

VOLUME I

SYSTEMATIC PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

PROLEGOMENA,
ON SCRIPTURE, ON FAITH

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG

WILEY Blackwell

Systematic Philosophical Theology

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*Prolegomena, On
Scripture, On Faith*

Volume I

William Lane Craig

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*To Jan, who inspired this monumental project
and sustained me throughout.*

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Preface to Volume I

I.

The British divine J. I. Packer opens his wonderful book *Knowing God* with the following words: “As clowns yearn to play Hamlet, so I have wanted to write a treatise on God.”¹ Had Packer wanted to look really foolish, he might have tried writing a systematic theology. I am convinced that such an ambition is impossible for any one person adequately to achieve. Since systematic theology draws upon biblical theology, historical theology, and philosophical theology, among other disciplines, an adequate systematic theology would require expertise in all these areas, which is impossible for anyone to achieve in this lifetime. Ideally, then, a systematic theology would be a collaborative effort, featuring the work of specialists in various areas. But it is dubious that such a joint effort could ever be consistent or harmonious. Though I dabble in biblical and historical theology, I am painfully aware of my shortcomings in those areas. So why should I undertake a project that is destined to fail?

Part of the reason is that contemporary systematic theologies tend overwhelmingly to be philosophically deficient. They are either disguised

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 7.

biblical theologies or dogmatic histories or speculative theologies with little input from the discipline of philosophical theology. As a result their treatment of key doctrines is often superficial and at best incomplete. Christian doctrine bristles with philosophical questions that are properly the province of the philosopher of religion or philosophical theologian. A systematic theology that focuses on such questions can help to redress the balance. For that reason I have chosen to write a systematic *philosophical* theology, that is to say, a systematic theology that focuses on the philosophical problems occasioned by Christian doctrine. Such a systematic theology will itself be terribly lopsided, of course, requiring the input, and perhaps correction, of specialists in other disciplines. But by focusing on the philosophical questions that arise in doing systematic theology, I hope to have some excuse for my manifest failings.

II.

My restricted focus occasions a troublesome question: who, exactly, is the intended audience of this book? My intention was to write a systematic philosophical theology that would be of interest not only to philosophers of religion but also to systematic theologians who wanted to become better acquainted with the philosophical issues arising out of Christian theology. So I take pains to explain things clearly as we proceed. But, alas, some of the philosophical discussion becomes necessarily so technical that I fear it will be simply *incomprehensible* to the average theologian untrained in logic and metaphysics. It is just impossible, try as I might, to explain everything necessary for an understanding of various debates. In the present volume, at least, there is not much of a technical nature in the first two *loci* to stymie the typical systematic theologian, though his eyes may well glaze over when he comes to the Bayesian analysis of the epistemic justification of belief in the inspiration of Scripture discussed in *De Scriptura sacra*. Things get much worse when we come to the locus *De Deo* in volume IIa, which involves very knotty questions. So I suspect that my work will mainly be read and appreciated by philosophers of religion and analytic theologians, who have the background to understand it.

III.

In the Prolegomena I delineate what I understand systematic theology to involve and how it relates to various theological disciplines. Since I take it to be part of the task of the systematic theologian to articulate a coherent

theological viewpoint, it seems to me that philosophical theology, properly understood, is an inherent part of systematic theology. I shall argue that it is analytic philosophy that is most helpful in unfolding the philosophical content of Christian systematic theology. Although some theologians, acquainted with modernist philosophical thought, still distrust analytic philosophy as inimical to theology, there has fortunately been over the last century, as I shall relate, a dramatic shift in the field of philosophy away from its anti-metaphysical bent, bringing with it a renaissance of Christian philosophy in the Anglo-American world that furnishes rich philosophical resources upon which the Christian theologian may profitably draw.

Although I am enthusiastic about the positive contribution made by analytic philosophical theology to systematic theology, I have become conscious in the course of writing this work of what William Wood has called the “deformations” of analytic philosophical theology, that is to say, defects which are corruptions of the very qualities that make the practice good in the first place.² Wood rightly points out,

Analytic theology also has its characteristic deformations, and they too are tied to its characteristic virtues. Many of analytic theology’s characteristic virtues are also those of analytic philosophy: a concern for linguistic precision, logical rigor, and linear argument, along with a strong commitment to transparent writing. These are genuine virtues, and they are much needed in theology and the study of religion. But it is also easy to see how the same virtues could become deformed. To a hammer, everything looks like a nail.³

To the philosophical theologian, everything looks like a problem to be analyzed and resolved.

Wood fears that the analytic procedure can lead to a loss of mystery and to superficiality. That, however, is not at all my fear; in fact, easy appeals to mystery are often an excuse for superficiality, whereas the resolution of mysteries may result in deeper understanding and increased awe of God’s greatness. I think rather that the deformation endemic to analytic philosophy of religion is sterility and aridity, an overly-intellectualized faith that can result in a heart that is cold toward God.

