INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI®

Université d'Ottawa · University of Ottawa

THE USE OF REASON IN KARL BARTH

by

Gerry Wilson

In partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy at the
University of Ottawa.

Thursday, June 14, 2001

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Leslie Armour

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Anselm	Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, Anselm's Proof of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme*
CC	*The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*
CD	*Church Dogmatics* Four Volumes. Cited according volume number, part volume number, and page number.
GD	Karl Barth, *Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*
Letters	*Descartes: Philosophical Letters*
PW	*The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* Two Volumes.
Romans	Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans.*
WGWM	Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man.*

Thesis Abstract

Karl Barth is the foremost Protestant theologian of the twentieth century. He is often derided as a fideist, and an enemy of reason, and, by implication, of truth. The burden of this thesis is to overturn this assumption concerning Barth's thought, by exhibiting the rationality which sustains his enormous body of published writing. I claim that for Barth reason is most powerful when it is about the theological task of finding the limits of reason's reach. Reason shows us its own limits in attempting to think the origin of all things, and thus of itself. I argue that Barth boldly affirms the necessity and integrity of empirical rationality, but that this mode of reasoning is limited from outside of itself in the effort to think the ground of both empirical reality and its own power to understand that reality. The reality of God, in Barth's Christian understanding God, shows the necessity and insufficiency of reason. Reason is necessary as the principle of unity in human experience, but it is insufficient in that it cannot comprehend, and so rationally integrate, the reality which God is. God transcends and is different from all acts in which we claim to know God. The recognition of this is not the end of reason, but its beginning as wisdom. I argue this thesis by a study of the two works which mark the fundamental turning points of Barth's intellectual development: his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1921) and his *Anselm: fides quaerens intellectum* (1931). I claim that the basic form of Barthian rationality is dialectical, and that the virtue of Barth's use of reason is in its power to transform external challenges to Christian belief into internal problems for its self understanding. Barth is not opposed to reason, but uses reason to fashion a coherent interpretation of reality.

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

I

The Thesis Karl Barth (1886-1968) is the most important Protestant theologian since the Reformation. He has had a significant influence on Christian thought in the twentieth century. In this thesis I argue that *Karl Barth uses human reasoning to exhibit the necessity but also insufficiency of reasoning for our understanding of God. Reason is necessary, for it is the standard of all intelligibility and the agent of unity in experience. It is insufficient, for to think God is to think something whose magnitude and nature transcend the grasp of reason.* The whole texture of Barth's thought is influenced, first affirmatively, then negatively, by modern philosophical rationality, particularly the classical German tradition, but including also the paradigmatic origin of modern thought in Rene Descartes.[1] Barth is concerned mainly with how these projects of modern philosophy bear on the question of God. Barth is not a philosopher, but uses philosophical concepts and methods to form theological arguments with varying degrees of persuasiveness.

Barth is not concerned to reconcile faith and reason, since he never once concedes their opposition or contradiction. Reason as such is a *formal* notion for Barth. Reason is a special power of thought, which in its *critical* role distinguishes itself from understanding by seeking to reduce the great diversity of experience to a minimum number of principles for ordering its intelligibility and thereby achieve a maximum of unity and clarity. Barth opposes the Enlightenment apotheosis of reason, and much of his work is devoted to overcoming what he regards as an untenable compromise of Christian self-understanding with the imperatives of a culture determined to shape itself without reference or relation to God. This has earned Barth the label fideist, on the assumption that Barth thinks that faith is some occult adherence of those who hold it, totally

---

1. For discussion of the impact of modern philosophy on theology in general see, Gustavo Benavides, "Modernity," in Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 186-204; Claude Geffré and Jean-Pierre Jossua (eds.) *The Debate on Modernity* (London: SCM Press, 1992); and, for a discussion of Barth and modernity, see Karl Gerhard Steck and Trutz Rendtorff, *Karl Barth und die Neuzeit* (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1973).

against the rule of reason. This conception of Barth is false. He is a proponent of faith. His work, however, challenges the presumption that Christian knowledge is obligated to submit to an alien standard of reason in order to earn the title of rational. Barth counters the claim to autonomy in secular reason with a radically theological conception of reason. I attempt herein to explain how this comes about in a small but methodologically decisive, part of Barth's enormous published output. I focus attention on works which summarize the two turning points in his intellectual development: his *Romans* and his *Anselm*. In the first work Barth develops a dialectical conception of reason. In the second, he complements it with a dialectical conception of Being, one in which the fundamental distinction between Being and beings is used to develop a notion of the dependence of all things on God. God alone is a necessary existent, all else deriving its existence from God.

Barth's thought is powerful and comprehensive in its range of interests. One finds throughout his development two aspects in thinking which are continually shaping one another in a dialectical interaction. On the one side stands Barth's most comprehensive category, the Word of God.[2] This notion has the same comprehensive applicability as Being has for Aristotle.[3] It is the Word of God which comes from outside of finite conditions of existence, and illumines the mind with an unsurpassable certainty of its reality and existence. The word of God operates both noetically and ontologically and is the transcendent and invisible source of their unity of being and our knowledge of it.

On the other side stands Barth's frequent wrestling with the whole problem of the mediation of faith in language, considered as the basic representational structure of human

---

2. See CD I/1, pp. 47-294 on Barth's discussion of the Word of God as the basis of dogmatic thinking.

3. In his *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (Notre Dame: university of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 23-45, Fergus Kerr interprets Barth as creating a "Christological metaphysics," in which Christ, the word of God incarnate, is given the tasks and functions which the philosophical tradition attributed to the concept of Being.

thought.[4] Barth is certain that the immediacy of faith which the Word of God gives to us is *mediated* through words, signs, and speech and that any account of how reasoning can exhibit the connection between itself and faith must consider the role of that mediating activity of reason.[5] How one conceives of this mediating activity has direct bearing on how one relates faith and reason. Barth's understanding of how language mediates revelation is evident in his acceptance of the Neo-Kantian (early in his career under the influence of Hermann Cohen)[6] and Kantian assumptions concerning the nature of human reason.[7] When faith—regarded as a rational disposition—understands God as the exclusively necessary being, it thinks a being in which all things can be grounded. The exclusivity of faith's object, owing to its necessity, results in a diminished capacity for the knowing subject. For, the fact that faith can be communicated only in language means that the certainty of faith's experience as an immediate awareness of presence is

---

4. Barth's conception of language is central to understanding how he sees the Word of God mediated in human words. See, for example, William J. Ellos, S.J. *Linguistic Ecumenism: A Barthian Road Back from Babel* (New York: University Press of America, 1983), esp. pp. 13-42; Ernstpeter Maurer, *Sprachphilosophische Aspekte in Karl Barths* »Prolegomena zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik« (New York: Peter Lang, 1989); Robert Brecher, "Karl Barth: Wittgensteinian Theologian Manqué," *Heythrop Journal* 24 (1983), pp. 290-300; and Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

5. In a philosophical discussion of interpretation of Biblical texts, Barth remarks that, "Even in what he says as an observer and exponent, he will everywhere betray the fact that, consciously or unconsciously, in cultured or primitive fashion, consistently or inconsistently, he has approached the text from the standpoint of a particular epistemology, logic or ethics, of definite ideas and ideals concerning the relations of God, the world and man, and that in reading and expounding the text he cannot simply deny these" (CD I/2, p. 728). The final chapter will address the nature of Barth's conception of language in more detail.

6. See on this, John Leyden, "The Influence of Hermann Cohen on Karl Barth's Dialectical Theology," *Modern Judaism* 12 (1992), pp. 167-83. Two studies richly detail the influence of NeoKantianism on Barth's thought. Johan Friedrich Lohmann *Karl Barth und die Nuekantianismus: Die Rezeption des Neukantianismus im »Römerbrief« und ihre Bedeutung für die weitere Ausarbeitung der Theologie Karl Barths*, (New York: De Gruyter, 1995), and Simon Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism? Barth's Earliest Theology and the Marburg School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

7. See Bruce Marshall, "Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings of Barth: Critically Realistic Dialectic Theology," *Zeitschrift für dialektische Theologie* 13 (1997), pp. 67-95 on Barth's Kantian shift from Neo- to a more classical Kantian epistemological theory. For a study which details the influence of Karl's philosopher brother Heinrich on his (Karl's) early development, see Joseph C. McLelland, "Philosophy and Theology—A Family Affair (Karl and Heinrich Barth)," in H. Martin Rumscheidt, (ed.), *Footnotes to a Theology: The Karl Barth Colloqium of 1972* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1974), pp. 31-52. See also George S. Hendry, "The Transcendental Method in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984), pp. 213-27.

weakened in all rational attempts at rationalizing it. Barth's choice of epistemological model has a theologically originated agnosticism as one of its consequences. Reason both discloses God as rationally necessary and finds the limit of the thinkable in God, as the one who is incomprehensible for thought. Reason's contingency is logically related to a reality which is alone necessary among realities. The tension between the immediacy of belief which comes from God's self-presencing and the mediation of that relation in language and reasoning is dialectically structured. Revelation lifts reason to a vision of what it could not otherwise see. Reason gives expression through language to an object which is greater than any object which language is constitutionally suited to describe.

Barth, like so many would-be antimodern thinkers, is everywhere conditioned by the problematic of modern philosophical rationality. This is clearly seen in the fact that for Barth the central difficulties with giving an account of the rationality of faith take the form of an epistemological problem. Barth is undeniably influenced by the developments in philosophy between Descartes and Hegel, specifically with how these developments affect the way the theological task is undertaken.[8] This is especially clear in Barth's *Anselm*, where the whole problem of proof is presented as a problem of how to demonstrate the objective reality of subjective ideality.

II

The Form of the Argument Barth uses philosophy in a purposely eclectic manner. He thinks that virtually all of the intellectual difficulties in modern theology arise from its attempt to find a *starting point* for theological reasoning within the human subject.[9] The proper starting point

---

8. See the magisterial study *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, tr. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (London: S C M Press, 1959), in which Barth assessed Haman, Kant, Herder, Jacobi, Hegel and other major thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Strikingly absent is the figure of Soren Kierkegaard, given the considerable influence Kierkegaard had upon Barth.

9. Barth thinks that the demonstration he undertakes would be necessary quite apart from how things stand with the philosophical culture in which philosophy operates, since theological rationality has a rational structure which is not dependent upon philosophical systems and can only be hindered by adopting such. See on this GD, pp. 325-7.

is in revelation, with that accommodation God makes to our understanding that we may know him. Barth's claim here has nothing to do with anti-intellectualism. Revelation is a problem concerning the *source* of the information we use, not about the rationality with which we develop it. Modern philosophy proves God, or marginalizes God, by applying a method of philosophical rationality which Barth names "theological Cartesianism,"[10] which provides the negative foil against which Barth develops his own position. Barth is clearly influenced and enriched by the great liberal scholarship of nineteenth century German theology, yet he sees this project as methodologically compromised to such a degree that it can no longer present a God for theology to discourse on. The core problem of "Cartesianism," as Barth understands it, is its anthropological involution. Cartesianism is shorthand for the whole shift in thought from the object being understood to the thinking subject seeking to understand it. This, Barth argues, leads to the intellectual occlusion of meaningful theological discourse, with God being understood (in Feuerbachian manner) as merely the objective projection of the conditions of human reason.

Barth opposes philosophical *systems* when they are used within theological reasoning,[11] but not philosophy as such.[12] Barth always takes some positive measure from his engagement

---

10. Barth describes Cartesianism as an ontology which functions as a "comprehensively explicated self-understanding of human existence which may also at a specific point become the pre-understanding of an existence in the Church or in faith, and therefore the pre-understanding and criterion of theological knowledge" (CD I/1, p. 36; cf. pp. 212-14). On Barth's polemic with "Cartesianism," see Vincent G. Potter "Karl Barth and the Ontological Argument," *The Journal of Religion* 45 (1965), pp. 309-25, and the ironic treatment of it in Fergus Kerr, "Cartesianism According to Karl Barth," *New Blackfriars* 77 (1996), pp. 358-68. Barth treats Descartes more extensively with a provocative analysis of Descartes's *Meditations* in CD III/1, pp. 350-63.

