical’ arguments. For example, as we saw in Chapter 5, while not wavering from the desirability or the need for evidence for key religious beliefs, Paley notes the role of ‘internal evidence’ for a belief from within the lived experience of a believer. Moreover, Paley seems to allow that theology may be considered separately or as a separate discourse, from discussions of more basic religious belief, and that considering and believing some religious beliefs may involve “a different way of thinking,” and a recognition that “there are other truths that cannot be known” without faith. While argument and evidence are present in such discourse, what kind of evidence or argumentation are involved is not discussed – and it does suggest an interesting qualification of the demand that reasonable believing be determined solely by probabilistic empirical arguments. There are, then, noticeable differences in Paley and Whately’s approach to the reasonability of believing religious beliefs in comparison with those of their predecessors.

While Paley and Whately largely ignore Hume’s ‘positive’ views on proof, belief, and reasonability, we see in Chapters 5 and 6 that they sought, at least indirectly, to meet his critique of religion and religious belief. Thus, we find in them a distinct and nuanced view of what is involved in the reasonability of believing: of argument, proof, and the place of testimony; the use of an Aristotelian model of induction in argument (which, arguably, avoids some of the criticisms by Hume concerning induction); a more robust view of the use of evidence and testimony that appeals to a ‘legal’ or ‘jurisprudential’ model of evidence, sufficient evidence, and proof; and reference to ‘internal evidences’ for religious belief. Paley and Whately also gave significant attention, moreover, to the *preconditions* for proof or demonstration. In Paley, it is the recognition that arguments appear in contexts, and that there is, therefore, a ‘burden of proof’ on views that challenge the established view, and that must be met. Moreover, Paley also seems to acknowledge that one’s faith or basic religious beliefs may serve as a ‘way of understanding’ or a ‘way of thinking.’ In Whately, too, one finds an explicit discussion of the presence and role of antecedent probability – which indicates the importance of presumptions and context in the construction and reception of all arguments, and which would seem to allow that there may be a faith-grounded way of thinking and reasoning.

As noted in Chapter 5, Paley took a systematic approach in attempting to show that one is reasonable in believing certain religious beliefs. His major apologetic works began with a volume on the historical coherence of the Pauline letters, through to arguments for the reasonableness of early Christian accounts, to a defence of the foundational claims of Christianity and, arguably, all ‘natural religion,’ such as the existence of a designer deity. In much of his work, one will recall, Paley sought to provide empirical evidence for specific religious beliefs in a way that he believed would satisfy an independent judge. And, overall, when it came to indicating what it meant to be reasonable in believing (i.e., reasonable in holding such religious beliefs), Paley stated that it was not that one needed to provide an argument which meets a foundationalist standard, but simply provide proof based on observation, testimony, and probability, such as that required in legal cases.

While Paley may also seem to have held a broadly Humean conception of the nature of religious belief – that religious beliefs are fundamentally propositional, have a basis or ground in evidence, and involve an intellectual assent – he added that these beliefs also have a dispositional character – i.e., they do not simply describe a state of affairs but include a disposition to act on them, and that having such a disposition may lead one to hold other beliefs. This broader understanding of religious belief, then, affected what religious beliefs meant as well as their relation to argument and proof – i.e., what such belief means has implications for how and how far evidence weighs for and against it; this is something that Whately and later authors, such as Newman, seem to have recognised as well. By (re)introducing the importance of acting on it as part of the meaning of a religious belief, Paley has a conception of religious belief that has a distinctive and, by extension, a different character from that of authors such as Hume.

Richard Whately's studies on logic and rhetoric provided increased rigor in making the 'evidentialist' account. Whately emphasised, one will recall, that there is not only an intellectual but a moral danger in not developing one's reasoning, and he insists that, to be reasonable, it is necessary at least to aspire to, if not have, sufficient evidence for one's beliefs – though he did not insist that one must always suspend belief until sufficient evidence is in. 'Sufficient evidence,' then, was evidence relevant to and relative to the subject matter, and proportionate to the degree of assent and the situation of the believer, that was presented in the form of a probabilistic proof which can lead to certainty. Such a proof was not, however, just to be strong enough to lead to one's own assent, but also sufficient for other rational beings to assent. Again, the standard of sufficient evidence that we found in Whately is a legal standard, not a foundationalist one. All the same, he held that this was productive of as much certainty as the subject matter allows. Moreover, like Paley, Whately argued that proofs always appear in a context, and that what is assumed or given in the context bears on the capacity of such a proof to persuade rationally.

When it came to specific arguments defending religious belief, it was noted that, like Paley, Whately did not deal primarily with abstract and theoretical debates concerning doctrine, but, instead, focused on fundamental matters, particularly, the basic claims of Christianity. And, like Paley, Whately rejected the reasonability of any appeal to 'blind faith,' and he was interested in showing that the testimony given in scriptural accounts was reasonable to believe because of the quality of the evidence.

With the evidentialism of Paley and Whately, the terms for the reasonableness of believing and the relation of faith and reason are marked out more clearly than before. To begin with, religious belief is, indeed, propositional – what was later called a 'belief-that' – but also a trust – a 'belief-in', and, in both senses, belief involves acting on it. Moreover, not to have, or not to seek, proofs is to violate not just epistemic and ethical duties, but religious ones. Consequently, 'reasonableness in believing' involved the provision of empirical or publicly observable evidence for at least some basic propositional beliefs of religion.