Ironically, the showcase example that occurs to me is the same one that occurred to Wood: the doctrine of divine simplicity. Wood criticizes Alvin Plantinga for his well-known critique of the doctrine, a critique Wood takes

² William Wood, *Analytic Theology and the Academic Study of Religion*, Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 45–46.

³ Wood, *Analytic Theology*, 45.

to be wrong-headed because it is based upon a modern understanding of properties that is foreign to the medieval metaphysical framework. This response seems to me unfair to Plantinga. Noting that certain Fathers held God to be identical to his wisdom, goodness, power, and so forth, Plantinga observes that these are properties; but God cannot be a property. If the medieval metaphysicians denied that these are properties, so much the worse for medieval metaphysicians! For these are, in fact, properties. So the critique sticks. Affirming a doctrine as opaque and apparently incoherent as divine simplicity does nothing to make Christian theology deeper, only more obscure.

Contemporary efforts to defend divine simplicity have become increasingly desperate and far-fetched. Bare logical coherence is purchased only at the expense of enormous implausibility. The resultant concept of God is light years away from the living God of the Bible. One philosophical theologian, reflecting on contemporary debates over divine simplicity, remarked to me, “I feel that we’re scarcely even doing Christian theology anymore.” I think he is right. The sterile abstraction that takes the place of God in the defenses of divine simplicity is hardly apt to warm the heart and prompt one to draw near to God. Contemporary philosophical theologians writing in defense of divine simplicity are doing no favor at all to Christian theology and spirituality.

Wood rightly urges analytic theologians to “think about God with an attitude of reverence and adoration.”⁴ Those of us who are engaged in philosophical theology need to examine ourselves to ensure that our faith does not become deformed. We need to be self-consciously engaged in Christian spiritual disciplines like corporate worship, prayer, study of Scripture, fellowship, and evangelization, lest our faith become overly-intellectualized and our hearts become cold.

IV.

It might be wondered whether there are any philosophical distinctives that crucially shape the theology presented in these volumes. As a matter of fact, there are. In the course of writing this work, I have been surprised how often a couple of philosophical convictions surface which decisively affect the shape of my theology. First is my rejection of a metaontological thesis of Quinean provenance, namely, a criterion of ontological commitment according to which we are committed to the reality of the values of variables

⁴ Wood, *Analytic Theology*, 175.

bound by the existential quantifier and to the referents of singular terms in sentences we take to be true. My repudiation of such a criterion leads me, among other things, to reject the Indispensability Argument for the reality of abstract objects, as we shall see in our discussion of divine aseity. Second is my endorsement of a tensed, as opposed to tenseless, theory of time, according to which both tense and temporal becoming are objective, as opposed to merely subjective, features of reality. My deep conviction that time is tensed leads me to affirm, among other things, that God exists omnitemporally rather than timelessly, as we shall see in our discussion of divine eternity, and that certain realist defenses of the doctrine of original sin are non-starters, as we shall see in *De homine*. These two philosophical issues – Quinean metaontology and a tensed vs. tenseless theory of time – are to my knowledge never identified and discussed by other contemporary systematic theologians, and yet they are watershed issues with respect to one's theology, especially one's doctrine of God.

V.

One of the challenges in writing a work like this is deciding how to deal with interlocutors. Traditional dogmatics tends to focus understandably upon the ageless figures of the past, such as the Church Fathers and the medieval and post-Reformation scholastic theologians. While such an approach has the benefit of making one's treatment timeless, it has the decided drawback of failing to profit from the cutting edge work being done in contemporary Christian philosophy. I am convinced that contemporary philosophers have not only advanced far beyond the figures of the past but have in many respects profited from and corrected their mistakes. A systematic theology that ignores contemporary philosophical contributions to the debate will be impoverished as a result.

On the other hand, extensive interaction with contemporary interlocutors is guaranteed to make one's systematic theology soon dated. The sad fact is that most of us will no longer be read or remembered in another generation. Although contemporary philosophers still interact with Gottlob Frege's epochal *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (1884), for example, who cares about or any longer reads Frege's interlocutors? Most of us and our interlocutors will be similarly forgotten, threatening our systematic theology with built-in obsolescence. So what to do?

My solution to this problem is to interact principally with the *positions* and *arguments* of interlocutors in the text, while reserving personal interaction with specific interlocutors for the footnotes. As a result one will

find fairly extensive footnotes discussing the views of various interlocutors alluded to in the text. This solution has the great benefit of streamlining the main text, so that the reader does not get bogged down in minutiae. I hope that the usefulness of my treatment will thereby be prolonged.