11. Barth's opposition is sometimes expressed in Tertullianic dimensions. "There never has actually been a *philosophia christiana*, for if it was *philosophia* it was not *christiana*, and if it was *christiana* it was not *philosophia*" (CD I/1, p.6).

12. Barth thinks that it is foolish to polemicize against a writer for using philosophy, since all biblical interpretation, as with all interpretation, depends upon philosophical "spectacles." "If we hold up hands of horror at the very idea, we must not forget that without such systems of explanation, without such spectacles, we cannot read the Bible at all. It is, therefore, a grotesque comedy, in which it is better not to take part, that again and again there are those who think that they can point with outstretched finger to all others past and present, accusing them of falling victim to this or that philosophy, while they themselves abide wholly by the facts, relying on their two sound eyes. No one does that, for no one can. It is no more true of anyone that he does not mingle the Gospel with some philosophy, than that here an now he is free from all sin except through faith" (CD I/2, p. 729).

with philosophers, even as he criticizes them.[13] He does not use philosophical ideas to polemicize with philosophers, but always transfers philosophical ideas into his theological framework and descriptions.[14] It is part of Barth's argument to demonstrate that theology has a controlling idea or belief of its own, which does not originate in philosophical reasoning, but can be explicated—can *only* be explicated—with its aid. Given that Barth finds use of philosophical categories unavoidable, there then arises a difficulty of which he is well aware. There arises in Barth a deeply rooted problem concerning the agency of human knowing when God is the object of such knowledge: If our categories are inadequate to know God, how can he claim that it is nonetheless we who do the knowing, that it is our rational act?

Now the problem for Barth is that even if we grant the source of the information we use in reasoning about God as originating in God, the *form* in which it becomes communicable and in which we represent it to each other and ourselves is the same medium used in philosophy. This means that theology understands its own reasoning activity as alien. All sacred doctrine is thus necessarily expressed in *secular form*. Revelation is always mediated in secular form. As such it always also conceals God in the medium which God uses to communicate his will.[15] In Barth's

---

13. In addition to the *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, see, for example, the discussions of Descartes (CD III/1, pp. 350-63), Leibniz (CD III/1, pp. 388-414), Fichte (CD III/2, 96-109), Nietzsche (CD III/2, pp. 231-42), and the existential ontologies of Heidegger and Sartre (CD III/3, 289-368).

14. His friend and colleague, Rudolph Bultmann—a New Testament scholar who adopts Heideggerian anthropological categories for interpreting St. Paul, and himself a competent philosopher of religious themes—repeatedly criticizes Barth for refusing to adopt a system of philosophy as a vehicle for his theology. "What you say," complains Bultmann, "(and often only *want* to say) is beyond your terminology,and a lack of clarity and sobriety is frequently the result." For his part, Barth thinks it dangerous when philosophers presume to speak about God with their systems: "I can only repeat that with your well-known attachment to Heidegger (not because he is Heidegger but because he is a philosopher, who as such has nothing to say to and in theology) you have done something that one ought not to do as an evangelical theologian." See Bernd Jaspert, (ed.) *Karl Barth - Rudolph Bultmann: Letters 1922-1966* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 38, 65 respectively.

15. "The secular form without the divine content is not the Word of God and the divine content without the secular form is also not the Word of God. We can neither stop at the secular form as such nor can we fly off beyond this and try to enjoy the divine content alone. The one would be realistic theology, the other idealistic theology, and both bad theology" (CD I/1, p. 175).

intellectual economy meaning is created at the intersection of two axes. (i) What is basic, normative and first to present itself to reflection is a *horizontal* axis, which could be described as a plane of immanence: the entirety of that rich and complex world of conscious life, for which the world is accessible in experience. This plane of immanence is represented as interconnected sequentially, and is metaphysically comprehended under the category of *temporality*. Empirical experience is the norm on this axis and the matrix for its knowing. (ii) The *vertical* axis intersects the horizontal and indicates transcendence. Transcendence is thought as a negative concept since it appears to reflection as a negation of the presumption of totality of the plane of immanence. Transcendence comes to view within immanence, but not as a function of the possibility of the plane of immanence. The paradox of finitude, and indeed, of knowledge as such, is that it can only come about when we understand the intellect as extending itself beyond what it appears to be: the power to know one's immediate environment and also one's inner states of mind; in sum, other finite magnitudes. Such a totality is a speculative claim for empirical experience, and not a datum of any experience as such. Experience thus depends upon what is not experienceable, on the presence of what it lacks and is not. This metaphor of the axes is a useful device for representing how Barth thinks transcendence while affirming immanence.

My concern here is to indicate how finite and infinite are preserved and transcended in Barth's thought.[16] Finitude cannot be known without boundaries. Yet, if the boundaries in question are merely philosophically achieved concepts—the circumscription in thought of thought's own purported domain—then the task of finding such a limit falls into infinite regress. Unless a genuine other informs my finitude, it will know neither itself as finite, nor that there is an other which is not itself. Immanence and transcendence are thus dialectically related through time. Barth is no *a priori* methodologist. The logic of finitude is essential to his conception of rationality, for it explains how revelation can be conceived as occurring within human knowing

16. There is a fine treatment of the problem of finitude and theological rationality in Conor Cunningham, "The Difference *of* Theology and Some Philosophies of Nothing," *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 289-312.

(which is the work of finitude) without being a function of factors which are purely immanent. It is, however, a logic which is discovered and articulated within immanence, which means that thought is always dialectically reliant on finitude. Barth's strategy for justifying a distinctly theological rationality runs as follows. He accepts the philosophically articulated account of knowing as the product of finite subjects, and thus as grounded in a difference comprehended in the metaphysical concept of subject and object interdependence. Barth wants, however, to reject the metaphysical *gravitas* by which this activity is speculatively attributed to a monistic substance. He achieves this latter task by substituting for the metaphysical a theological justification for the possibility of human knowledge, one which knows a triadic minimum, rather than a monism, as that which warrants the unity of knowledge, and the unity in being. This triadic minimum is grounded in God's own being (as Triune), but is methodologically constituted in the intellect's representation of the world as an interaction between human being, the world (creation), and God.

The finite conditions of human reasoning are driven home with a sort of sceptical resignation. "We live in and by the *healthy opinion* that we are," says Barth, "that something is. But in itself this is not better founded than the morbid idea that we are not, and that nothing is. We are certainly not in a position to verify our healthy idea and raise it into a certitude" (CD III/1, 345). We behave "as if" the phenomena we entertain in consciousness are true deliverances of objects in space and time and that they are as they appear to us to be. We have no way of proving this "as if." Barth fully accepts negative limitations of the phenomenal conditions of our experience.

> The nihilism which is implicit and often enough explicit in the human mode of life, which can never be quite suppressed and which it is better not to deny, calls in question the validity of this supposition. Thus in point of fact we live without knowing that we are or that anything is. We may well attempt to persuade ourselves that the world is real. But such an attempt cannot deliver us from the vicious circle of consciousness and being which might equally well be the circle of pure appearance. In making this attempt, we might be engaged in a constant repetition of this circle. (CD III/1,

346)[17]

In itself, human consciousness cannot devise a method for validating the objectivity of its ideas. This is because any such validation requires demonstrating that an idea in the mind originates with an object outside the mind. Yet, if all of our knowing is really derived from a mode of awareness which is phenomenological, and is thus always already a blend of sense perception and transcendental ordering, then any new strategy employed from within such a resource can only repeat the condition out of which it emerged. Now, Barth's answer to this problem is not to abandon the method which seeks to prove that certain contents of our mind (ideas) have an objective origin (outside the mind), but to adapt the method of establishing meaning which is associated with this sort of phenomenal view of knowing. The form of arguing which Barth adopts is a modified version of a *transcendental argument*.

Transcendental argument is native to Kant and the Kantian tradition and is intended to solve a problem specific to that tradition.[18] It is primarily a means by which Kant seeks to establish the categories of the understanding. My interest here is in sketching its form, not testing its validity in Kant's usage. Transcendental arguments are notoriously difficult to test, since they are arguments concerning the basic element of reason, but reason understood as *critical* reason. This means that

---

17. The translation of this last block quote is misleading in that it renders Barth's "aus dem Kreislauf von Bewußtsein und Sein" as "the vicious circle of consciousness," when the word vicious is entirely absent from Barth's text. The circularity is simply expressed, and not deprecated.

18. Herman Krings, "Knowing and Thinking: On the Structure and History of the Transcendental Method in Philosophy," in *Contemporary German Philosophy*, tr. H. Schmettau and D. E. Christensen (University Park: Pennsylvannia: State University Press, 1982), vol. 4, pp. 206-22, connects the Kantian use of transcendental argumentation with the medieval scholastic tradition. The transcendentals of the middle ages where comprehensive concepts, operating above the lesser distinctions of "specific, generic, and highest generic concepts" (p. 208). The transcendentals where differentiations of the universal category of being, such that "these terms are always implied whenever the word 'to be' or 'is' is spoken" (ibid.) They resist dialectic erosion. "They are connotations of the concept of being, or of the synthesis of sentence structure, which are inevitable and do not permit of being overtaken by dialectic. We encounter this characteristic quality, that is, the impossibility of being overtaken, everywhere in knowledge and speaking as the circularity of transcendental reflection: these concepts do not become the object of reflection apart from already being presupposed" (ibid., 208). Kant's concern is not so overtly metaphysical, although it could be argued that the critical philosophy is an attempt to carry on the metaphysical tradition after the rise of the rational subject in modern thought.

what transcendental arguments seek to establish are the criteria by which we judge what is and is not a valid conception of objects. These arguments operate on the premise that sensible intuitions are not objects and do not stand over against my conception of them, since they rely on my own thinking activity for their constitution. We cannot simply consult objects to check our representation of them, since our representations of them are possible only by means of intellectual constructions (concepts) which we make and under which we subsume intuitive moments of experience. Transcendental arguments are thus inevitably circular. They always derive from some aspect of phenomenal awareness the condition for its occurrence in thought. As rational arguments for the constituting power of mind, they must derive from mind, not from sense (which is supposed on this view to be void of signification), or from mere understanding, which in its activity of gathering concepts in time relies on something not derived to give meaning to what is derived. Transcendental arguing is thus a form of *a priori* argumentation seeking to specify the conditions under which objects can be cognized. Paul Guyer summarizes transcendental argument in Kant's usage.

> (1) all possible representations belong to a single numerically identical self; (2) this is a synthetic connection of representations, which (3) requires an *a priori* synthesis among them, (4) the rules of which are none other than the categories which are therefore (5) necessary conditions for the representations that themselves belong to the numerically identical self.[19]

The unity which objects have in knowledge relies upon a self which is not accessible directly by

---

19. See "The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* P. Guyer, (ed.) (New York: Cambridge UP, 1992), p. 144. From the enormous literature on transcendental arguments see Eva Schaper "Arguing Transcendentally," *Kant-Studien* 63 (1972), pp. 101-116; Eckart Förster, "How Are Transcendental Arguments Possible?" in Eva Schaper and Wilhelm Vossenkuhl, ed., *Reading Kant: New Perspectives on Transcendental Arguments and Critical Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Deiter Henrich, "The Proof-Structure of Kant's Transcendental Deduction." *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1969), pp. 640-659; Jeff Malpas, "The Transcendental Circle," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1997), pp. 1-20; and Charles Taylor, "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 20-33, who notes the disquieting truth that "A valid transcendental argument is indubitable; yet it is hard to know when you have one, at least one with an interesting conclusion. But then that seems true of most arguments in philosophy" (p. 33). See also Herman Krings, "Knowing and Thinking: On the Structure and History of the Transcendental Method in Philosophy," in *Contemporary German Philosophy*, tr. H. Schmettau and D. E. Christensen (University Park: Pennsylvania: State University Press, 1982), vol. 4, pp. 206-22.

introspection but deduced as a necessary precondition for the unity of knowledge. In a highly abstract argument, Kant sought to establish the existence of a self-continuous "I" which must formally be able to accompany all judgments. The principle for the unification of knowledge never comes directly into view but is a theoretical condition, formulated as the transcendental unity imposed by an apperceiving self. The argument states that if we are to have knowledge of objects, we must be able to know before knowing—and from within the confines of the mind—what objectivity is like. Kant tries to establish the conditions and the form of reason quite apart from the objects or experience of them which actual thinking of the world involves. It is the apriority of reason for Kant which forces him to create structures supposed to lie deep in the mind. Pure reason orders understanding by its categories, which is an internal synthesis. A second synthesis occurs when sense experience is taken up by discursive understanding. These two activities are antithetic: pure reason is atemporal, whereas understanding is time bound. So a third factor of thought must preside over this pair of synthetic activities which make up the mind's activity. That third factor is the transcendental self. This is not an empirical self, but a self created out of the need to have the basic notion of unity to give identity to all contents of knowledge, identity, that is, in and for a thinking self. Knowledge would not be knowledge without this continuity provided by the self. What the transcendental argument shows is that if reason's primary function of forming objects is to be validated *a priori*, then the basic concepts (categories), without which reasoning would be impossible, must have a ground within the thinking subject which is not tied to empirical experience but makes that experience possible by giving intelligibility (judgment) to the contents of experience (sense perception).