This evidentialism was considered by some to miss what was essential to religious belief. As one early critic, Mark Pattison, put it, it was “that Old Bailey theology, in which… the Apostles are being tried once a week for the capital crime of forgery” (Pattison 1860: 260). And, as we also saw, Coleridge considered Paley’s and similar authors’ arguments as missing the heart of religious belief – “forgetting that Christianity is not just a theory but rather spirit and life” (Coleridge 1839: 279). Chapters 7 to 9, then, looked at some of the major and more extended responses to this evidentialism.

In the middle and late 19th century, some writers accepted the general Lockean criteria for meaning and proof, but ignored or rejected some of Paley and Whately’s arguments and refinements. Others pressed on with further refinements in the understanding of religious belief and in what is required for reasonably believing a proposition, but rejected the constraints and general terms inherited from Locke and present particularly in Whately. Others still, and for many different reasons, found the evidentialist standard for reasonable believing to be too narrow, or that it excluded or marginalized important phenomena such as religious experience. In other words, through the latter part of the 19th and into the 20th century, there continued to be changes and shifts in the discussion of what religious belief was, and of the reasonability of believing and the relation of reason and evidence to it. We saw that, in many cases, these shifts in the meaning and application of key concepts seem to have been largely unrecognised or ignored by a number of the theological and religious writers of the time, so that there was less and less direct engagement of the issues. Yet we also saw that there were, broadly speaking, three principal responses to the various evidentialist views of religious belief, by authors who defended the possibility of ‘reasonable belief’ and reasonableness in believing.

As we saw in Chapter 7, Newman was very familiar with how Locke and, later, Paley and Whately, approached the reasonability of religious belief, and he acknowledged the appropriateness of these approaches to determining ‘reasonable belief’ and truth about a number of matters. But Newman resisted extending them to religious belief and faith. Newman drew on some of the insights or refinements made, for example, by Whately, in recognising that the starting point of argument and proof reflects the prior commitments of the interlocutors, and that antecedent probability has a role in providing proofs. Nevertheless, he considered Whately’s evidentialism unsuited to the genuine understanding of and discussion about religion and religious belief. Newman, as we saw, regarded the evidentialist approach to religion as productive of, at best, a notional assent, one that would be largely ineffective in leading to or producing real assent, and not relevant to the reasonability of believing religious beliefs.

Thus, Newman shifts the general discussion about the reasonability of believing and of belief by identifying, unlike his predecessors, not only different senses of the concept of 'reason,' but different senses of 'faith,' as well as distinguishing the different kinds of assent to belief. For example, as noted in Chapter 7, Newman takes account, perhaps to a degree that Whately did not, of how specifically antecedent probability needs to be taken into account in argument. Thus, when it comes to argument and proof, particularly on matters of religious belief, Newman states that there is no neutral ground from which discussion begins. Modes of argument and argument itself are contextually determined, and this bears on the issue of the reasonability of believing, for the interlocutors may miss seeing that their arguments, and the weight that they give to putative evidence, rest on prior suppositions. One's illative sense, reflecting these antecedent probabilities in one's reasoning, is the means by which one may be able to identify what counts as evidence and proof, where there may be 'converging probabilities,' and to reach 'reasonable' conclusions. So, while Newman's analysis of the concept of reason, as the capacity for linear thought, allows him to hold that, on many matters, people may share the same or similar kinds of reasoning and the same or similar 'antecedent probabilities,' it also shows that this is not always the case. Reasonability in believing is not unqualified; one is reasonable in light of the assumptions and presuppositions one makes. And, depending on the kind of reasoning one employs, one may find that it is not appropriate to discussing faith. Thus, reasonability seems, as in early authors such as Chillingworth and Tillotson, to be dependent upon prior commitments and, for example, a prior faith.

So, in Newman, evidence and proof are relevant to religious belief and faith; Newman insisted that belief had must have a ground. Still, this does not mean that the believer must have a demonstrative or probabilistic argument for her faith, and Newman held that, given the object of faith, it could be appropriate to believe without conclusive evidence. In the final analysis, then, Newman's interest was on 'internal evidences' and the appeal to conscience, and he argued that, in the discussion of religious belief, there should be a focus on internal conscience rather than external evidence. In these ways, Newman recognises the value of evidence while also rejecting or abandoning it as setting a standard for argument, evidence, and proof for all beliefs.

Like many of his predecessors, then, Newman sees religious belief (or, perhaps more precisely expressed, real assent to religious belief) as cognitive and a matter of truth, and even, like some of them, as 'foundational' in understanding and in action. Newman is cautious about what, exactly, assent involves. While one may assent to propositions which express abstract notions, such assent is only *notional*, and it is in this category, as we have seen, that Newman places many theological claims. It is, rather, the concrete, real assent with which Newman is concerned. For Newman, religious belief requires a *real* assent. This assent has a ground, so that one is 'reasonable' in believing, but neither 'argument' nor 'proof' is a necessary feature of it or of the reasonability of religious belief. Given this view of reason, then, Newman harkens back to an understanding of reason 'within' faith, and shifts away from evidentialist approaches.

William Clifford, as we saw in Chapter 8, broadly accepted the terms and assumptions of Locke and Hume (and, arguably – though he does not mention them as such – of Paley and Whately), e.g., their view that one must or should have evidence and argument for at least, some reasonable believing. Moreover, Clifford understands religious belief in much the way that Hume – and, to a moderate extent, Locke, Paley, and Whately – understood it: religious beliefs are cognitive, descriptive propositions like any other meaningful proposition. Religious beliefs have, as many others had recognised, an important causal connection with action, though what exactly that connection was, Clifford left undefined. This is the principal reason why the issue of the conditions for the reasonability of believing is so important for Clifford – because of his view that believing leads to action.