One will find few systematic theologians among my interlocutors in this book. There are two reasons for this relative absence. First, I am not greatly acquainted with the works of systematic theologians. This is embarrassing and represents a shortcoming on my part. But second, to the extent that I am familiar with the works of systematic theologians, I have not found them particularly profitable when it comes to philosophical theology, the focus of this work. This reduces the necessity of and motivation for interacting with them. Instead, what I have chosen to do is take a couple of representative tokens of systematic theologians as my interlocutors. Specifically, I have chosen the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck, whose knowledge of dogmatics was encyclopedic, as a contemporary representative of the tradition of Protestant scholasticism and my own *Doktorvater* Wolfhart Pannenberg, perhaps the most rational (and, as we shall see, rationalistic!) of contemporary theologians as a representative of the best of current work in systematic theology. Interacting with them has proved interesting and, I hope, will be helpful.

VI.

Another important decision I have made was to publish the volumes of this work *seriatim* instead of waiting until the whole was completed. Not only is the future uncertain, but the prospect of revising the whole multi-volume work after (God willing!) its completion is akin to “painting the Forth Bridge”: by the time the task is completed, it will be time to begin anew! On the other hand, releasing the volumes one at a time runs the risk that one may later regret what one has said in earlier volumes. Still, it seems preferable to get what has been accomplished into print, perhaps with the possibility of later revision. One oddity of this decision is that cross-references in earlier volumes to later *loci* refer for a time to nothing.

VII.

I have organized my philosophical theology along the lines of the classic *loci communes*, or chief topics, of Protestant scholastic theology. This rubric is not only an excellent organizational tool for doing systematic theology but has the additional benefit of relating the philosophical

questions explored directly to the relevant theological topic. As an evangelical Protestant, I begin with the locus *De Scriptura sacra* as the basis of authority in our theologizing (and philosophizing!). Having laid the foundations, we next turn to the locus *De fide* to explore epistemological questions related to Christian truth claims. Then in volume II we turn to the locus *De Deo*, which lies at the very heart of Christian theology. This locus alone is so rich in philosophical questions that I can deal only with the coherence of theism (*Attributa Dei*) in volume IIa and reserve a discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity (*De Trinitate*), along with an Excursus on Natural Theology, for volume IIb. I shall tackle the companion loci *De creatione* and *De homine* in volume III. In volume IV I shall, God willing, handle the loci *De Christo* and *De gratia*, and conclude our series with *De ecclesia* and *De novissimus* in volume V.

VIII.

I am grateful to my wife Jan for inspiring me to undertake this monumental project. I am also thankful to my research assistants Timothy Bayless and Hayden Stephen for their help in procuring materials. I am also indebted to Mr. Bayless for his diligent compiling of the various indices and bibliography and for putting footnotes into the house style. Acknowledgement of the helpful input from various colleagues will be found at the end of each locus.

Although I draw in this work from many previous publications, I have in every case updated and expanded my earlier discussion. Previous publications relevant to Volume I include: *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, with J. P. Moreland, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017); “Propositional Truth—Who Needs It?” *Philosophia Christi* 15 (2013): 355–64; “‘Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God’ (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration,” *Philosophia Christi* NS 1 (1999): 45–82; *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. rev. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity*, Philosophical Studies Series 84 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001); *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism I: Omniscience*, Studies in Intellectual History 19 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 43–63.

Prolegomena

Systematic philosophical theologies are rare – at least on the contemporary scene.¹ Paul Tillich’s *Systematic Theology* and Wolfhart Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology* deserve to be called systematic philosophical theologies, heavily shaped as they are by philosophical concerns.² Unfortunately, neither of these theologians was able to benefit from the renaissance of Christian philosophy that has transpired in Anglo-American analytic philosophy since the late 1960s. Rather Richard

¹ By “contemporary” I mean within roughly the last one hundred years, since many of us working today were contemporaries of those who wrote during that time. On this understanding works such as Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* count as contemporary systematic theologies. Historically speaking, the first systematic philosophical theology was Origen’s *Peri archōn* [*On First Principles*], written in the third century. Peter Lombard’s *Sententiarum libri IV* [*Four Books of Sentences*] (ca. 1150) set the model for medieval treatments. The preeminent work in systematic philosophical theology was undoubtedly Thomas Aquinas’ massive *Summa theologiae* (*Summary of Theology*) (1265–74). Outstanding among Protestant thinkers was Francis Turretin’s *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*) (1679–85).

² Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994–1997). Tillich offered an “ontological definition of philosophy” which takes philosophy to be basically metaphysics. Just as philosophy deals with the question of being in terms of categories, structural laws, and universal concepts, so theology, when dealing with our ultimate concern, presupposes in every sentence the structure of being, its categories, laws, and concepts. “On every page of every religious or theological text these concepts appear: time, space, cause, thing, subject, nature, movement, freedom, necessity, life, value, knowledge, experience, being, and not being. . . . Therefore, the systematic theologian must be a philosopher in critical understanding even if not in creative power” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1. 21). Pannenberg is explicit: “A specific interpretation of the relationship of theology to philosophy fully and unmistakably informs this presentation of Christian doctrine. . . . in my view the first task of a philosophical theology is to fix its intellectual point of departure in the historical revelation of God” (Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:xii).