Transcendental arguing is thus a *formal* undertaking, seeking to establish the conditions of experience. Transcedental arguments are by no means a substitute for experience, on which they rely, and the conditions of which they seek to describe. Knowledge depends upon reasoning, but reasoning is formally empty without input from perception.

The circularity of transcendental argument derives from the single dimension in which it

requires reasoning to operate. Space and time were once thought to be the conditions of a domain in which human thought could detect the divine agency without identifying that domain with the divine.[20] In the critical philosophy, though, space and time are not regarded as objective. They are preconditions for any and all possible intuitions and their representation, and thus they are the *form* which intuition requires. This internalization of space and time is theoretically crucial. Transcendental arguments do not conclude to an object outside the mind. In fact, they make the relation "outside the mind" impossible to represent inside thought. The critical philosophy is plagued by an "outsidelessness"[21] which it tries to overcome. Time and space are ours to the extent that we invent them. This is why it cannot settle the question of objective status of its representations by reference to an object it is supposedly deriving from dimensions shared with it, since the space which differentiates the mind from its other, and the duration in which objects continue for our inspection, are both primitive operations of mind, and thus subjective or internal. The ground of both the whole domain of objects and of the thinking self must be nontemporal.

In sum, transcendental arguments are negative demonstrations which seek to exhibit the essentiality of certain necessary concepts (categories of pure reason) by *using these categories* to show that no *critical* reasoning would be possible without them. The foundational concept thus argued for is a thinking self which remains self-identical through change (the change of augmented knowledge acquisition).

The logic of transcendental arguments is a ground-consequent logic. This logic structure of the method which begins with the phenomenon of thought and seeks to genetically determine the origin of the idea in thought. It is especially concerned with objectivity and in its attempt to show how, for finite creatures like us, scientific knowledge of objects (in the Newtonian sense of

---

20. See on Kant's view of space and time Wayne Waxman, "Kant and the Imposition of Time and Space," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 19 (1996), pp. 43-66.

21. The term comes from B. R. Brinkman's provocative little essay, "'Outsidelessness' and 'High Noon'," *Heythrop Journals* 35 (1994), pp. 53-63.

science) is possible, it simultaneously shows why we cannot have theoretical or object knowledge of supersensible entities.[22] Hermann Krings offers a helpful summary of the nature and limits of the logic of the critical philosophy.

> The transcendental procedure of thought aims for a logic—to be precise, for a logic of the genesis of the object of experience or for a 'logic of truth', as Kant has clearly stated. The elementary analysis of the object of experience shows quite generally that this object *is not simple* but rather has to be understood as the result of a complex constitutive process. The single constitutive elements and their interrelatedness (*symploca*) must within such an analysis be thought of as 'earlier' in relation to the constituted object. The 'A Priori' has operational significance, to express the matter formally.[23]

Transcendental method is not causal and is not meant to be an entity which comes within the explanatory orbit of causal interaction. It points to what is a condition for thinking causes, and must as such be outside the series of causes. It does "signify that which is not a part of the series of causes but instead is itself the condition of the series of causes and which therefore can only be thought."[24]

Now, this sort of argumentation is similar to what Barth seeks to accomplish in his study of Anselm. In developing the analogy between Barth and critical philosophy, which he of course does not accept uncritically,[25] we should note, first, that Barth does not regard the critique of (pure) reason as a new philosophy. Kant was only writing a prolegomena to the actual work of

---

22. It does not say there are no supersensible entities, but only that they do not fall within the purview of what is now called knowledge.

23. Ibid., 209-10.

24. Hermann Krings, ibid., p. 212.

25. "Therefore it can only rest on an appalling misunderstanding of what is a necessary critique for us at this point if, looking back to our investigation of the knowledge of God, we still regard it as answered in principle by a critical philosophy, or try to borrow points of view and arguments from such a philosophy, so that, by a final critical bracketing of our investigations and conclusions (in which in a sense we have a place alongside the judging of God), we relieve ourselves of the weight of the question directed to us, procuring for ourselves a quiet mind and light shoulders in relation to it" (CD II/1, p. 248).

philosophy.[26] Barth adapts the critical philosophy, partly because in method it corresponds to what he thought Anselm was trying to do in his demonstration of God's necessary existence. In this respect, Barth's method moves from thought (conception) to object. Second, Barth is seeking a ground-consequent relationship between the concept with which he begins and the object it describes. Third, the transcendental entity to which Barth argues is also inaccessible to empirical perception. It is the source of what comes into theoretical understanding, without being a single datum within the theoretical domain.[27]

Two important differences disturb the symmetry in the analogy between critical philosophical method and Barth's method. These two features, I contend, constitute the great reversal which Barth is attempting to promote in his method, a reversal in the order of dependence of faith and reason, such that reason is seen to derive from the essential rationality of God, rather than God from the essential rationality of human and nonhuman nature. First, Barth does not think that the concept of God, as *something than which a greater cannot be conceived*, is a native property of the transcendental make up of human thought. It does "exist" in thought,[28] but Barth contentiously claims that it is a revealed name of God and not a concept natural to the human intellect or derivable from introspection on its operations. Second, in this method Barth substitutes a divine subjectivity conceived along transcendentalist lines, for human subjectivity. Critical philosophy sought to show the extent to which knowledge is a function of human subjective

---

26. Barth takes up Kant's warning that we should not make of his methodological insights a new philosophy, and then comments that a "critique of reason is complete only when it issues in applied science; God comes in history only through deeds and evidences; he manifests himself in consciousness only through compelling, revealing, immediately self-confirming insights and communications—else what is the meaning of all the words about the Word?" (WGWM, pp. 283-4).

27. For an example of how transcendental argumentation appears in current debates theological rationality, see Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 20-26.

28. Existence *is* a predicate which things other than God may have or lack in addition to the natures (*essentia*) they actualize. God is unique precisely as the one in whom the nature (what) and the actuality of existence (*esse*) are identical and necessary.

possibilities by arguing for the necessity of certain basic concepts, which are then thought to form the heart of reason. It concludes to claims concerning the nature and limits of possible knowledge. Barth concludes to the *necessary* existence of God—he never doubts God's actual existence—and mandates it as a condition of the success of his argument. The question Barth seeks to answer is how faith advances to understanding, and not how unbelief can be won over by argument. This latter strategy he regards as impossible. These points will be taken up in a criticism of Barth's position in the concluding chapter. For now I want set out the direction of the argument, especially in the third chapter.

III

Ideal and Real as Polar Limits of Human Reasoning Barth's use of reason is fundamentally dialectical. Everything that falls within the power of human understanding is grasped as a product of oppositional tensions which generate the concepts and language with which we understand ourselves and our world. Barth thinks that reason itself is dialectically created. In the 1929 essay "Fate and idea in Theology,"[29] Barth develops a conception of theological reasoning which is directly related to philosophical rationality. He argues that theological reasoning does not occur on a different plane of operation than philosophical rationality. His argument presupposes that theological reasoning has a different *origin* than philosophical reasoning, but that both have the same conceptual framework—both, that is, are "human discipline[s]" (p. 28). The importance of this essay for our purposes is that it furnishes a clearer conception of Barth's use of reason than does his *Anselm*, which, for all its importance, still leaves foundational questions concerning the basis of theological reasoning unanswered.[30] In

---

29. See Karl Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology," in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth: Essays and Comments* H. Martin Rumscheidt, ed., (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1986). This essay is a series of lectures delivered in 1929. Page references to this work will be cited throughout the remainder of this subsection in the main body of the text.

30. Two recent studies have argued that for all its methodological importance, *Anselm* adds little that is new to Barth's emerging theological rationality. See Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 412-440; and William Stacy

the essay here considered Barth presents theological reasoning as a form of *critical realism*. Philosophy, as a disciplined self-questioning of human understanding, discovers a basic tension or polarity in human reason between what is immediately *given* and formative of experience and the judgments of truth on that immediate experience, a judging capacity which is not simply given in and with experience of the real. Philosophy also concerns itself with the problem of the "higher unity" of this *constitutive* polarity of human reason. Theology, too, is necessarily confronted with this problem of contradictory poles and their higher unity, since it wants to affirm God's reality while denying that God is simply a third thing resulting from the synthetic activity of these opposite poles of reasoning. For these reasons, theology "cannot evade the task of conceptualizing God" (p. 56).

Far from denying the validity of philosophical rationality, Barth relies upon it to clarify the distinctive sort of reasoning proper to the biblically based theology he wishes to advance, a theology conceived of as a dogmatics built upon "a conceptual scheme grounded in the Bible" (p. 28). Such a theology as Barth conceives it "is an academic discipline [*Wissenschaft*]. That is, it is a technically ordered investigation into the truth about God as the object of ecclesiastical proclamation" (p. 26). Significantly, Barth does not claim that God as such is the object of theological science:

> It thus does not investigate and teach the truth about God as such. For theology as for all other academic disciplines, God as such is a hypothesis, a limit-concept, which cannot come into consideration as an object of human inquiry and knowledge. Theology, rather, investigates and teaches the truth about God as he is proclaimed and should be proclaimed in the church. (p. 26)

It is because theology has for its conceptual medium a specific human discourse, the Church's talk about God (in the form of sermon, creed, theological reflection), that it is a human discipline falling within the purview of philosophy. Indeed, because "all philosophy has in fact had its origin in some kind of theology" (p. 30), the two disciplines enter into a specific, mutually

---

Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), esp. p. 35.

illuminating relationship to one another. The relationship between theological and philosophical reasoning separates them only by a hair's breadth, though this distance is abysmally deep. Theology has

> no categories by which it might conclusively be able to differentiate its knowledge, the knowledge of God's Word, from the knowledge of the philosophers. It can never say the specific thing it has to say as theology such that the philosopher could not say it in a pinch, perhaps meaning something completely different. For that is precisely what theology will never be able to prove to the philosopher with final triumphant clarity—that the philosopher really means something different. (p. 28)[31]

Although theology and philosophy are similar and certainly share an identical "framework" of operation,[32] Barth thinks that they come at the problem of God in opposing ways. The burden of critical realism in Barth, I will argue, is to show precisely how this difference can emerge, despite the similarities between philosophy and theology.

(a) *The Realist Element in Thought* As the essay's title indicates, Barth seeks to develop his argument out of a consideration of the "two main boundaries of human thought," namely, "fate," and "idea." These are general terms for the oppositional structure of *nontheological rationality*, an oppositional structure which has many aspects and alternative formulations.[33] Barth

---

31. So close are the conceptual method's of philosophy and theology that theology is always under threat of losing its identity. "At no time is theology ever *not* in danger, ever *not* in temptation. Theology stands under the insufferable pressure of a situation where it can speak only humanly and where this occurs so much the better in philosophy. [...] Just as theology is tempted by philosophy, so too the church stands in the parallel danger and temptation of either trying to become the state or of being absorbed into the state" ("Fate and Idea in Theology," p. 30).