Despite these affinities with predecessors who emphasised argument and proof, Clifford shifts the focus of the discussion of the reasonability of believing, by employing an evidentialism that appears to be more comprehensive and demanding than that of many of his predecessors. This bears significantly on the issue of reasonableness. For Clifford, the reasonability of believing depends on one having sufficient evidence or proof for the proposition that one believes. And, as we saw, Clifford thought that there was just one ‘method’ for reasonable believing and proof – a method that applies to all believing and all beliefs. While he does not spell out this method in detail, he holds that one has no epistemic or moral right to believe unless one has evidence that addresses all reasonable doubt, i.e., “It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.” (This is in contrast to evidentialists such as Paley and Whately, who were committed to having evidence for reasonable believing, but who did not hold that it was always strictly necessary, and who also held that such a standard was appropriate to accounts of Scripture or the basic theistic beliefs of Christianity, but not to abstract matters of theological doctrine or dogma.) While Clifford’s evidentialist predecessors seemed to allow that, while there could be arguments concerning the inspiration of texts and concerning theology, such arguments might not be accessible to all, Clifford seems to revert to Hume’s approach – i.e., that argument and sufficient evidence need be given for almost all beliefs to which one assents, except what Hume might call ‘natural beliefs.’

As we saw in Chapter 8, Clifford seems to be inspired by Hume in other ways. Like Hume, Clifford appeals at times to ‘the uniformity of nature’ – that no evidence can justify one believing what is outside the uniformity of nature. Indeed, other than for what Clifford called matters of ‘instinct’ or what one might call basic beliefs, there is no hint of any exemption from this more exacting evidentialist standard or any contextualization of different kinds of beliefs: aesthetic, ethical, scientific, and religious. And, further like Hume, when it comes to the meaning of religious beliefs, it seems that Clifford held that they are simply or generally descriptive propositional beliefs that are part of, or refer to, the teachings of a religion, or that are held as such by a believer. While Clifford had been open, early in his career, to the view that religious beliefs were unlike other beliefs, viz., empirical beliefs, and that they were not to be subject to the same epistemological standards, he had abandoned this view by the time of his “The Ethics of Belief.” And while Clifford saw belief as having a dispositional character, he did not appear to consider it as part of the sense or meaning of a belief.

While Clifford’s discussions are notable in their minimal reference to his predecessors or contemporaries, it is clear that, in articulating his robust evidentialism, there are shifts from their views: Clifford ignored or rejected the ‘refinements’ of Lockean empiricism by Paley and Whately and the criticisms of evidentialism by Newman. And while, in certain respects, Clifford follows his predecessors in offering a kind of juridical model or standard of belief, and while he does allow that sometimes one may legitimately act – though not believe – without complete evidence, overall Clifford takes the discussion of the reasonability of religious belief back to Hume. While the question might well be asked whether Clifford's standard meets his own standard and is itself reasonable, and whether his suggestion that religious believing is not reasonable adequately reflects an accurate account of what religious belief is, Clifford’s continuation and extension of evidentialism has not only endured, but has come to be largely regarded as the prototypical evidentialist view.

William James’s approach to the reasonability of religious believing was, in a number of respects, markedly atypical from those of the earlier figures discussed. Unlike the other authors in the present study, James can be seen as providing an ‘external’ perspective on the reasonability of religious believing. As we have seen, James was not an adherent of a creedal religion (though he was raised in a Swedenborgian household), and neither did he argue for agnosticism or atheism – at least, not in any conventional sense; as one author describes him, James was “in-between” (Vernon 2010). James was also not particularly interested in matters of doctrine or dogma or scripture; rather, he was interested in the phenomenon of religious experience, and its effect on people’s lives.

As we saw in Chapter 9, James raised the question of the reasonability of the criteria for reasonable believing – what the criteria are, and what justifies them – and he considered traditional rationalist, empiricist, and evidentialist epistemologies to lead to a dead end. So, while he adopted an empirical approach – what he called ‘radical empiricism’ – he insisted that intellectual enquiry be open to considering fairly all experience. Thus, he responded to and commented on the criteria set by evidentialism, particularly as Clifford seemed to employ them, though James’s interests concerned reasonable belief as a whole.

In James, the criteria for ‘reasonable believing’ are admittedly rather vague; reasonability is determined in view of criteria such as: whether the belief is helpful, useful, and efficacious in (one’s) practical action. More concretely, its truth – and the reasonability involved in believing it – depend on what follows from it, i.e., whether it ‘works best, keeping in mind the aim of the activity,’ and on whether it ‘fits’ with reality, i.e., fits with one’s understanding in the context in which it arises. Reasonable believing, then, is a personal – in some ways, a subjective – matter, as it concerns why the individual concerned, and not any other individual, should believe. (Still, recall that, in his posthumously-published 1906 essay, “Reason and Faith” (James 1927), James speaks of a ‘faith ladder.’ If it is reasonable to move up this ladder, then one can speak of the reasonability of faith.) On matters of distinctively religious belief, however, James is not interested primarily in an external proof, but on how ‘internal’ reasoning or internal evidence may work.