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Swinburne's tetralogy in philosophical theology, coupled with his trilogy in natural theology, is representative of that tradition and is doubtless the preeminent example of systematic philosophical theology in our day.³ Many other philosophers or theologians have taken steps toward a systematic philosophical theology, even if the scope of such a project makes the goal elusive.⁴

1 The Renaissance of Christian Philosophy

It is precisely the renaissance of Christian philosophy in our day that makes this so opportune a time for the writing of a systematic philosophical theology.

1.1 A Look Back

In order to understand our current situation, it is helpful to understand something of where we have been. In a personal retrospective, the eminent Princeton University philosopher Paul Benacerraf describes what it was like doing philosophy at Princeton during the 1950s and 1960s. The overwhelmingly dominant mode of thinking was scientific naturalism. Physical science was taken to be the final, and really only, arbiter of truth. Metaphysics had been vanquished, expelled from philosophy like an unclean leper. "The philosophy of science," says Benacerraf, "was the queen of all the branches" of philosophy, since "it had the tools. . . to address all the problems."⁵ Any problem that could not be addressed by science was simply dismissed as a pseudo-problem. If a question did not have a scientific answer, then it was not a real question – just a pseudo-question masquerading as a real question. Indeed, part of the task of philosophy was to clean

³ Even prior to their completion, Swinburne's seven volumes were being compared to Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* (Philip L. Quinn, "Swinburne on Guilt, Atonement, and Christian Redemption," in *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honor of Richard Swinburne*, ed. Alan G. Padgett [Oxford: Clarendon, 1994], 277). Swinburne's trilogy in natural theology includes *The Coherence of Theism*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), and *Faith and Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005); while his tetralogy comprises *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). Among contemporary systematic philosophical theologies one might mention as well Norman Geisler's *Systematic Theology*, 4 vols. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002–2005).

⁴ For example, Stephen T. Davis, *Christian Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Oliver D. Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine: Toward a Systematic Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019); Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁵ Paul Benacerraf, "What Mathematical Truth Could Not Be–I," in *The Philosophy of Mathematics Today*, ed. Matthias Schirn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42.

up the discipline from the mess that earlier generations had made of it by endlessly struggling with such pseudo-questions. There was thus a certain self-conscious, crusading zeal with which philosophers carried out their task. The reformers, says Benacerraf, “trumpeted the militant affirmation of the new faith. . . in which the fumbling confusions of our forerunners were to be replaced by the emerging science of philosophy. This new enlightenment would put the old metaphysical views and attitudes to rest and replace them with the new mode of doing philosophy.”⁶

What Benacerraf is describing is a movement known as Logical Positivism. The book *Language, Truth, and Logic* by the British philosopher A. J. Ayer served as a sort of manifesto for this movement. As Benacerraf says, it was “not a great book,” but it was “a wonderful exponent of the spirit of the time.”⁷ The principal weapon employed by Ayer in his campaign against metaphysics was the vaunted Verification Principle of Meaning. According to that Principle, which went through a number of revisions, a sentence in order to be meaningful must be capable in principle of being empirically verified. Since metaphysical statements were beyond the reach of empirical science, they could not be verified and were therefore dismissed as devoid of factual content.

Ayer was explicit about the theological implications of this Verificationism.⁸ Since God is a metaphysical object, Ayer says, the possibility of religious knowledge is “ruled out by our treatment of metaphysics.” Thus, there can be no knowledge of God.

Now someone might say that we can offer evidence of God’s existence. But Ayer will have none of it. If by the word “God” you mean a transcendent being, says Ayer, then the word “God” is a metaphysical term, and so “it cannot be even probable that a god exists.” He explains, “To say that ‘God exists’ is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false. And by the same criterion, no sentence which purports to describe the nature of a transcendent god can possess any literal significance.”⁹

Suppose a religious believer should appeal to religious experience as a means of knowledge of God. Ayer is not impressed. He would not think to deny that the religious believer has an experience, he says, any more than he would deny that someone has an experience of, say, seeing a yellow object. But, he says, “whereas the sentence ‘There exists here a yellow-colored

⁶ Benacerraf, “What Mathematical Truth Could Not Be,” 42.

⁷ Benacerraf, “What Mathematical Truth Could Not Be,” 42.

⁸ A. J. Ayer, “Critique of Ethics and Theology,” chap. 6 in *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952).