32. "Theology is a technical discipline concerned about God, about the God proclaimed by his church. It is, however, a human discipline. It involves a fundamental reflection upon reality by means of *that very same thought* which is also the tool of the philosophers. Therefore, it cannot fail that those two boundaries of human existence, the basic problem of all philosophy, will also arise in theology and play a decisive role" ("Fate and Idea in Theology," p. 32, emphasis added).

33. "I might just as well have said: 'reality and truth', or 'nature and spirit', or 'the objective and the non-objective', or 'the conditioned and the unconditioned', or 'being and thinking', or 'heteronomy and autonomy', or 'experience and reason'. I might also have said: 'realism and nominalism', or 'romanticism and idealism'" ("Fate and Idea in Theology," p. 25). For insightful discussion of dualisms in Barth's thought see Graham Ward, "Barth, Modernity, and Postmodernity," CC, pp. 274-95, esp. 291-3. There is a valuable discussion of the philosophical background of the issues of idealism-realism which concern us here, in Fergus Kerr, "Idealism and Realism: An Old Controversy Dissolved," in Kenneth Surin, ed., *Christ, Tragedy and Ethics: Essays in Honour of Donald McKinnon* (Cambridge:

represents human thought as occurring between the foundational opposition of *real(ism)* and *ideal(ism)*, though he regards these as complementary and equally necessary if thought is to give a full account of its own activity and potentialities. The real and the ideal are not, however, symmetrically related:

> The relationship between fate and idea is not symmetrical. We do not stand, as it were, at the midpoint between the two. On the contrary, it will always seem more natural for us to seek God in our act or fate in our God. *Knowledge is first and foremost a knowledge of experience or of existing reality. When it proceeds to clarify itself critically, by advancing into knowledge of the truth, then that is simply a second step which presupposes the first.* (p. 32-33; emphasis added)

Barth treats the realist standpoint, as I will show, as somehow initially already dependent upon idealist assumptions. Realism in theology is manifested in assumptions concerning the relationship of God and Being. For the realist, to say that God "is" is to move from the realistic beginning in experience, and advance toward the goal. The *being* of God has three possible interpretations. (1) God *partakes* in being. (2) "God is himself being" (p. 33). (3) Everything that *is*, as such participates in God. The logical model which interprets being and beings in relationship to God in degrees of similarity and dissimilarity (of being) is called the *analogia entis* (analogy of being). "Everything that is exists as a mere creature in greatest dissimilarity to the Creator, yet by having being it exists in greatest similarity to the Creator. That is what is meant by *analogia entis*" (p. 33). The realist imagines that "in what is given" she will be able to *infer* her way back to God. "God is ontologically and noetically the fate of humanity. It is thus the case that we stand in relation to God by virtue of the fact that we ourselves *are* and that things outside of us *are*" (p. 33). Realism is premised on the duality of "we ourselves and things outside of us." It understands the analogy of knowing God within the metaphysical confines of all knowledge as a subject-object relationship. "What is given has both an inward and an outward dimension, a subjective and an objective facticity. *Analogia entis* means the dissimilarity and similarity to God which I myself have as knower and the thing outside of me has as the known. That is what it has to mean if those two

---

Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 15-33.

givens are to become for me something similar to God (*similitudo Dei*) and if I am supposed to know God from them" (p. 33). The realist component in cognition requires that whatever counts as knowledge must have the form of objectivity or givenness about it. The great difficulty in philosophical treatments of God revolve around the question of how we are supposed to interpret the mode and possibility of divine presence or givenness. The realist thinks it is best interpreted as the static and constant character of the nature which makes knowledge of it possible. Realists think that there is a natural affinity between God's will, the order in the universe, and the structure of human reason. Knowledge of God follows upon and must be coherent with our rational assumptions concerning the nature of the universe.

The basis of realist or experiential *theology*—of which Thomas Aquinas is the classic representative in its "objective" school, and F. D. E. Schleiermacher in its "subjective"[34] school—is its insistence that knowing God must be related to our "fate"—to the origin of knowledge in immediate experience. Knowing God must be tied to the givenness of reality in general. God must be a *fact*, if there is to be knowledge of God. Barth agrees with the realist. "Our life is a process of perceiving ourselves, our world, and the two in indissoluble correlation" (p. 36). The foundational concept for theological method is that of revelation, and Barth thinks that the concept of revelation has a realist reference built into it. Revelation is a communication between two discrete subjects. Barth always regards revelation as originating outside of human subjectivity, but in an object who is a supreme, paradigmatic subject. "Simply to recall the concept of revelation ought to bring home to us that in realism we can detect one of the legitimate and indispensable

34. Realist theology can emphasize God's givenness as subjective, as when Schleiermacher classically explains the idea of God as issuing from the "feeling of absolute dependence" on God. It can also emphasize the objective character of givenness, as when Thomas Aquinas makes the metaphysics of being (Aristotelian) the conceptual model for understanding God's objectivity. Within the realist outlook there is a dialectical swing, so that "a psychologistic empiricism will eventually call forth one that is historicist, just as the latter if neglected will call forth the former" ("Fate and Idea in Theology," p. 34).

aspirations of all genuine theology, namely, the concern to understand God as an act" (p. 36).[35] Experience is open to the actual, "as a series of operations that happen to us and with us," and this is what enables us to "connect the concept of reality with that of fate" (p. 36). "Act means being, and being can only mean act" (p. 36), so it is not strange that we should, at least initially, think of God in realist terms. The thought of God "must be an expression of reality, indeed of the great reality which includes and surpasses all other reality in itself. It must represent the one reality present in all other reality, hidden but not entirely hidden there. It acquires legitimacy as a thought about experience" (p. 37).

As he will do for his affirmation of idealism, Barth now turns to a critical limitation of theological realism. Anyone who sought to reject the objective aspect of realism, with its primary reference to the given, would "not be a very good theologian, not even a particularly good Protestant theologian. Instead, he would merely show himself to be an idealist, and not a particularly sophisticated one at that" (p. 37). However, because the realist position is in fact "a particular form of human *logos*," it calls for our vigilance. Realism is hampered by an uncritical assumption that "revelation really do[es] no more than confirm and reinforce supernaturally a naively presupposed human capacity and necessity apparently somehow given with our existence as such" (p. 38). Barth criticizes realism, with a critique of Aquinas's fundamental operating principle, *Gratia non destruit, sed supponit et perficit naturam.* The problem here is that "the experience of God becomes an inherent possibility and necessity," along with human existence as

---

35. On Barth's being-in-act ontology, see Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Existentialists and God: Being and the Being of God in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Tillich, Etienne Gilson, Karl Barth* (Dubuque, Iowa: University of Dubuque Press, 1956), pp. 113-34; George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 30-2, who defines actualism in Barth as follows: "At the most general level it means that he thinks primarily in terms of events and relationships, rather than monadic or self-contained substances. So pervasive is this motif that Barth's whole theology might well be described as a theology of active relations. God and humanity are defined in fundamentally actualistic terms" (p. 30). Some critics find the achilles heal in Barth's method in his actualistic thinking. See the criticism in Ronald Theimann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), pp. 94-96. For a wider philosophical contextualization of the issue, see Eberhard Jüngel, "The World as Possibility and Actuality: The Ontology of the Doctrine of Justification," in *Theological Essays*, tr. J. B. Webster, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), pp. 95-123.

such (p. 39). The Word of God overturns the naive confidence that redemptive knowledge is derivable from natural knowing. Why? Because there is no substitute for the Word of God, which creates both the 'object' experienced and the possibility of its being experienced. Human understanding is the locus of this conjunction of actual and possible, but the possibility is given in and with the act. "God's word does not confirm and reinforce the naive confidence that it is possible for human beings to experience God. On the contrary, *by mediating such an experience*, it shakes that confidence rather severely" (p. 39).

In addition, theological realism misidentifies the nature of the divine givenness. God is not given in being as such. Barth rejects the notion of Being as an arch-category which must subsume God within it. Against a fixed concept of Being, Barth places a concept of God whose being is a being-in-act, eternally complete. Theological realism overlooks the fact that *grace* is the permanent mode of God's self-giving:

> It cannot be understood as though divine acts occur, or as though their effects appear, without an actor. [...] God is therefore given to us neither in the givenness of history and nature nor in that of our own consciousness. In these abstractions from the event of grace, God is not given to us. For grace is the event in which God comes to us in his Word, an event over which God has sole control, and which is strictly momentary. Otherwise God would simply be identified with some underlying mechanism of nature, representationally construed (whether by myth, symbol, or metaphor). He could not be distinguished from fate. The possibility of experiencing God cannot be understood as something *given* by fate. *God distinguishes himself from fate by the fact that he is not so much there as rather that he comes.*" (p. 40; emphasis added)

A third problem confronting realist theology is that it does not do justice to the noetic effects of sin on the problem of knowing God. It presents, thinks Barth, knowledge of God as an ineluctable process, concurrent with the awareness of being. When it does this it detracts from the basis of revelation and knowledge of God in God's own free willing and choosing. Revelation, which is always tied to redemption for Barth, is not a cosmic mechanism or process, but a willed and intentional divine act. It concerns persons—indeed, makes them such—and not units or things in a process or mechanism. The "possibility and necessity" of knowing God is thus "a matter of

God's free will and not our will" (pp. 40-1). No infusion of grace or habituation can of itself reverse the fundamental opposition which the human will has to God. This problem of sin has not only the obvious moral, but also epistemic, implications. If we are predisposed to resist belief in God, this will affect the criteriology we accept, or, more importantly, fail to accept, as evidence for God's reality. The aporetic difficulty here is that if we are so blinded by sin that we cannot know God, how can we be culpable for such ignorance (as it seems we are)? Similarly, if sin really is pervasive and really does undermine our reasoning about God, how can such reasoning ever form a genuine knowledge of God? The answer to this difficulty cannot emerge from *within* the problematics of epistemology alone, for salvation is *possible* only as coming from outside of human resources.[36] Redemption is a *possibility* understood from within its christological *actuality*. The importance of sin, moreover, is that awareness of it provides one of the motives for self-criticism and revision of our beliefs. Suspicion is not directed at disbelief, but is an integral aspect of authentic belief itself.

(b) *The Idealist Element in Thought* God is an *act* before he is a *fact*. "God distinguishes himself from fate by the fact that he is not so much there as rather that he comes" (p. 40). God is not simply there, as history, nature, or consciousness are, and so God cannot be simply deduced from these givens. The logical problem with natural theology (experiential theology) is that the difference between our perceptions of things as effects of God, on one side, and God's own nature, on the other, is too great to be captured in any analogical structure which can give it accurate meaning within a closed system of symbols. Analogies of being are self-eliminating, since they always presuppose an asymmetry between God's similarity and God's dissimilarity to

---

36. On the problem of sin and reasoning, see Merold Westphal, "Taking St. Paul Seriously: Sin as an Epistemological Category," in Thomas P. Flint, ed., *Christian Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 200-226. Westphal's argument requires that we recognize the interest-laden character of the epistemological project as such. "It is not hard to see that logic, as the theory of what inferences we are entitled to make and with what level of confidence, is but a subdivision of epistemological ethics, specifying an important subset of epistemic rights and duties. This way of putting it shifts emphasis from beliefs to believings, or, to put it linguistically, reminds us that syntax and semantics are always subordinate to pragmatics. This, in turn, makes it more natural to speak of sin as an epistemological category" (pp. 200-201).

creatures or nature as a whole. Consequently, an analogy always relies on initially unexpressed assumptions to move from nature to supernature. The belief that God is "self-giving" differs from the realist's assumption of God's "givenness." We need, therefore, to find a different understanding of God's givenness than the realist one at the base of experiential theologies. Barth sees realism as prone to identify God and natural reality, a judgment which transforms realism from a necessary initial moment in reasoning to a "demonology," which consists in a total identification of the divine with the natural. Barth holds that since God creates and sustains all things, the realist's instinct to look for God in those things is sound, but the belief that God is *available* and accessible in them is mistaken. God hides behind things. Any talk of accessibility can only arise out of the discovery that God accesses our human ways of knowing. God makes us "ready" to receive the knowledge we may have of God. The realization that the initial moment by which we seek God in reality is not sufficient of itself to produce true knowledge of God—and tends to produce misconceptions of God—sets the realist in a *crisis* situation. Crisis is not, however, a negation of reasoning. It is, rather, a "chastening" through self-questioning. It consists, Barth argues, in a movement from the *real* to the *true*. Such a movement is already an indication of the shift to an idealist perspective. For idealism critically discriminates "knowledge of the given for the sake of its strengthening—chastening it by rejecting the self-evident status it has for realism; strengthening it by restoring its true connection" (p. 46).