James’s view was shown to be that, properly speaking, religious beliefs are those beliefs that come directly from one’s own experience – specifically, religious experience. The existence of such experience led him and others to such beliefs as ‘There is an unseen order that an individual may apprehend (or, possibly, infer),’ and which may trigger the further belief or conviction that one’s well being is enhanced by orienting oneself to that order. These beliefs are cognitive but, more importantly, serve as “rules for action”; this is part of their meaning and truth. Other putative religious beliefs – those found in religious doctrines (e.g., concerning divine simplicity) – generally do not affect conduct, and, as we saw in the discussion of James, are regarded by James as “destitute of all intelligible significance.” Indeed, it is not even clear that they are, in James’s sense, beliefs. Still, there seem to be other beliefs that may count as religious beliefs on James’s criteria. For example, though James does not discuss explicitly doctrinal beliefs (i.e., “hypotheses,” in James’s sense) such as “God is the source of morality,” if they ‘lead to action,’ they presumably can count as religious beliefs. Further, there are ‘overbeliefs,’ which are explicit intellectual ‘buildings-out’ of other beliefs, but which in some cases may also, I have suggested, be beliefs that reflect the implicit ‘construction’ of the standards by which one judges. In short, for James, so far as such beliefs ‘work best in the way of leading,’ they may count as meaningful religious beliefs.

We find in James still other shifts from the earlier discussion of the reasonability of religious belief. Although James was more concerned with religious experience than the notion of faith, all the same he was, as we have seen, interested in the issue of how such evidence might bear on religious belief. On the one hand, and despite some popular impressions or superficial interpretations of his views, James expected belief to be based, where possible, on reason and evidence. (As a committed empiricist, however, James does not signal any problems with putative religious experience providing empirical evidence.) That being said, one could, James writes, also be 'reasonable' in believing in circumstances where evidence was not decisive and where what was at stake was, among other things, 'momentous.' His defence of a 'right to believe,' which reflects his philosophical pragmatism, does not entail that what is believed is true, that the matter is settled and no further inquiry is needed, or that another person should or would make the same choice. But such a 'right' does suggest that there is nothing fundamentally epistemically problematic, irrational, or inherently immoral in exercising this right (see Suckiel 1996, discussed above). We have, therefore, a view of reasonableness very different from a number of James's predecessors.

James, then, took a distinctive and novel approach to proof, religious belief, and the reasonability of religious believing, and added new insights to the discussion. He did not eschew the relevance of evidence, but arguably expanded what counts as evidence and what counts as reasonable believing in light of the available evidence. Moreover, by his recognition of the place of the individual person and her ends and purposes in determining the meaning and truth of religious belief, that one's convictions were shaped by things which were not of a purely intellectual nature, as well as his recognition of the phenomenon of overbelief, James's views were shown to be more than a mere development of those of his predecessors.

By 1910, the year of James's death, one found, therefore, something of a paradox concerning the discussion of religion and religious belief in theology and allied disciplines in much of the Anglo-American world. On the one hand, interest in religion – particularly in religions other than Christianity – was strong and growing. On the other hand, the discussion of the reasonability of religious believing that had been a major focus in Anglo-American theology and philosophical theology for the preceding two and a half centuries, had virtually ceased to be a primary concern. (And, to the extent that reasonableness of belief and the relation of faith and reason were being discussed, it was primarily in the context of ‘internal evidences’ rather than ‘external proofs.’) This move away from the discussion of reasonableness and the meaning and proof of religious belief suggests that the major positions on these issues had been well marked out. It did not mean, however, that the underlying issues had been resolved.

As the preceding summary brings out and puts into sharper focus, while it may at first appear that some of the major authors who wrote on these issues were addressing the same issue of the reasonability of religious belief, what that issue in fact meant and what it involved differed significantly. The present study has shown differences in what counted as reasonability, and also in the underlying understandings of proof, evidence, and religious belief. And even the questions that these authors sought to answer were seen not always to be the same. As noted in Chapter 1, the twentieth century philosopher of history, R.G. Collingwood reminds us that to understand an author one must, among other things, understand the question or questions that the author was trying to address. Taking this approach, then, one notes that the principal question that the figures discussed in this study sought to answer apparently varied. For Chillingworth and Tillotson it was, ‘Which beliefs must a Christian hold – and, indirectly, which not – in order to be a Christian?’ and secondarily, what was the role of reason in determining such beliefs? For Locke, the question was much broader: ‘What things are human beings fitted know?’ and, particularly, but still broadly, Which religious beliefs is it reasonable to believe? Hume was concerned with the same questions, though, in his response to the latter, it seems that he consistently held that there were none. Paley focused instead, primarily, on the general question of what is reasonable for *any* fair-minded person to believe about the credibility and reliability of the testimony of the witnesses in the gospels and the Pauline letters – and, later, about the causal explanation of apparent order in the universe. He was not, however, interested in extending his enquiry to more abstract matters of theological dogmas. Whately adopted a similar approach, and limited his investigations in similar ways, but developed or more carefully explained some of Paley’s ideas on the nature and limits of reasoning and proof. Finally, those who followed these earlier authors – such Newman, Clifford, and James – addressed the relevance of reason and proof to religious believing in general – though they wrote little, if anything, on the reasonability of believing particular theological doctrines. Contrary to initial impressions, perhaps, there are significant differences in question and emphases in the authors studied, and careful analysis and comparison of the respective responses is required.

In the course of the present study, a number of other significant issues, related to this discussion of reasonability, have been noted. Among them were: correcting common assumptions about the discussion; that religious belief did not mean, and has not meant, "belief in the absence of supportive evidence, and even in light of contrary evidence"; pointing out where an author's views may have been 'misread'; and that some of the insights and options offered have, arguably, been forgotten or ignored – for example, evidentialism does not obviously require foundationalism; that the inductive arguments used tend to follow an Aristotelian, rather than a Humean model; that 'proof,' even 'probabilistic proof,' was understood in very different ways; and that, overall, much of the weight of an argument rests on more fundamental questions about the nature of proof and the nature of religious belief.