⁹ Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 115.

material thing' expresses a genuine proposition which could be empirically verified, the sentence 'There exists a transcendent god' has . . . no literal significance" because it is not verifiable. Thus the appeal to religious experience, says Ayer, is "altogether fallacious."¹⁰

From this perspective, statements about God do not even have the dignity of being false. Now at first blush such a perspective might seem utterly implausible. If a statement like, "God loves you" were no more meaningful than, "T'was brillig; and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe," then how could one even know what it was supposed to be about, so as to be able to say that statements about God are metaphysical and therefore meaningless?¹¹ But as Nicholas Wolterstorff explains in a recent reminiscence:

By the mid-1950s we were all aware of the fact that the term 'meaningless' as employed by the positivists was a term of art. It was not their view that everything that failed their test was jabberwocky – meaningless in that sense – nor was it their view that one should never make utterances that failed their test. They just meant that one had not made an assertion, a true–false claim; one's utterance lacked assertoric meaning.¹²

To illustrate, questions and commands have cognitive meaning, but they are neither true nor false, since they do not make any assertions. Metaphysical and theological sentences might be useful for some purpose but not to make assertions.

It was not just metaphysical statements and, hence, theological statements that were regarded by logical positivists as void of assertoric content. Ethical statements were also declared to be meaningless because they, too, cannot be empirically verified. Such statements are simply emotional expressions of the user's feelings. Ayer says, "if I say 'Stealing money is wrong' I produce a statement which has no factual meaning. . . . It is as if I had written, 'Stealing money!!' . . . It is clear that there is nothing said here which can be true or false."¹³ So he concludes that value judgments "have no objective validity whatsoever."¹⁴ The same goes for aesthetic statements

¹⁰ Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 119.

¹¹ Charles Taliaferro explains that critics of positivism "argued that meaning was prior to verification; you have first to grasp the meaning of a proposition before grasping what conditions would confirm or disconfirm it. This line of reasoning was designed to pry apart the positivist charge that meaning and verifiability were somehow conceptually united" (Charles Taliaferro, *Evidence and Faith: Philosophy and Religion since the Seventeenth Century*, The Evolution of Modern Philosophy [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 351).

¹² Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Then, Now, and Al," *Faith and Philosophy* 28, no. 3 (2011): 256.

¹³ Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 107.

¹⁴ Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 108.

concerning beauty and ugliness. According to Ayer, “Such aesthetic words as ‘beautiful’ and ‘hideous’ are employed. . . , not to make statements of fact, but simply to express certain feelings. . . .”¹⁵

It is sobering to realize that this was the sort of thinking that dominated the departments of philosophy at British and American universities during the last century into the 1960s.¹⁶ It was not without its impact on religious life. Under the pressure of positivism, some theologians began to advocate non-cognitivist theories of theological language. In their view theological statements are not statements of fact at all but merely express the user’s emotions and attitudes. For example, the sentence “God created the world” does not purport to make any factual statement at all but merely is a way of expressing, say, one’s awe and wonder at the grandeur of the universe.

Gilbert Ryle poignantly described the state of philosophical-theological dialogue in the late 1950s:

In our half-century philosophy and theology have hardly been on speaking terms. . . . When theological coals were hot, the kettle of theological philosophy boiled briskly. If the kettle of theological philosophy is now not even steaming, it is because that fire has died down. Kettles cannot keep themselves on the boil. A philosopher cannot invent conceptual stresses and strains. He has to feel them if he is to be irked into dealing with them. I do not want to exaggerate. The theological fire has died down, but it has not quite gone out and the kettle of theological philosophy, though far from even simmering, is not quite stone cold.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 113.

¹⁶ I do not mean to suggest that philosophers of religion were absent from the scene during this time. See Eugene Thomas Long, *Twentieth-Century Western Philosophy of Religion 1900–2000*, Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion 1 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000). In 1957 Elton Trueblood could speak of “an astonishing amount of vigorous religious thinking,” exemplified by Whitehead, Temple, Maritain, Tillich, Niebuhr, and many more,” and of “the phenomenal new burst of religious interest in American colleges and universities” (David Elton Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957], xi, 3). But I think it would be fair to say that these thinkers lay outside the dominant mainstream of analytic Anglo-American philosophy. Dean Zimmerman reminds us that during the period of positivist rule, “an indomitable little group” of analytic British philosophers and theologians such as F. R. Tennant, Austin Farrer, A. C. Ewing, H. H. Price, Ian Ramsey, H. D. Lewis, Basil Mitchell, and a few others carried on with philosophical theology as usual (Dean Zimmerman, “Three Introductory Questions,” in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman, [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007], 1–13). What is remarkable about the recent renaissance of Christian philosophy is that it has arisen wholly within the mainstream analytic tradition.