Idealism is "the antidote to all demonology passing itself off as theology" (p. 47). Idealism is a necessary element of reasoning, for the *true* and the *real* are not coextensive. "Truth is not self-evident in and with experience of the real, even though truth presupposes the necessity of such experience. It is its idealist pole which makes reasoning *critical*, a value of thought which Barth seeks to combine with the realist side. As in his treatment of the realist viewpoint, Barth begins his treatment of idealism by underlining its virtues. He defines idealism as

> the self-reflection of the spirit over against nature. It discovers a correlation between thinking and truth. The creative logos becomes the source from which subject and object are given in correlation. Reason is exalted over the

> objective and subjective power of fate, and is used to gain mastery over the limitation fate imposes on human existence (p. 43).

Barth clearly thinks that idealism counterbalances realism. Aquinas, for instance, is regarded as deriving his concept of God's otherness through an abstraction of the givenness of God as represented in the metaphysics of being. Realism knows well enough to distinguish God from all things, but its analogy of being also identifies God with all things by way of the category of being. Idealist thought, on the other hand, emphatically distinguishes God from all things. Barth suggests that the affinity of idealism with mysticism implies that idealism is not the result of a commitment to "a philosophical system," as happens with realist theology's appropriation of Greek metaphysics. The fundamental distinction in idealism between God and all else makes it easier to "understand *God's* revelation in contrast to whatever else might somehow be revealed" (p. 45). The excelling virtue of idealism, as Barth understands it, is its power to include the real in a higher unity which grounds it in truth:

> Genuine idealism will affirm mysticism, but also culture. It will not only discover and proclaim the self-existent God as the great idea and truth. It will also discover and proclaim that in God all ideas, truths, principles—all practical and theoretical concepts—originate.[...] Genuine Idealism describes a hyperbola. It leads away from reality into the realm of truth (which does not necessarily coincide with reality), but from there it leads back to reality, now understood as the context where truths are found. In its own way genuine idealism does not exclude but includes the given. That is what makes Christian theological idealism possible: a critical understanding of revelation's givenness. (p. 46)

The central problem for our conceptualizing of God is how to understand the nature of *givenness*. Barth contrasts realism's tendency to identify God and nature (being) with a notion of God's givenness as an *act of continual self-giving*. While he praises the amenability of idealism to this central truth of God's being, he finds it necessary to question idealism's treatment of the notion of the divine givenness. The problem is that it locates that givenness in *spirit*, rather than nature, but fails to recognize that it is only dealing with created spirit. The key criticism of idealism is that it runs the great risk of identifying God with the higher powers of the human mind and its capacity to understand and represent created spirit. Barth appears to identify created spirit with reason. A

consequence of this identification of divine spirit with human reason is that theological idealism presupposes that God is accessible to human thought at all times, like the realist, but in a different locus. Barth criticizes this presupposition for the same reason he criticizes it in realism, namely, that it denies the freedom of God to originate the acts in which we know God.

While theology will endorse the idealistic method, Barth raises three critical points which must be asserted against its presumption of presence.[37] First, the idealist must be reminded that *access* cannot mean our accessibility to God, but God's power to access our thought processes (p. 47). In ourselves we have no capacity to know God. It must be given to us in and with the event of God's self-disclosure (p. 48). Second, Barth cautions against taking the dialectic of idealism as a foundational method, for its spirit does not discover the truth as it is in God, but only as it is reflected in the mirror of the human mind. As creaturely, the spiritual realm has creaturely status and "therefore gives us no access to God" (p. 48). This critical problem turns on the transcendence of God, which idealism tends to lose sight of. "Theology is certainly intellectual work, but its object of inquiry is neither spirit nor nature, and therefore strictly speaking it belongs just as little to the humanities as to the sciences" (p. 49). A third criticism of idealism addresses the problem of its tendency to imply that revelation is the third thing which is produced from a *synthesis* of the realist moment of thought with the idealist moment of thought. Barth is suspicious of synthesis. In all nontheological knowledge the "familiar antithesis between spontaneity and receptivity remains valid" (p. 50). Any theological employment of such reasoning can therefore be "only regulative, not constitutive" (p. 50).

The sum of Barth's criticism of idealism, with which his own method has obvious affinities, is that it falls prey to a false view of the relation of God to reason:

> There is no receptivity without spontaneity as well, and faith cannot of course be reduced to some sort of trance-like condition. No, reason's normal activity is not interrupted [in faith]; but it is directed, guided and

37. The concept of presence is intended to suggest that in our knowledge of God we entertain an other as present to us, and as having the power to make himself present in a way that only intersubjective, volitional agents can.

> ordered by something superior to itself, something that has no part in its antithesis. Taken as a whole (as an activity spontaneous and receptive) reason is passively related to that superior reality. It is related to it, in other words, obediently. That is the oddity about knowledge of God as compared with other knowledge. To implicate this superior reality, to which we are obedient, in the antithesis between spontaneity and receptivity would be senseless. When we are dealing with the knowledge of things, this antithesis is in force. (p. 50)

Barth affirms the necessity of reason for knowing God, but denies that reason is in itself the source of knowledge of God. Reason "always knows itself in contrast to something outside of itself" (p. 50). Faith is a kind of knowledge,[38] but it comes from outside of the antithesis of real and ideal. To equate God with either reason or nature is equally erroneous:

> Faith believes in neither—neither in created spirit nor in the external reality by which spirit knows itself. Faith does not believe in these mutually limiting realities. It does not believe in the sort of unconditionality that is unconditioned only in contrast to conditioned reality, and whose relationship is therefore reversible. *Faith believes in the Creator of all things and thereby in no further object.* (p. 50-1; emphasis added)

(c) *Theological Rationality as the Nonsynthetic Mediation of Ideal and Real* Barth makes a further qualification of theological reasoning. It is neither exclusively realist, exclusively idealist, nor is it intermediately *dialectical*. Again, it is true, as we saw in Barth's affirmation of idealism, that theological reasoning will make use of dialectic. Theology has no objection to "the philosophical way of thinking dialectically about the contradiction," so long as it recognizes that dialectic is confined to the "reality and truth of human existence, at whose limits the idea of God can emerge only as a question" (p. 53). Dialectic must not confuse the theological problem of how to speak "positively about God with its own problematic," and it must not confuse its synthetic ways and their results with a true thinking about God. For, since the proper concern of philosophical reasoning is human experience, all its attempts to construct a theological content

38. "Knowledge of God in his Word is the knowledge of faith. Yet faith understands its knowledge as given by God—not as a human work, not as a divine and human collaboration, but as our being known by God's Word" ("Fate and Idea in Theology," p. 49).

invariably end in "theosophy" (p. 53).[39] Theology must practice dialectic, but it must be careful not to propose the possibility of a grand synthesis unified in the concept God:

> The art of theology cannot be the art of synthesis. It may practice the art of including the opposite dialectically. To that extent it may even be addressed as philosophy. But it must distinguish itself as *philosophica sacra* from all philosophy and from classical philosophy as embodied in Thomas and Hegel most of all. That is, it must refrain from all reaching—however ingeniously, piously or covertly—for a grand synthesis of opposites.
>
> Why is that? Because theology must in no sense be anthropology. Because instead of reflecting on the reality and truth of human existence, it reflects on the reality and truth of God's Word as spoken to human existence. Theology does not take pains to think dialectically about opposites because of the contradiction in human thought (which intimates a contradiction in human existence). This contradiction does not pose a riddle for which, as a technical discipline supposedly focused on humanity (say, humanity as it reflects on its own existence), it would more or less know how to give a clear and definite answer. On the contrary, theology thinks dialectically because this contradiction has been placed into the world of thought and existence by God's Word as something it, and only it, resolves. (p. 54)

Barth clearly thinks that theological reasoning—knowing God—involves the resolution of the antitheses which are reflected from existence in thought. Theological reasoning supposes *from the beginning* that the ostensible aporias of ideal and real can be given a "higher unity" in the knowledge of God. The "unity of reality and truth occurs in and only in God's Word" (p. 58), which does not hinder Barth from warning that we should not take our own theology to be *the* theological reality.

Barth argues that theology has no privileged access to God, no language or faculty by which it is set apart from philosophy, which he clearly understands as the paradigmatic metadiscourse of intellectual culture. Theology operates in the same rational framework as philosophy, in that both are limited to and make sense within the powers available through language and conception. There is, however, within philosophical reasoning a basic polar tension

---

39. Barth makes this point repeatedly in his lectures on ethics from 1928-29: "In this regard it is not less but more real philosophy than a non-Christian philosophy which betrays itself constantly by not staying with the question of man, but at some point [...] moving on to an answer, propounding a final reality in an absolutizing of thought or thinking or even thinking man, and thus pacifying both itself and man, so that instead of a philosophy it becomes a theology, albeit a pagan one." See Karl Barth, *Ethics* Dietrich Braun, ed., (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 42.

between realism and idealism, and the problematic facing these philosophical ways of constructing the world are shared by all theologies which adopt them. Barth thinks that a theology cannot evade these viewpoints, but he also cautions against dangers peculiar to each standpoint. Realism is complemented by idealism, which for its part presupposes reality as the context of truth. Each of these standpoints in philosophy seeks to overcome the other by including it in a synthesis in which the one standpoint is thought to provide the secret solution to what is lacking in the other. The dialectic or synthesis in which this attempted unification occurs itself generates a third term which is regarded as the new norm in philosophical reasoning. Barth argues against this philosophical reasoning that only the Word of God, his fundamental category, is able to provide the unity which philosophical dialectic seeks to achieve on its own. However, when we ask concerning the form of our theological concepts, it turns out that they are dialectical, because we have sought to include, *and transcend* the confines of, the two poles of philosophical reasoning. Theological rationality attempts to do what the realist attempts to do to the idealist, and what the idealist attempts to do to the realist: it attempts to absorb both poles of thought into a standpoint which preserves what is best in each according to a standard which is, or reflects, the Word of God.

This raises the fundamental questions of how we *access* this standpoint and how it alters the balance which obtains between ideal and real. Barth's answer to this problem seems to be that we access it by God's including us in the divine self-knowledge. Such a knowledge affects other modes of reasoning, by providing a basis for their ordered coherence, resulting in a reordering of the standards of judgment. When Barth claims, as he sometimes does, that we know God by means of the higher categories of thought, he is not saying we can know God directly, as a realist might claim. Barth affirms the reality of God, but the categorial mediation of God is a sure sign that we are *not* knowing God directly, in a realist sense. Because Barth understands God as personal, personality as equivalent to subjectivity, and subjectivity as transcendentally constituted, he interprets God's own subjectivity as a transcendental subjectivity. This reference to transcendentality is intended to claim that knowledge occurs within a particular model of mind

which gives priority to nontemporal features (ideas or concepts) which are the true source of meaning and intelligibility, as will be shown in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: Crisis, Dialectic and Reason in the *Romans* Commentary

I

The Pauline Background St. Paul's epistle to the Romans is decisive for our understanding of his theology. It advances many important ideas concerning the relationship between God and world. It begins with the theme of judgment. God's wrath is being revealed against human godlessness and wickedness: humans suppress the truth of God. Judgment is the abandonment of persons to their own self-destructive behaviours. To defy God's law (will) is both counter-human and inevitable. Sin ruins God's creation, by twisting or blocking entirely the right relationship with God. Human kind is alienated from God. The judgment is universal, including the chosen people of Israel and those outside of that special group. All abuse the revelation of God. The chosen people do so by using the law to judge others, rather than themselves. The Gentiles do so by suppressing, ignoring, or distorting the natural awareness of God they perceive in the cosmos and their inner selves.