In short, it is clear that, in the presentation in this study of the different perspectives on the reasonability of religious belief, there were several shifts – shifts in the understanding of reasonability, in the meaning of religious belief, and in the reasonability of religious belief.

One might still ask, however, why such shifts occurred? What do these shifts suggest or tell us about the reasonability of religious belief? And how might a review of this centuries-long discussion be useful to theology today? I provide a brief response in the next four sections.

10.4 Summary of debate

In the preceding discussion, we saw that there seem to be two principal reasons why there were shifts in the understanding of the reasonableness of believing religious beliefs in early Anglo-American theology and writing on religion.

One reason, I have suggested, is because of other shifts – e.g., shifts about what 'proof' means and what counts as evidence – which correlate with, or have an impact on what counts as reasonable. What has been shown is that there is a good deal of complexity in the issues of proof and evidence – that many factors come into play (e.g., what is the kind of proof that one is using, what counts as evidence, how one 'makes sense' of the phenomena or propositions offered as evidence, which evidence is 'relevant' or 'has weight', and which is irrelevant, marginal, or ironic).

Thus, on the one hand, for some authors, models of proof and understanding of evidence are presented without reference to, or mention of, possible suppositions or assumptions – so that there is, so to speak, an understanding of 'reasonableness' as the product of a neutral, 'pure reason.' These authors also hold that there are, or ought to be, at best a few, fundamental criteria for sound argument and proof. On the other hand, for other authors, what counts as evidence and as proof is seen as being based on prior assumptions of which these authors are usually self-consciously aware. For these authors, method and proof are 'relative' to the object of investigation. This is, as noted earlier, something recognised since Aristotle – that ethics, aesthetics, and religion, for example, are matters about which demonstrative arguments are not generally possible, because of the nature of the object of study, and that how one proves something in one field is different from enquiries that have a different object. This suggests, moreover, that how the reasonability of a religious belief is determined by a person with one set of assumptions about what counts as a satisfactory argument or relevant evidence, is likely to be different from how, for example, a person with a different set of ideas and assumptions would determine it. More needs to be said on this point in general, but the analysis of the views of the authors discussed in this study provide sustained evidence for noting such a distinction, and that there are shifts in criteria. This, then, is one explanation for some of the shifts in the standard(s) for reasonableness – i.e., in the role of reason, evidence, and proof in relation to religious belief – that have been described in this study.

A second reason for these shifts in the understanding of reasonability, is that the meaning of religious belief has an important impact on its reasonability. And, as the meaning of that term shifts, what counts as an appropriate argument or proof of, or reasonability in believing, religious beliefs also shifts. As noted throughout this study, there is some variation in what the authors discussed take religious belief to be – i.e., what kind of object they are enquiring into. At one level, one can see this as follows: if one looks at religious belief in the way that some theologians have conceived of it, one sees that – though they did not draw attention to it as such – religious belief is complex, having both a descriptive and a dispositional character, so that the standard of truth and reasonability of believing involve considering what such belief means in a sense wider than that of a purely descriptive statement. This, I have suggested, is something that authors as varied as Chillingworth, Tillotson, and Newman (and perhaps also Paley, Whately, and James) recognised – that because of presumption, antecedent probabilities, or overbeliefs, not only does proof differ, but what those beliefs themselves mean differs.[2]

If, however, one takes religious belief to be primarily, or merely, a set of descriptive propositions, this calls for a different standard of proof and of truth. Should one adopt this approach, however, one might well ask how other beliefs – ethical, aesthetic, cultural, for example – would fare on such a standard of proof, and whether the result might not give one pause in accepting this standard. Whichever stand one takes, however, one should be able to answer why one adopts this particular standard, and why one holds that there is just one such standard, or, as the case may be, many standards of reasonability, argument, and proof.

The position that religious beliefs have both a descriptive and a dispositional character does not entail that their meaning is available only to the person who has the belief, nor that what religious beliefs are is incommensurable with other beliefs. It does suggest, however, that the meaning is not reducible to descriptive propositions, and suggests strongly that what a believer understands by a religious belief is not the same as what one who is not a believer understands by it, and that this difference needs to be recognised for discussion to occur.

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[2] I discuss, at length, the possibility of understanding religious beliefs as involving descriptive and dispositional elements, in my chapters in *Responses to the Enlightenment: An Exchange on Foundations, Faith and Community* (Sweet and Hart, 2012).

The fact of these differences and these shifts in the meaning of religious belief and in the nature of evidence and proof reveals a further claim about the reasonability of religious belief and religious believing. It seems that religious believing is judged to be *un*reasonable in those situations where the standard of proof appealed to makes no acknowledgement of any assumptions in proof (e.g., a recognition of presumptions, antecedent beliefs, or overbeliefs), and where religious beliefs are taken as simply descriptive propositions (as seems to be the case with Hume and Clifford), whereas such believing is generally held to be reasonable (e.g., in Paley, Whately, and Newman) when one acknowledges that there are such assumptions. Thus, the difference between those who believe and those who do not, may not be so much that one side 'reasons' better, but simply that what counts as appropriate reasoning, the nature of proof, antecedent conditions, and the meaning of belief varies, depending on the object of belief.