¹⁷ Gilbert Ryle, “Final Discussion,” in *The Nature of Metaphysics*, ed. D. F. Pears (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 159–60. I am indebted to Charles Taliaferro for this reference. Note that Ryle does not attribute the tepid state of philosophical-theological dialogue so much to philosophy as to theology, whose flames had died down. Gordon Graham rightly observes that the divorce between theology and philosophy was not only advocated by logical positivists and existentialists from the philosophical side but was insisted upon by the highly influential theology of Karl Barth from the side of theology (Gordon Graham, “Philosophy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance,

The low point undoubtedly came with the so-called Death of God theology of the mid-1960s.¹⁸ On April 8, 1966, *Time* magazine carried a cover which was completely black except for three words emblazoned in bright, red letters against the dark background: “Is God Dead?” And the article described the movement then current among American theologians to proclaim the death of God.

Today that movement has all but disappeared. The kettle of theological philosophy is once more boiling briskly, at least in the Anglo-American realm. What happened?

1.2 *The Collapse of Verificationism*

What happened is a remarkable story. Philosophers within the analytic tradition itself exposed an incoherence which lay at the very heart of the prevailing philosophy of positivism. They began to realize that the Verification Principle would force us to dismiss not only theological statements as meaningless, but also a great many scientific statements, so that the Principle undermined the sacred cow of science at whose altar they knelt.

Contemporary physics is filled with metaphysical statements that cannot be empirically verified. When the contemporary student of physics reads the anti-metaphysical polemics of early twentieth century scientists, he must feel as though he were peering into a different world. For it is now widely recognized that the boundaries of science are impossible to fix with precision, and during the last few decades theoretical physics has become characterized precisely by its metaphysical, speculative character. In various fields such as relativity theory, quantum mechanics, classical cosmology, and quantum cosmology, debates rage over overtly metaphysical issues.¹⁹ Take relativity theory, for example. Both special and general relativity are susceptible to radically different interpretations of the same physical phenomena and raise profound metaphysical questions about the nature of space and time. The eminent philosopher of science John Earman contends that when it comes to questions about the nature of space and time, there is simply no way to justify an empirical/philosophical dichotomy; the

[Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 514). Thus, says Carl Henry, dialectical-existential theology was “powerless to withstand the onslaught of naturalistic secularism and logical positivism, which take the dialectical-existential disavowal of valid cognitive claims for deity as confirmatory evidence that theology is nonsense” (Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations* [Waco, TX: Word, 1976], 188).

¹⁸ See Paul M. van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel: Based on an Analysis of Its Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966).

¹⁹ For discussion see my *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity*, Philosophical Studies Series 84 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 139–148.

appropriate term for the study is the old one: Natural Philosophy.²⁰ Or consider quantum physics. In Euan Squires' opinion, "In an effort to understand the quantum world, we are led beyond physics, certainly into philosophy and maybe even into cosmology, psychology and theology."²¹ There are at least ten different physical interpretations of the mathematical formalism of quantum mechanics which are empirically equivalent and yet differ meaningfully in their respective ontologies. Or take the field of classical cosmology. "Cosmology," says George Gale, "is science done at the limit: at the limit of our concepts, of our mathematical methods, of our instruments, indeed, of our very imaginations."²² In an article in *Astronomy*, astrophysicists Tony Rothman and George Ellis pose the question, "Has astronomy become metaphysical?" and answer that it has.²³ Questions which are metaphysical in character are hotly debated in astrophysical journals. Gale observes, "It is clear that metaphysics continues to play an honorable role in cosmology. And, to the extent that it is an honorable role, it is no dishonor to use metaphysics in one's cosmologizing."²⁴ Physics becomes most metaphysical in the budding field of quantum cosmology. Alex Vilenkin frankly characterizes his discipline as "metaphysical cosmology."²⁵ Metaphysical questions, hypotheses, and difficulties are abundant in these and other fields of modern physics. Philosopher of science Bas van Fraassen nicely puts it: "Do the concepts of the Trinity [and] the soul. . . baffle you? They pale beside the unimaginable otherness of closed space-times, event-horizons, EPR correlations, and bootstrap models."²⁶ If the ship of scientific naturalism was not to be scuttled, Verificationism had to be cut loose.

But even more fundamentally, it was also realized that the Verification Principle is self-refuting. One has but to ask oneself, is the sentence "A meaningful sentence must be capable in principle of being empirically verified" *itself* capable of being empirically verified? Obviously not; no amount of empirical evidence would serve to verify its truth. The Verification Principle is therefore by its own lights a meaningless combination of words, which need hardly detain us, or at best an arbitrary definition, which we are at liberty to reject. Therefore, the Verification Principle and the theory

²⁰ John Earman, "Who's Afraid of Absolute Space?," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 3 (1970): 317.

²¹ Euan Squires, *The Mystery of the Quantum World* (Bristol: Adam Hilger, 1986), 4.

²² George Gale, "Cosmos and Conflict," paper presented at the conference "The Origin of the Universe," Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, CO, September 22–25, 1988.

²³ Tony Rothman and George Ellis, "Has Cosmology become Metaphysical?" *Astronomy*, 15 no., 2 (1987), 7.