God's judgment is righteous and global in its reach. All are united in the demand placed upon them and the inability to meet it. The law as such is good. It is intended to make us see our need of grace. Sin is defined in relation to law. The law inspires us to enact it, but we fail by its standard. Sin is our denial that we are guilty of breaking God's law. Paul takes this ambivalence of law right into the soul of the believer. We desire to obey the law, but we also desire to resist it. We see its inherent goodness, but cannot internalize it without showing the ambiguity of our inmost selves. Law is never sufficient to redeem human kind. What we should but cannot accomplish, God does for us. God's mercy overtakes God's wrath. God remembers ancient promises and keeps faith, even where covenant partners have not. Even while we are God's enemies, God's grace works to redeem us. This is Paul's good news: we who cannot save ourselves are saved by the one who can most justly condemn us.

There is a paradox, though. God's act of redemption is so unexpected in its form that it seems incredible, even impossible. It was foolishness to the Greeks—a god who *is* man; and a

moral indignation to the Jews—salvation without personal fulfilment of law. God sets aside eternal glory and becomes a human being. In the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, God acts focally to redeem creation. All of creation is the object of this action, not a chosen people only, or even humankind as a whole. Nature itself, which somehow suffers the impact of sin, is included in the scope of redemption. God acts incognito. In the life and promise of *this* human being, we are called to stake our lives.

Ethically, we are not to throw off the constraints of social order and cultural responsibility. The call is to be taken up into God's disclosed purpose for creation, which is its transformation. This is in part an intellectual task. It involves being renewed in our thinking as the key to renewing our social and political world. Romans intimates a revolutionary gospel, which is nonviolent, founded on and sustained in the love of God, and transformative, not destructive. The violence of the cross is an end of all violence and a condemnation of whatever is won by violence. The moral life is renewed over time and in the context of actual practice, which is obedience. Paul cautions against political revolution. The way of the Cross is to suffer rather than to commit violence.

No contenders can substitute for God, who is absolute. The deepest source of redemption is in a decision made within God, not a response to some unanticipated historical contingency. Election is God's loving resolve to save what is lost, and Jesus Christ is the agent of the divine will. Hope in the good and gracious consummation of history is founded on the events focused in Jesus Christ. Christ's bodily resurrection is the basis of hope. God is continually present in the mode of Spirit, creating and sustaining all of reality. Prayer is the discipline of growing into Christ's likeness, and the Spirit is the power through which we are borne along into it. Faith is the gift of God through which we come to understand God, ourselves, and each other as taken up into the divine purpose for creation.

This introduces some of the key themes in St. Paul's letter. It is clearly an important document for understanding Pauline thought. Many of the core ideas concerning Christian identity are presented in Paul. Karl Barth recognizes this, when he appropriates Paul's letter for his own

distinctive purpose. He uses St. Paul's letter to make existentially vital criticism of his own cultural context. Barth adapts key themes from Romans as a vehicle for his own message.

For example, Barth takes St. Paul's doctrine of judgment and makes it over into a doctrine of crisis and a negative theology. Crisis is a negative notion. It is the dissolving and reconstituting power which God brings into a social arrangement which has no resources for thinking of God. Crisis is global. It affects the "world" through effecting the human intellect as the primary agent of its production. Crisis is primal. It is the origin from which all things come, and the end toward which they move. Crisis is focused in the Cross of Christ, but this is not self-evident. Barth thinks that crisis conceals God's identity from us. He takes crisis to be effected by God's own activity in our world. Whereas for Paul the redemptive consequence of judgment commences with the recognition of its need, this is not so in Barth's cultivation of crisis.

Another important Pauline adaptation in Barth is the way Barth uses the concept of paradox. There is the paradox of the God-man Jesus Christ. There is the paradox of law as goodness and as damnation. Paradox is resolved eschatologically, when God's work of redemption is complete. Seen in light of the divine economy, what at first seems impossible to us becomes plausible. In Barth the paradox of incarnation is elevated to act as an analogue for all of reality. Reality is everywhere concealed under appearance. The only way to penetrate the tissue of appearances is through dialectic. In dialectic we are able to interrogate the unquestioned assumptions which we take to be the foundation on which reality is built. Ironically, what Barth claims to find at the end of dialectic is a God who is anonymous, a purely formal negation of the world.

A third point will further highlight Barth's unique usage of Pauline themes. St. Paul sought to redeem Jewish religious institutions by bringing the Gospel to them as the implicit fulfilment of their own religious expectations. Though Jewish belief was morally offended at the incarnation, Paul's letter clearly understands Christianity as implied in Judaism and as genetically related to it. Paul, in short, wanted to redeem and transform Jewish faith by making the gospel its

centre and criterion. Barth takes Paul's admittedly radical criticism of religion (especially Judaism) and gives it a global application to religion as such. Barth sharply distinguishes faith from religion. Faith is a mode of apprehension, which Barth understands as originating independently of religious practice. More than that, Barth sees religion as antithetic to faith. He elaborates the reasons for this in detail.[40] Here, where the Romans commentary is my concern, it should be noted that Barth claims that religion is illusion. Religion is the one place we would think to find an opening for knowledge of God. In fact, however, it is where human beings offer to God what they can only receive from God: the terms of their redemption. Religion and faith alike take for granted that redemption is needed. Where this assumption is lacking, it can be and invariably is created in the event of crisis. Crisis is another word for revelation, though it has many other associations in Barth's usage. I want to elaborate on these points by developing Barth's arguments on these three issues.

In his commentary, Barth wrestles with the great themes and problems of the perennial tension between theology and metaphysics, specifically the metaphysics in theology. We do well to read Barth's commentary as an attempt to find a way out of that tension to a theologically pure form of thought. In the genre of a commentary, Barth takes off on a long and striking criticism of his intellectual culture, in which the dominant concern is Christian talk about God. Barth uses Paul's letter to make his case that the God of Jesus Christ is the hidden agent behind the crisis of culture and is thus uniquely able to offer solutions to its deepest questions. God is the "Primal Origin" of all, yet Barth denies that this God is *causally* related to the world. God is thus the *origin* of everything, but the *cause* of nothing. Barth does not deny that God is known through the media of nature, but the mode by which this knowledge is mediated is not a scientific or objectifying mode of knowing. God's qualitative ultimacy (perfection) evades all quantitative measure,

---

40. See the discussion in CD I/2, pp. 297-325; and the whole of § 17: "The Revelation of God as the Abolition [*Aufhebung*] of Religion," pp. 280-361. See on this the discussion by J. A. Di Noia, "Religion and the Religions," in CC, pp. 243-57.

including causal description, and calls for a different method than mere scientific knowledge can afford. Such a method would not only describe an object but prescribe a disposition requisite for knowing it. The logic of how the problem of divine-world relationship is expressed here is, no doubt, shaped by Barth's debt to Kant's philosophical theology.

If God is the origin of all things, why should this not entitle us to derive from our metaphysical knowledge of things in general propositions describing God as their cause? Barth's own organicist image of origin suggests a genetic connection between origin and copy, which in turn suggests a *causal* nexus. Barth wants to avoid causal language in describing God's relationship to the world. Part of the way in which Barth claims knowledge of God through created media without using causal categories is through his notion of theological participationism: human reason is purified of its temporal inadequacy (chronic vagueness in cognitive judgment) by participation in the mind of God, whose reason is the pure (formal) paradigm of our imperfect human thinking (with "existential concepts"). This intuition occurs in the "Moment" which is outside of time, and thus not subject to the constraints of existential concepts. Barth never resolves this dilemma between thinking as form and thinking as content.

Crisis thinking, and its attendant existentialism, will always have a nihilistic outcome. If human thinking is bounded by its finitude, conceived as an "interminable cross-reference with itself,"[41] then it will be disempowered by an unending regression of thought which cannot discover anything not identical in form with itself. Human being is not the measure of all things and can only begin to measure them rightly when first measured by the absolute. Barth's thinking remains a captive of his particular version of dialectics, for which transcendent reference must always seem problematic. It is not until his work on Anselm that Barth fully articulates his solution to this problem. The work on Paul's epistle to the Romans is important for how it decisively *sets the problems* which will occupy Barth's thought. The solution of these problems,

---

41. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York:Vintage, 1994), p. 318.

suggestively present in parts of the commentary, comes in the work of the mature years: methodologically in the study of Anselm of Canterbury and in the Prolegomena volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*.

II

(a) ***Crisis: The Diastatic Relation of Time and Eternity*** Crisis is the most inclusive category, affecting the way in which Barth handles almost every topic or issue. Crisis is more a condition than a simple idea. The condition which is crisis is dynamic, including both structural analyses of how things are and moral judgments on how things ought to be. Crisis is thus both a moral and an ontological category, which is expressed by dualities in antithetic tension. Most important are the contrasts of time and eternity, finite and infinite, and God and world. Crisis is both positive and negative—it eliminates false standards and establishes truer ones, affording greater approximation to truth. Barth's representation of crisis is paradoxically structured by an ironic relationship of truth and reason. Truth is presupposed as the real at which rational processes are directed, yet all rational categories succumb to crisis, frustrating the foundational impulse of reason. This is clearly an unsatisfactory outcome, as Barth realized.

Time and eternity are understood by Barth in a *diastatic* relationship. Time may be conceived (asymptotically) as approaching eternity, but may never make contact with it. Eternity is a negative limit against the aspirations of temporality. Everything of which time is a proper predicate is negatively related to eternity, is excluded from it. God alone is eternal, and all else is temporally conditioned. Time and eternity are the first distinction in the programmatic *difference* between God and what is not God.

Barth holds that time-eternity is the primal expression of the "infinite, qualitative distinction" between God and creature, which is his starting point. Time-eternity is more comprehensive than the finite-infinite relation, which relies on "imagination" for its construction. Time and eternity are the metaphysical correlates for the most basic distinction which can be made. This distinction corresponds to the world which we can comprehend and the invisible basis of

which is beyond our grasp. Considered in linear terms, time originates from eternity and ends in it. "Eternity, as the boundary of time, is the end of time; as the primal origin of time, it is its goal" (R, 414). Eternity, when conceived theologically as abiding "beyond" time, is the origin of the crisis of all time-bound things. "Standing on the boundary of time, men are confronted by the overhanging, precipitous wall of God, by which all time and everything that is in time are dissolved" (R, 500).

The first and most important result of this antithesis is that "time is nothing when measured by the standard of eternity, that all things are semblance when measured by their origin and by their end" (R, 43). Eternity poses a standard of measure which no intellect can attain (WGWM, 80), and thus stands as a great negation over all human striving, but *only* when that striving fails to acknowledge the eternal. The eternal *relativises* all that is temporal. Barth does not advocate relativism. He means instead to point out the importance of relationality, specifically "our relationship to our Primal Origin" (R, 465). All that is temporal strives toward the eternal as the boundary which defines it, a boundary without which it would be pure, infinite flux. Eternity is a qualitative advantage which the absolute enjoys over all that it subordinates, and it is a distinction which our reason cannot comprehend, but only apprehend as a limit. In the concept of eternity the mind possesses an Archimedean point from which the whole of reality may be ordered. "Not for some relative thing does the ambiguity of our finiteness cry out, but for the Absolute: it cries for an answer beyond our comprehension, for the true and Unknown God" (R, 303). The unknowability of God is not primarily a conclusion from epistemological scepticism, but is associated above all with the divine nature itself. The eternal God is entirely outside of time, and this has logically negative consequences.