10.5 Research relevance and contribution to Systematic Theology

The present study deals with a fundamental issue in Christian doctrine – namely, how articles of faith or religious beliefs, dogmas, doctrines, and the like, can be held, and whether it 'accords with reason' or is 'reasonable' for one to hold them. This is, perhaps, one of the central concerns of that subclass of systematic theology called 'philosophical theology.' The approach taken in this study, following the first four 'functional specialties' or 'functional specializations' identified by Lonergan – research, interpretation, history, and dialectic – has been largely historical and analytical, for its focus is a stage in the *historical* discussion of the issue – that concerning the meaning of religious belief, and the reasonableness of religious belief and of religious believing, between the mid-17th and early 20th centuries in Anglo-American philosophical theology.

Today, in theology, there is a somewhat fragmentary knowledge of this discussion of the reasonability of religious belief in the Anglo-American traditions prior to the beginning of the twentieth century. And, arguably, what there is, focuses on just a few authors. It was because of the need for more awareness of the context in which this theme of 'reasonableness' arose and was discussed, that the present study was undertaken. The purpose of this study was to address this issue of reasonability in some key authors in the Anglo-American traditions, and to explore its relation to their conceptions of proof, reason, and evidence, and to the meaning of religious belief. This required surveying and discerning the views of these figures, including what questions they sought to answer, what assumptions they made, and how their views bore on, or how they understood the reasonability of religious belief. A survey and analysis of these authors breaks new ground; hitherto, there has been no systematic or sustained single work that traces the development of the understanding of the reasonability of religious belief in Anglo-American philosophical theology, and that focuses on these key authors and these underlying concepts. Yet, as contemporary discussion of the issue of the reasonability of religious belief sometimes draws on, or refers to, this earlier discussion, an analysis and presentation of the work of these earlier authors not only contributes to a better understanding of the character and developments of their own work, but may also provide some insight into options available in current debates.

Among the other advantages of such a survey of these themes in the work of these authors is, first, that it enables one to see development and changes in the meaning of key terms, and in how ‘proof,’ reasonability, and religious belief were grasped. What I have shown is that there were a number of changes in how religious belief was understood, but also developments and modifications, particularly in the criteria for proof. Second, such a survey enables one to address the cogency of the received view about the role of foundationalism and of evidentialism in this earlier discussion. Further, such a survey enables one to identify presumptions or assumptions, but also insights, that may have been made but, later, overlooked. This may well have a bearing, I have suggested, on theology, and particularly philosophical theology, today.

The views of many of the authors studied have, admittedly, been interpreted in different ways, and there are certainly challenges to the cogency of their respective views. Moreover, one must acknowledge that these authors were addressing questions of *their* day – questions that may no longer be among those with which theologians and philosophers today are primarily concerned. The present study seeks, however, not to assess the plausibility of the criticisms but, rather, to appreciate better what it was that these authors set out to do, and to provide a foundation for gleaning insights into the issue of the reasonableness and meaningfulness of religious belief.

I would argue, however, that what has been found in the process of this study is that there is more depth and subtlety in some of these authors than commonly recognised, which shows that what was involved made discussion then – and makes discussion now – more complex. Careful reading reveals some important differences and nuances, and reminds us of options and possibilities that may have been overlooked, ignored, or forgotten. It helps also to make a case for seeing religious belief as having both a descriptive, propositional, and an expressive, dispositional character that is relevant in determining how and how far reason and evidence may count for or against such beliefs. And, further, it makes one aware that the standard of proof – and of evidence and reasonability – is not a neutral one, and that how this standard is understood bore on reasonableness *then*, and bears on reasonableness *now*. Findings such as these help to describe and, perhaps, explain what, exactly, is involved in the kinds of proofs that believers find persuasive, why some evidence counts as evidence, but also why some criticism and putative counterevidence may fail to convince believers to abandon believing.

In short, a principal way in which the present study makes a contribution to systematic theology is that significant parts of this area and period are relatively understudied, and that the present project not only addresses a gap in existing research, but in some cases provides a more extensive analysis of the views of some of the principal figures, offers a review and reinterpretation of their work, and provides a new way of seeing the relations among them. Thus, the present study provides the systematic theologian with knowledge and insights into this important period in theology.

There are, however, two additional ways in which the present project may be of interest to systematic theologians, though I do not discuss them directly in this study. Understanding this earlier discussion and debate concerning the reasonability of religious belief provides a background not only for later, but for even more recent and contemporary discussions. One such discussion is that of the intelligibility of religious concepts, such as the concept of God.