²⁴ Gale, "Cosmos and Conflict."

²⁵ Alexander Vilenkin, "Birth of Inflationary Universes," *Physical Review D* 27 (1983): 2854.

²⁶ Bas C. van Fraassen, "Empiricism in the Philosophy of Science," in *Images of Science: Essays on Realism and Empiricism*, ed. by Paul M. Churchland and Clifford A. Hooker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 258.

of meaning it supported have been universally abandoned by philosophers. William Hasker observes, “Nowadays ethics, religion, metaphysics, and science all go about their business largely untroubled by the positivist assault, which is well on its way to becoming a distant memory.”²⁷

1.3 *The Advent of Postmodernism*

The downfall of positivism and the reopening for discussion of virtually all the traditional problems in philosophy has been called the central philosophical event of the second half of the twentieth century.²⁸ One result of this collapse has been the rise of Postmodernism. Scientific naturalism, originating in the Enlightenment, is characteristic of so-called “Modernity,” or the modern age, which is dominated by science and technology. The collapse of Verificationism brought with it a sort of disillusionment with the whole Enlightenment project of scientific naturalism.

This might seem at first blush a welcome development for Christian believers, weary of attacks by Enlightenment naturalists. But Postmodernists have unfortunately tended to despair of ever finding objective truth and knowledge. After all, if science, man’s greatest intellectual achievement, cannot do so, then what hope is there? Hence, Postmodernists have tended to deny that there are universal standards of logic, rationality, and truth. This claim is obviously incompatible with the Christian idea of God, who, as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, is an objectively existing reality, and who, as an omniscient being, has a privileged perspective on the world, grasping the world as it is in the unity of his intellect. There is thus a unity and objectivity to truth which is incompatible with Postmodern relativism. Postmodernism therefore tends to be no more friendly to Christian truth claims than is Enlightenment naturalism. It reduces Christianity to but one voice in a cacophony of competing claims, none of which is objectively true.

1.4 *The Rebirth of Christian Philosophy*

Fortunately, Postmodernism was not the only response to the collapse of Verificationism. Since Verificationism had been the principal means of barring the door to metaphysics, the jettisoning of Verificationism meant

²⁷ William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 23.

²⁸ Tyler Burge, “Philosophy of Language and Mind: 1950–1990,” *Philosophical Review* 101, no. 1 (1992): 49. Arguably the utter collapse of nineteenth century Idealism in both Continental and Anglo-American philosophy created a caesura between Idealist and post-Idealist philosophy which was deeper than the caesura between positivist and post-positivist philosophy, especially in Anglo-American philosophy, which continues to be broadly analytic on both sides of the positivist divide. But the collapse of positivism was more important for the rebirth of Christian philosophy.

that there was no longer anyone at the door to prevent this dreaded and unwelcome visitor from making a reappearance. So the demise of Verificationism has been accompanied by a resurgence of metaphysics in Anglo-American philosophy, along with all the other traditional questions of philosophy which had been suppressed by the Verificationists. Along with this resurgence has come something new and altogether unanticipated: the birth of a new discipline, philosophy of religion, and a renaissance in Christian philosophy.²⁹

Although philosophy of religion has been recognized as a delineated second-order discipline of philosophy as far back as G. W. F. Hegel, who lectured on the subject, analytic philosophy of religion is a recent movement of the last half century or so and is one of the most exciting and burgeoning areas of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. Its rise was facilitated by the demise of the Verificationist theory of meaning and the rebirth of metaphysics.³⁰

²⁹ For a nice account from an eyewitness see William Hasker, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 421–446; cf. Zimmerman, "Three Introductory Questions," 1–13. Hasker discerns three phases of the movement: 1955–1965, when the predominant concern was religious language; 1965–1985, when the debate over the coherence and truth of theism dominated the field; and 1985–present, during which philosophical theology blossomed. For a deeper, if cursory, look back see William J. Wainwright, "Introduction," in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, 3–6.