(b) *The Antithesis of Finite and Infinite* Finite and infinite are correlated concepts which are important to Barth's conception of the generation of crisis. Barth relates them antithetically, they are opposite concepts, and things of which we predicate them must repel each other, a repulsion which is thought as negation. Barth's over-riding concern in his treatment of infinity is

to ensure that it does not become identified with the concept of eternity. Eternity is "not a constant factor which we can affirm safely and directly and non-paradoxically, as though it were a series of universal ideas—such as the idea of God, of Christ, of Mediation. His omnipotence has not the necessity of a logical mathematical function" (R, 276). Eternity is hiddenness which can only be broached paradoxically, namely, in the paradox of speaking of eternity as though we could directly apprehend it. To prevent their fusion in thought, Barth subordinates infinity, but he clearly thinks of the absolute as infinite. For example, Barth builds a notion of God's love (*agape*) as the basis for human intersubjectivity, on the analogy that *agape* "boarders on infinity" (R, 452). Barth clearly uses the concept of infinity in positive ways (see WGWM, 74, 154).

This notwithstanding, Barth gives metaphysical infinity a negative role. Infinity stands over against our concepts, which are finite, and indicates a constant otherness to all of our conceptions. No concept exhausts its object without remainder. Conceptualizing reality is qualified by an infinite horizon which no thinking can overtake. Barth appears to think that because there is *some one* magnitude which is beyond human comprehension that *all* concepts all finite conceptualizing is threatened with nihilistic reduction. This claim follows from an apparent requirement that each object or concept in our rational domain is part of a system which must have a concept of the whole in order to know the concept of parts, and thus to *order* all concepts. With such a requirement what falls outside of the rational is clearly hostile to rationality, alien and threatening to it:

> Explosions are the inevitable consequence of our bringing infinity within the range of concepts fitted only for apprehension of what is finite. For, in so far as we admit infinity as a concept, that is to say, in so far as we make it observable to ourselves as infinity, since we are unable to rid it of its characteristic 'otherness' in relation to what is finite, our concept of eternity emerges as an ALMOST infinitely finite thing! But such an observed notion of infinity is in no way infinity itself; for when our notions are related to the Source of all that is ours, they are shown to be things that have been dissolved. (R, 290)

Infinity is destructive when we bring it to bear on our concepts, when we try to represent it or "make it observable to ourselves," since all our concepts are fitted for grasping what it finite.

Infinity is cognitively elusive because it confronts us with the ostensibly impossible task of conceiving, and so bounding or limiting, what is by definition unlimited. He thinks that when we try to represent in thought the notion of infinity we identify it with eternity. But we cannot intuit the divine eternity through our imaginative construction of infinity. Barth thinks that eternity—a property of God alone—dissolves[42] all our concepts. Moreover, Barth thinks that our notion of infinity relies on finitude and is derived from it. This must be, since all our concepts, and thus all our intentional acts of thought, are finite and cannot contain what is infinite. This prompts the urgent question of why we are constrained to think that God causes this violent deconstruction of our concepts. I will return to this problem. For now it must be noted that the *presupposition* of it is very important to Barth's notion of why infinity is destructive, rather than creative, of our concepts.[43]

---

42. I shall elaborate on this central concept of dissolution (*aufheben*) in section III on dialectic.

43. In his mature thought Barth spells out the nature of his suspicion of infinity. "The infinite, the God who is subject to his [finite human being's] control in this way, obviously cannot be in any way unsettling, menacing or critical, in spite of the subject's finitude. Behind and above His whole infinity there towers all the time the comforting certainty that the finite being itself, as subject of this infinite predicate, is undoubtedly the person at work, supreme in thought and definition over this infinite. This work must obviously abide by only one rule if the finite subject is to remain secure. Under no circumstances may the predicate be conceived or described as the subject (in the same, or perhaps in a basically superior sense, as compared with the human subject), and therefore under no circumstances may God be conceived or described as person. This would be an admission that God's infinity is his own and not that of man. *It would involve a denial and abandonment of the presupposition that God is the content of the human concept of reason. It would mean a serious calling in question of that which is based solely on human self-consciousness, and therefore of the final reality of human personality. Man would be finally stripped of his own creative role in the visible and the invisible, and therefore to all things.* This was what must never under any circumstances be allowed according to the most sacred convictions of the generations cradled in the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and classical Idealism" (CD II/1, p. 290; emphasis added). If infinity is anything other than pure extension it threatens the *supremacy* of the human subject. Philosophical infinity challenges the personality of God.

The reason Barth thinks that the Enlightenment/Idealist/Romanticist denial of personality to God is erroneous is that he thinks that the *proper* paradigm or instance of reason *is in fact* the reality, not *idea*, of God in his Triune being. He says: "If we begin with this equation, willingly and wittingly or not we have already contested the fact that God is a person, and we cannot later recant. For with this equation we have attributed true and proper personality to man as the subject of the idea of reason, thus making the step which necessarily brings us into insoluble contradiction with belief in the personal God." (CD II/1, p. 291). Barth is not attacking reason in attacking Idealism, he is attacking the relocation of the proper locus of reason from God to human being. For, only from the point of view of the necessary marginalization of God's personality, can human reason appropriate that which it actually derives from God, as a *self-attribution* accomplished and known in the act of intuiting its own personality and reason. "Only from this point of view is their opposition to the personality of God really intelligible. It was irresistibly powerful because it moved in purely analytical statements, because it merely repeated

The core of the concept of infinity is a dynamic of perpetual transcendence: it tends to transcend the limiting act of concept formation and entails the possibility of yet further acts of thought. Infinity finds no limiting thought which can contain it, except the thought of the illimitable, which is simply the thought of incontainability. The infinite is present *in* thought as its potential inexhaustibility, and not as an idea or concept. Analogically, we could describe infinity as the unattainable whole of which each act of thought is a finite part. Each determinate thought or conception thus implies its own proximity to the infinite, on which it relies and to which it can never attain. For Barth, though, "infinity itself," in contrast to our representation of it, escapes our control. Barth, as is clear in the following passage, will not let us escape crisis by domesticating the dissolving effect of eternity with a concept of infinity. Infinity is the mere beyond of each finite act of cognition, which is then theoretically posited as inexhaustible, and not an intuition of the *beyond* which is the state or condition of eternity as such:

> Beneath each slight discomfort, and notably beneath the greater miseries of human life, there stands clearly visible the vast ambiguity of its finiteness. How are we to meet this? All our answers, all our attempts at consolation, are but deceitful short-circuits, for from this vast ambiguity we ourselves emerge; we cannot escape from it, not even if we evoke in our imaginings an infinite divine harmony beyond this world of ours. The infinity of our imagination is measured by our limitation and achieves no more than infinite-finiteness. The harmony which we imagine is relative to our discord, the Fata Morgana of our wandering in the desert; and the God whom we permit to reward and compensate us in some other world is—if observed, for example, with the eyes of an Ivan Karamazov—'No-God', the god of this world, fashioned after our image and, consequently, subject to our criticism—and to our denial. (R, 302-3)

Infinity is how thought represents to itself a magnitude it can never comprehend, but in the act of representing forges for eternity a limit. Infinity is an epistemic category, whereas eternity is an ontological category. For Barth, the mere fact that we can represent to ourselves an infinity tells against its ultimacy. Barth does not deny the reality of the infinite as a quality of the absolute. For

---

the so-to-speak commonly held presupposition that man is the person who, thinking the idea of his reason, has the power to think God, and that for this reason, and in confirmation of it, God is to be thought of as absolute and infinite, but cannot under any circumstances be thought of as person and therefore as the superior rival of man." (CD II/1, pp. 290).

instance, a positive notion of infinity is operative in the concept of God as wholly other, "the infinite aggregate of all merely relative others" (WGWM, 74). The infinity we *can* know, as Barth interprets it, is an immanentized and negative infinity, and not the eternity which is properly God everlasting and complete being. We cannot know the divine infinity in itself.

(c) *The Problem of Metaphysics* Barth's use of these metaphysical ideas is theologically determined, and, of course, determines the texture of his concept of God. All antitheses are recapitulated in the grand antithesis which is Barth's conception of the God-world relationship. God's reality is entirely beyond any direct human conceptualization. This is ironic, since Barth's thought is motivated by the urgency of the claim that we "must win again the mighty sense of reality in which Paul and Plato and the prophets" are agreed (WGWM, 286). Whatever Barth means by realism, it is not direct or naive realism. Christ is the immanent way of God among human beings, the way God is real for our apprehension. This is not to say that the *form* of this truth replaces the transcendent *content*, Christ's controverted divinity. Christ is a new thing from God above, but this does not mean that we know God through him in ways distinct from how we know other things, as though something other than the object of knowledge determines our description of it:

> As evidence of the purity and superiority of the new life in which we find ourselves and as an aid to the deepest understanding of ourselves, let me lay stress upon the fact that this new life is not our best understanding and experience of God, not our best godliness, *not an experience apart from others.* Let me speak as abstractly and theoretically as possible, that all emotional misunderstandings may be eliminated: this new life is that from *the third dimension* which penetrates and even passes through all our forms of worship and our experiences; it is the world of God breaking through from its *self-contained holiness* and appearing in secular life; it is the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead. To participate in its meaning and power is to discover a new motivation. (WGWM, 286-7; emphasis added)

The "new life" which is at the heart of Christian existence comes from a source utterly beyond anything "our deepest understanding and experience of God" can know. The incommensurability between our experience and God's transcendent reality is not an impediment to

knowing God. God himself has come into our world from outside of it.[44] We have no general knowledge of God as of an absolute principle or concept, but always only as mediated by Jesus Christ. This conception of the God-world relation does not fit well with the metaphysical categories Barth uses. For, with these categories God and world are *negatively* related, and related only in a representation, or, as Barth prefers to call it, a "parable," or "a token, of the action of God" (R, 435).

Metaphysical categories *distance* God from human concerns, but God has *paradoxically* solved the dilemma of distance, the paradoxes of near and far, of immanence and transcendence, by acting in the hiddenness of a human form. With these metaphysical concepts (time-eternity; finite-infinite) Barth intends to speak of the absoluteness of God, without presuming to be able to directly address God. Metaphysics and Christian theology share a common assumption which Barth seems to be exploiting. Both assume that appearance conceals as much about the real or true as it reveals, and that we must therefore apply a critical criterion to appearance to disclose its deeper meaning. In metaphysics we seek independent principles or concepts which can explain superable and dependent ones. Christian theology seeks the invisible God through a visible incarnation. Of course, the comparison is only general, and should not be pressed too far. Incarnation is an indirect way of God being in the world, just as much of our metaphysical discourse is an attempt to glimpse the absolute through applying reason to the order in the world as an expression of it (the absolute).[45]

Barth does bring a kind of metaphysics to bear on St. Paul's letter. However, Barth is openly critical of traditional metaphysics. He is especially eager to deny that God as totally other has any *causal* relation to the world. In the course of doing so, we get a glimpse into the epistemic

---

44. The concept of anything being outside God is problematic, but "in an incomprehensible way there is an outside to God" (CD II/1, p. 52). For a discussion of the problem see Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, tr. Margaret Kohl (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 140-58.

45. See on the central place of the Incarnation in Christian thought, Rowan Williams, "The Incarnation as the Basis of Dogma," in Robert Morgan, ed., *The Religion of the Incarnation*, (Bristol: Bristol Classics Press, 1989), 85-98.

assumptions at work in Barth and how they feed the crisis:

> If God, as the final Cause, could [...] be placed within the succession of other things in this world, and if conclusions could be drawn about Him from the other things of the world, what are we then to make of the fact that the whole concrete world is ambiguous and under KRISIS? There is no object apart from our thinking of it; nor has an object any clear characteristics save when we are able to recognize them by some quick-moving previous knowledge. Therefore if God be an object in the world, we can make no statement about Him [...] which does not proceed from some previous superior knowledge. If, therefore, God were [...] an object among other objects, if He were Himself subject to the KRISIS, He would then obviously not be God, and the true God would have to be sought in the Origin of the KRISIS. [...] The true God, Himself removed from all concretion, is the Origin of the KRISIS of every concrete thing, the Judge, the negation of this world in which is included also the god of human logic. It is of this true God we speak—of the Judge of the world of which He forms no part. Tempting, therefore, as the argument directly from ourselves to Him may be, it fails to reach the goal. It is a blind alley. (R, 82)

Barth here proposes that any conception of the world along causal lines relies upon the conception of a first cause as the primary cause of all lesser ones. All causes are necessarily connected to the first cause, whose existence explains theirs, while they imply something about the nature of the first cause on which they rely. Given that "the whole concrete world is ambiguous and under KRISIS," it would follow on the causal theory that God is enveloped in the crisis also, God being one cause among others. Barth therefore denies that God is to be conceived as the first cause. He subscribes to the view which holds that cause and effect are formal categories of pure reason, and that human thought spontaneously orders sequential experiences in accord with the law of their (cause-effect) relation. If we do not derive causal relations from experience of the world, then any crisis involving our inability to refer to the world in causal terms must be an epistemic crisis, and not an ontological one.[46] "Therefore," Barth concludes, "if God be an object in the world, we can make no statement about Him [...] which does not proceed from some previous

46. The intellectual consequence of such a sceptical enframing of the objectivity causal interaction, whatever its true source, is conceptually debilitating, especially in the area of cosmology. The modern problem begins with Hume, but the philosophical background for Barth's self-limitation of reason here is almost certainly Immanuel Kant. See in particular *The Critique of Judgment*, tr. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 283-88, being § 76.

superior knowledge" (R, 82). As object in the world, God would be bound by laws of causal necessity, which contradicts God's freedom over against the world (R, 355).