In the first place, terms such as ‘faith,’ ‘belief,’ and ‘religious belief,’ have a central role in some recent work in systematic theology, and the relevance of notions such as proof and ‘reasonability’ continue to have a role, particularly in some of the Anglo-American traditions (see Sweet 2012). For example, the American theologian George Lindbeck, in *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984), but also in several articles in the 1990s, argues that understanding across religious traditions runs into the problem of the translatability and commensurability of the concepts and terms used. On Lindbeck’s view, understanding the utterances and terms of a religious tradition requires not only that one be familiar with the sacred texts of that tradition and the cultural context in which these texts and the related utterances arise, but “one must participate in that community” of belief. Questions, therefore, of what an article of faith or belief means, of whether it can be proven or disproven, become, therefore, unanswerable, unless one already shares that view. Thus, there is little possibility for those on the ‘outside’ of a tradition – be they of other religious traditions or critics of religion – to understand that tradition; “when affirmations or ideas from categorically different religious or philosophical frameworks are introduced into a given religious outlook, these are either simply babbling or else, like mathematical formulas employed in a poetic text, they have vastly different functions and meanings than they had in their original settings” (Lindbeck 2009: 49). Similarly, the American theologian Gordon Kaufman argues that certain key religious terms fail because they do not have a reference, and are therefore arguably unintelligible. In *God the Problem* (1972), for example, Kaufman asks: “if absolutely nothing within our experience can be directly identified as that to which the term “God” properly refers, what meaning does or can the word have?” (Kaufman 1972: 7). His response seems to be that it can have no meaning at all. On such recent views, then, it seems that attempts to understand or to discuss or provide ‘external arguments’ for articles of faith or religious belief must inevitably fail, and, by extension, that claims to the ‘reasonability’ of belief or proof must fail as well. The present study, however, provides examples of authors who acknowledge the differences – sometimes the deep differences – among believers and non-believers, without abandoning the possibility of finding some reasonability in belief and in believing. Such examples may be of some use, then, in understanding the rationale for, but also in engaging this recent debate.

A further reason why the present project may be of interest to systematic theologians is because it bears on an ongoing debate – one which has perhaps experienced a revival –

and that is whether theology is a genuine academic disciple. This has been a matter of both popular and scholarly discussion. For example, in a 1998 ‘op ed’ in *Free Inquiry* magazine, Richard Dawkins writes: “The achievements of theologians don’t do anything, don’t affect anything, don’t mean anything. What makes anyone think that ‘theology’ is a subject at all?” (Dawkins 1998: 6). And, similarly, in an interview discussing an earlier debate with Alister McGrath, Dawkins states: “Christian theology is a non-subject. It is empty. Vacuous. Devoid of coherence or content. . . . The only part of theology that could possibly demand my attention is the part that purports to demonstrate that God does exist. This part of theology I have, indeed, studied with considerable attention. And found it utterly wanting” (Krejci-Papa 2005).[3] Thus, in answer to the question whether theology is an academic discipline or a science or a subject that might reasonably be taught in universities, Dawkins’s view is that it should not. One finds similar criticisms among some other well-known critics of theology, such as Sam Harris, Willem Drees, and Jerry Coyne[4], and it is a view that has garnered some popular appeal.

Such a view has been challenged, and the contrary position argued by figures such as the American theologian and philosopher Nancey Murphy, the Irish-British theologian, Alister McGrath (e.g., McGrath 2001-03), and several others. And while the figures discussed in the present study do not directly address this particular issue, the issues of the reasonability of religious belief, the meaning of religious belief, the relevance of evidence and argument, the nature of proof and the place of “probable reasoning” (cf Murphy 1990: 79f), and the like, all clearly bear on this question of whether theology is a genuine academic discipline. And, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, the authors concerned adopt methods and propose accounts of meaning and proof and understandings of religious belief that not only challenge the conclusions of such contemporary critics, but may also provide a warrant for the contrary view – which, therefore, clearly bears on systematic theology today.[5]

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[3] Similarly, in a 2007 interview, Dawkins says “Theology is a non-subject. I'm not saying that professors of theology are non-professors. They do interesting things, like study biblical history, biblical literature. … But theology, the study of gods, the study of what gods do, presupposes that gods exist. The only kind of theology that I take account of are those theological arguments that actually argue for the existence of God” (Williams 2007).

[4] See Drees (2007: 377-379). Drees writes, for example, that “theology is not a science.” See also Coyne (2015).

10.6 Limitation of the research

As noted in Chapter 1, the present study – like all studies – is, of necessity, restricted in scope. Perhaps most obviously, given that the focus of this study is Anglo-American theology and philosophical theology from the mid 17th to early 20th century, it contains only a few, indirect references to the traditions of philosophical theology outside of the Anglo-American sphere. That being said, as we have seen throughout, much of the development of Anglo-American theology in the period covered occurred with only very little 'outside' influence, and then, principally only in the mid to late 19th century. A consequence of this is that this 'isolation' allows for a rather broad internal coherence to the discussion. Still, a more recent study of the European tradition overall than, for example, those of Pünjer and of Pfleiderer would clearly be valuable.

A second concern may be that the present study limits itself to only nine figures, primarily in Britain, in the course of a debate lasting close to three centuries, and that this may not provide a sufficiently comprehensive account. As we have seen, however, this concern is mitigated in part by the fact that, while there were indeed other figures in each period who could have had a place in the present study, those discussed are not only representative of the principal positions but, in many cases, if not all, were recognised as key figures in the debate in both Britain and its American colonies. Thus, while the present account is not exhaustive, it allows the reader to follow the currents, themes, and influences on the problem undertaken in this study, and the figures discussed are ones who feature importantly in the history of theology and philosophical theology in the Anglo-American world. Further research in this area is certainly warranted, but it is worth noting that some other influential figures, such as Jonathan

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[5] Newman, for example, gives an explicit argument for the need for the study of theology in a university in his *Idea of a University* (Newman 1907). Walgrave has suggested that a reason for the inclusion of theology was 'intellectual,' and that this reflected Newman's notion of the illative sense. (See Walgrave (1960), cited in Dale (1972: 16)).