³⁰ Wolterstorff thinks that a second precondition of the rise of analytic philosophy of religion was the collapse of classical foundationalism through meta-epistemological investigations during the 1960s (Nicholas Wolterstorff, "How Philosophical Theology Became Possible within the Analytic Tradition of Philosophy," in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 158–161). But I suspect that Wolterstorff is putting the cart before the horse. It took decades before the reverberations of those investigations were fully felt in religious epistemology, and by then the renaissance of Christian philosophy was already well on its way. I see the revolution wrought by Reformed epistemology (to be discussed in the sequel) to be the fruit rather than a seed of contemporary philosophy of religion. What we do find fairly early on are challenges to so-called "evidentialism," the Enlightenment conviction that "theistic belief, to be rationally held, must be grounded in evidence, and that such evidence must ultimately consist of that of which one is certain" (158). For example, in a fascinating little comment by a young Alvin Plantinga in 1962, he points out that "there are many beliefs we all hold and hold with no detriment to our rationality for which we cannot produce both evidence and proof that the evidence really is evidence" – for example, belief in other minds (Alvin Plantinga, "The Sceptics' Strategy," in *Faith and the Philosophers*, ed. John Hick [London: Macmillan, 1964], 227; cf. Kai Nielsen's dogged reply: "if I am talking about some question of fact, if I assert that something is true, I imply that I have evidence for what I claim to be true" (Kai Nielsen, "A Sceptic's Reply," in *Faith and the Philosophers*, 231). Plantinga's insight would later bear fruit in his *God and Other Minds* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967]. But challenging evidentialism is a far cry from a searching analysis of classical foundationalism, which was yet to come. Moreover, the defense of theistic belief did not require an abandonment *tout court* of classical foundationalism, for theists could counter the sceptic by defending theistic arguments which were as acceptable as arguments for secular conclusions. Wolterstorff fails to give due account of the resurgence of natural theology as a vital part of contemporary philosophy of religion. Early books in philosophy of religion thus typically included a substantial section on theistic arguments (see, e.g., Daniel J. Bronstein and Harold M. Schulweis, *Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion: A Book of Readings* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1954]; Frederick Ferré, *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967]; George L. Abernethy and Thomas A. Langford, *Philosophy of Religion: A Book of Readings*, 2nd ed. [London: Macmillan, 1968]. Thus, the demise of classical foundationalism could not have been a precondition of the renaissance of Christian philosophy.

Since the late 1960s Christian philosophers have been coming out of the closet and defending the truth of the Christian worldview with philosophically sophisticated arguments in the finest scholarly journals and professional societies.³¹ At the same time that theologians were writing God's obituary, a new generation of philosophers was re-discovering his vitality. And the face of Anglo-American philosophy has been transformed as a result. By 1980 *Time* found itself running another major story entitled "Modernizing the Case for God" in which it described the movement among contemporary philosophers to refurbish the traditional arguments for God's existence. *Time* marveled:

In a quiet revolution in thought and argument that hardly anybody could have foreseen only two decades ago, God is making a comeback. Most intriguingly, this is happening not among theologians or ordinary believers, but in the crisp intellectual circles of academic philosophers, where the consensus had long banished the Almighty from fruitful discourse.³²

Baruch Brody attributes the dearth of philosophy of religion during the first half of the twentieth century, not only to Verificationism, but also to the fact that "very few working philosophers in the analytic school have had a personal religious commitment"; but by the time of his writing he reports "a growing number of analytical philosophers who have a real personal interest in theological issues and would like to apply to those issues the methods of the analytic school" (Baruch A. Brody, ed., *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* [Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974], vii; cf. Philip L. Quinn, "Philosophy of Religion, History of [Addendum]," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald M. Borchert [Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006]), 7:497–98. Wolterstorff considers this factor so important that, along with the demise of Verificationism and classical foundationalism, he lists it as one of the three preconditions for the renaissance of Christian philosophy:

"We are touching here on a fundamental cultural difference between the United States. . . and Europe. . . . The flowering of philosophical theology. . . has occurred mainly in the United States, this in spite of the fact that analytic philosophy is at least as dominant in such places as England, Scandinavia, and Australia as it is in North America. The reason for the difference is obvious: the United States is far more religious than these other parts of the world. . . . In short, the sociological fact that a good many American philosophers are theists, Christian and Jewish especially, has been a decisive factor in the flourishing of philosophical theology" (Wolterstorff, "How Philosophical Theology Became Possible," 162).

While Wolterstorff is doubtless correct about the critical role played by the United States' greater religiosity, appealing to such sociological factors casts one's explanatory net so wide that one would justifiably include, e.g., the remarkable ministry of Billy Graham and its impact on American culture as a contributing factor to the renaissance of philosophy of religion! We are interested in philosophical, not sociological, reasons for the change. It is interesting that authors citing Wolterstorff's analysis routinely ignore his third precondition (e.g., Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, "Introduction," in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Flint and Rea [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009] 3).

³¹ Already in 1962 Abernethy and Langford were able to report, "serious study and discussion of philosophical issues in religion are on the rise. Among scholars in the fields of philosophy and theology there is more interest in the work being done in each other's discipline and more of an effort to take seriously each other's interests than at any time for several decades" (Abernethy and Langford, *Philosophy of Religion* [Preface to the First Edition, 1962], ix). By 1967, H. D. Lewis could say that the philosophy of religion "has become again one of the liveliest interests of philosophers" (H. D. Lewis, "Philosophy of Religion, History of," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards [New York: Macmillan & The Free Press, 1967], 6:285).

³² "Modernizing the Case for God," *Time*, April 7, 1980, 65–66. Note the oblique reference to Verificationism.