Edwards, William Ellery Channing, and Archibald Alexander Hodge in the American colonies and the United States, and George Campbell, John Wilkins, John Erskine, and Joseph Glanvill in Britain, are currently receiving more complete treatments of their own work.[6]

Finally, this study is restricted in scope because it focuses only on those figures who argued about the reasonability of religious belief primarily by referring to reason, evidence, argument and proof. There are, of course, other, more 'fideistic' approaches, particularly with the beginning of the 19th century, where the focus then was not so much on the reasonableness, but on the faithfulness of the believer. A broader lens, perhaps, where the spotlight of the study would be on 'certainty' and not on 'reasonableness,' would include more discussion of some of the evangelical and dissenting traditions, and would require more detailed discussion of figures such as Keble, Kingsley, Ward, Manning, Green, Bosanquet, and Temple. Yet this would be quite a different study than the one undertaken here.

10.7 Recommendations and area of future trajectory

In light of the preceding summary and discussion, the present study and its conclusions provide some guidance for discussion, within and outside of theology, today. What I offer in this final section are not hard prescriptions, but simply some suggestions that flow from some of the views presented in this study. All the same, they may enable one to see where, exactly, discussion might go.

The present study reminds one that, to discuss the reasonability of religious belief today, as in an earlier era, one must always discern whether the interlocutors share or, at least, are aware of, what Paley, Whately, Newman, and James, called, respectively, their presumptions, their antecedent probabilities, and their overbeliefs.

Thus, one must be sure that, before it can proceed fruitfully, discussion is consistently focussed on the same question – or, if it is not, that the interlocutors are conscious of this from the start. As we have seen – and this is something that Collingwood reminds us – without a clear understanding of the question underlying or motivating the discussion, there is a good chance of misunderstanding the response, or, at least, the appropriateness of the response, of one’s interlocutor.

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[6] For example, Suderman (2001), Walzer (2003), Yeager (2011), Holifield (2003), and Noll (2002).

Again, one must have a clear understanding of the object under investigation – i.e., what religious belief is and what it means. This will influence what should be the proper standard for assessing its truth and the reasonability of believing it. For example, what beliefs are one to focus on in discussing the reasonableness of religious believing? The various utterances of those who profess to be members of a religious community or tradition? Or statements of scripture, or doctrine, or ‘articles of faith,’ from that tradition? Or statements following from what one might call a religious experience? Or…? Some scholars have insisted that the discussion of religious belief should take into account what it is that ordinary believers seek to do and say; this is a point that was made, for example, by Newman and, arguably, James, but also by later, secular authors, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, and by his theist ‘disciples,’ such as D.Z. Phillips. The point is, in other words, that one needs to have an understanding of what it is that makes religious beliefs (distinctively) *religious*. Then, following from this, one needs to ask, for example, whether such belief or such beliefs are to be taken simply as descriptive propositions or assertions, or need they be understood more broadly – for example, as having both a descriptive and a dispositional character (i.e., not only reflecting one’s prior dispositions, or being conditioned by prior trusts, but indicating an intention to act on them). As we have seen, some recent theologians have questioned whether a non-believer has, or can have, “a full appreciation and understanding of theistic beliefs.” Moreover, while holding a religious belief is not the same as having faith – faith being, in many religious traditions, a disposition or virtue that is held to be a product of a response to the divine – one must consider whether one can, effectively, separate the two, and how this bears on the possibility of understanding or evaluating either. Further, one must consider whether the interlocutors have a shared understanding of what counts as ‘reasonability.’ Does reasonability require proof or evidence, or that it ‘fit’ with common or received knowledge, or simply that it not conflict or be inconsistent with what is already known?

To the extent that reasonability focuses on ‘proof’ and ‘evidence,’ one will note, in the authors studied, that the standard for evidence and proof for reasonable believing varied. It is important to keep in mind, then, that people bring certain suppositions or assumptions to their conceptions of proof, and that the standard of proof and evidence may also vary according to the object under consideration (e.g., what counts as evidence or as a proof for an empirical claim or a scientific law differs from that for an ethical, or political, or prudential – and for a religious – claim). Thus, one may ask whether evidentialism or foundationalism are necessary in order to have a genuine proof and, by extension, reasonability. Or is an evidentialism that reflects a model of judicial reasoning appropriate? Or is evidentialism itself too strong a standard for the reasonability of believing?

Finally, for present purposes, one must consider whether proof is always necessary for reasonable believing. As we have seen, some authors have held that one can hold, or believe with some degree of confidence and reasonability, what has not been proven or demonstrated, provided that it does not contradict what one already knows, or, perhaps, provided that it would be useful to believe it. We have seen that some have held that there can be non-propositional grounds, such as experience and infused or revealed faith that may also provide a basis for reasonable believing. If, however, one holds that there must always be ‘external’ proof for reasonable believing, one might well ask what such proof *ought* to look like, and whether such a position might require abandoning beliefs and knowledge claims that otherwise seem consistent with, or conducive to, reasonability.

Difference or disagreement on one or more of the preceding issues does not mean that discussion in theology, or about theology, today, is not possible. As we have seen, discussion and debate occur without necessarily considering questions of the meaning of religious belief or of the standard of reasonability and reasonable believing. Yet having noted the fact of intractability in the contemporary discussion of the reasonableness of religious believing, one is called on to consider why discussion has broken down. And without addressing or, at least, recognising such issues – i.e., the issues explored in the present study – discussion of the reasonability of believing will likely be, or will likely remain, intractable.

None of the authors or views discussed in the present study constitute a ‘last word’ on the subject, but the reader will have seen the value of taking their views into account, and in seeing not only some shifts, but some overlaps. Whatever imperfections these views, and the views in the present study, might have, there is plausibly more to the reasonability of religious believing than some recent authors, including the so-called New Atheists, suggest.

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