Barth says that there "is no object apart from our thinking of it; nor has an object any clear characteristics save when we are able to recognize them by some quick-moving previous knowledge." On this view of knowledge there is no ontological independence of the objects we know. It follows that the characteristics of the objects we describe must be derived from our own mental operations, a "quick-moving previous knowledge." If God is an object, then we *can* think God, who thereby lacks existence independent of the conditions of our knowing. But this is precisely the view of God Barth wants to reject. On the other hand, if God is not an object among objects, then our usual way of representing the interaction of objects, through causal associations and processes, does not apply to God. Consequently, we cannot *think* of God at all.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that his allegiance to such an epistemology causes Barth to judge that whenever statements about God are warranted by tracing their basis to some aspect of human thinking, then propositions so grounded are not describing God but some human faculty. When we see Barth, as we often do, entirely dismissing lines of argumentation which seek to prove God by demonstrating the rationality of some attribute of God or our conception of God, he is merely reasserting his axiom that within the boundaries of our finitude no demonstration of the true God is forthcoming. We have no exit from our finitude and so no demonstration of God. Barth will always draw a circle around any criteriology of the rational which seeks to include God as one of its possibilities. This is a problem for him, since he also wants to be taken seriously as pursuing the science of theology, which must include an account of how our rational operations relate to the absolute we seek to indicate in them. I will argue later that the whole concept of crisis is epistemologically driven and can be remedied by abandoning epistemology or finding a better version of it than the one Barth employs.

(d) *The Logic of Crisis* Barth's thinking clearly shows a concern for logic in the broad sense of that term. By logic I mean the attempt to ascertain those formal conditions of thinking

which give discursive thought intelligibility. Logic is the pattern, form, or structure within which thought moves when it is explanatory and not simply expressive. Whatever can be expressed in language relies on logic, which is usually only implicit. Explicating the logical patterns of thinking is a useful way of disclosing where our thinking fails, resulting in unclarity. Logic is not a content, except in the most abstract, purely formal reflection on the deepest foundation of diverse kinds of logic. As I show briefly below, logic is important to Barth. If Barth's thought is systematic, then this can only be characterized as the repetitive practice of subjecting all subject matters he treats to the criteria of revelation, and conceptually redescribing their meaning in light of it. This redescription takes the form of dialectic. Barth's whole vast corpus of writing could be understood as one attempt to work out the "logic of grace."[47]

What is one to make of Barth's repudiation of "the god of logic" (R, 82)? Barth does not say precisely what he means by logic, but includes it as one among other human intellectual activities negated (a logical operation!) in God's general attitude to the world. The sarcastic tone suggests that Barth has only inflated claims for logic, the "god," rather than logic itself in mind. The attack on logic is not intended to deny that we rely on reason.[48] In fact, Barth holds that crisis can only become intelligible through logic (see section (d) below). Whenever logic, or any other mode of reasoning, imposes prior conditions on how God must act in making himself known, then it intrudes beyond the range of its legitimate application (which is intensive, not extensive). When this happens logic truncates knowledge of God, through an *a prior* restraint on the form of divine communication. Barth also objects to the abstractness of logic. Logic must abstract from reality in order to provide a schematic pattern of meanings for interpreting otherwise disordered experience.

---

47. For an attempt to relate the theoretical assumptions of a Barthian theology to the logic and progress of the physical and life sciences, indicating the scientificity of a Barthian style theology, see Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), esp. pp. 128, 207-8, 214-22. On Barth's relation to the social sciences see Stuart D. McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), esp. pp. 1-9, 55-69.

48. In addition to the already discussed lecture "Fate and Idea in Theology," see also the insightful remarks in CD I/2, pp. 727-36, esp. 736.

The logical requirement of internal consistency involves a lack of comprehensiveness in what it can include as intelligible. If it gains its authority by abstracting from reality, it cannot claim to be a knowledge of this "living" world. It therefore has a limited use. Thus, warnings notwithstanding, "human logic always tends to arrange its propositions in a series and to leave out of account what is not pro-posed, which is in fact the pre-supposition of all pro-positions. In speaking of God, human logic characteristically ignores both His nature and the fact that, when the reference is to Him, the argument from operation to cause is inapplicable, since He is not a known thing in a series of things" (R, 82). I return to a related theme when, in discussing dialectic, I consider Barth's views on contradiction.

Crisis is for Barth the condition of all things, excluding God. Crisis is another world for transition, and everything is in transition, which is the dynamic or movement in reality. The reason crisis means a great "disturbance" (R, 424-526) for thought is that it introduces a transcendent factor which resists correlation in the subject-object schema of cognition. However, it is not simply that the absolute represents an incomprehensible magnitude. This would make it a problem of the purely metaphysical sort. The added difficulty is that the encounter with the absolute discloses an ethical crisis at the centre of the problem of reason. In his treatment of the ethical question we see more fully how Barth uses reason. Reason and will, rationality and morality mutually condition each other. Understanding reason is aided by understanding moral decision, since both share a common theoretical root.

(e) *The Ethical Dimension of Crisis* In the question about truth and the nature of the good, we see that crisis is a crisis in the state of our knowledge initiated by the introduction into it of an absolute standard. Whenever we attempt to treat this "object" as any other and fix it coherently within knowledge, we fail. It is not that the object we seek has no identifiable logical features, for it is at least an Other, and thus a relational term. The problem is that this Other is more than an object we describe by putting it under a concept. The Other as absolute is a thing which we not only question, but are questioned by. When the absolute is considered as both ethically constituted

and ontologically constituting, it is more aptly described as the good:

> What is true—even what is truest—must submit itself to the question of crisis, whether it is also *good*. The competence of this question is established by the very fact that it is asked. Logic asks the truth of things as they are, and for its own purposes even *its* question is not accidental and arbitrary but inevitable; it is not the object but the presupposition of thought; to a certain degree it is substantiated not by something else but by itself. This is the case, only to the degree that it accepts the counter-question regarding the truth about truth, that is, the ethical question. In this the idea of things as they might be and ought to be lays claim to the whole of human life. It is only when the logical question, about things as they are, is merged in the ethical question, about things as they might be, about the good, that it becomes ultimate and partakes of the nature of crisis. (WGWM, 136-7)

The question of ethics[49] is a universal question, and asks "how man ought to live and move and have his being not only in this but in all possible worlds" (WGWM, 139). Ethics involves logic and is thus a cognitive undertaking, at least in part. Ethical behaviour is placing moral action under the concept of the good toward which it strives. Morals are not objects, like spatiotemporal entities, but they are objective, in that they aim at what is not possessed by the agent but exists in the good. Morality is our attempt to make ourselves like the good. Morals are thus the *presupposition* of ethical action, just as logic is the presupposition of rational description of the real. The good is what morality is in its pure form as a principle. Barth unites here the formal-objective power of logic to judge objectivity, with the question of ethics, understood as the ought of what could and should but may not actually be. They are united by the category of judgment. Ethics as morally prescriptive thought and object cognition as scientific description both depend upon *intellectual judgment.*

The crisis arises because we cannot directly access the good. The problem of ethics is "not touched by scepticism to which all ethical systems are exposed, for the reason that long before sceptics arose, it, itself, was the pitiless crisis which produced all ethical systems" (WGWM, 138).

---

49. In the year in which Barth's second edition of the Romans commentary was published, 1922, Barth also published the essay "The Problem of Ethics Today." This essay is in many ways a better statement of Barth's ethical thought in this period of his development than is the Romans commentary. See WGWM, 136-82.

Ethics proceeds like logic, in that it presupposes the existence of the good and seeks to bring human behaviour into conformity with it. This *presupposition* in ethics is all important. Barth holds not only that the ethical quest is possible but also that the crisis arises largely from the sense of lack which the question of ethics opens up in us. I ought, but I cannot do the good. The good itself is the source of the crisis. The scope of its effects is global. "The problem of the good calls in question all actual and possible *forms* of human conduct, all temporal *happenings* in the history both of the individual and of society" (WGWM, 138-9). Yet, for Barth, the good is also the source of the mitigation of crisis. For, it confronts us with the question of how to live the good life not only in this but in "all possible worlds" (WGWM, 139), and so of the possibility of a resolution which is ultimate in import, and thus programmatic for action.

So, the ethical dimension of the crisis has these two features. First, it is cognitive, for it presupposes that there is a concept or idea under which our behaviour is to be brought. Second, in the form of the ethical question about the good, about how I shall *perform it*, it involves a reference to an ultimate source which our immanent means of knowing is not sufficient to comprehend. Crisis has an ethical dimension because our lives are not solely concerned with knowing, but also with doing. There is thus, again, a positive and a negative, though Barth tends to underscore the negative:

> We must not for one moment think we can escape being part of the world in which we live, in which we can do no more than demonstrate our existence, and within which the ethical good can *not* be found—for to find or to be able to find a thing here is to prove that it can *not* be the good. But at the same time the fact remains that our demonstrated existence in this world is measured upon a standard which is not at all a part of existence as we know or conceive it. The fact remains that man as man is irresistibly compelled to acknowledge that his life is the business for which he is responsible, that his desires require examination, and that the might-be is sometimes the ought-to be which is the *truth* about truth, the ultimate governor of conduct. (WGWM, 137-8).

Barth comes to the conclusion that anything we can rationally demonstrate is for that reason not the good, since demonstration is only possible in the realm of existence. On the other hand, the intelligibility of existence cannot be a part of the act of existence itself, for it would then

be dissolved in crisis. Thus, every argument against having demonstrated the good, is at the same time a negative argument for its actuality, but only in the form of a presupposition, only, that is, as a *logical* structure necessary for discerning the order in reality. This theory of ethics, according to which every human arrangement in personal or social morality or ideology is an approximation falling short of the good itself, is applied in his critique of revolution:

> When men undertake to substitute themselves for God, the problem of God, His mind and His judgment, still remain, but they are rendered ineffective. And so, in his rebellion, the rebel stands on the side of the existing order.
>
> Let the existing order—State, Church, Law, Society, &c, &c.—in their totality be:
>
> $$(a\,b\,c\,d)$$
>
> Let their dissolution by the Primal Order of God, by which their totality is contradicted, be expressed by a minus sign outside the bracket:
>
> $$-(+a+b+c+d).$$
>
> It is clear that no revolution, however radical, which takes place within the realm of history, can ever be identical with the divine minus sign outside the bracket, by which the totality of human ordinances is dissolved. Revolution can do no more than change the minus sign within the bracket—the plus, that is to say, which existing ordinances possess within the bracket because they exist—into a minus sign. The result of a successful revolution is therefore:
>
> $$-(-a-b-c-d)$$
>
> And now we see that for the first time the great divine minus sign outside the bracket has transformed the anticipatory, revolutionary minus sign into a genuine plus sign. Revolution has, therefore, the effect of restoring the old after its downfall in a new and more powerful form. (R, 482-3)

God is the negation of our attempts at both a revolution in social standards and a conservative "legitimism," seeks to resist the negative effect of the absolute by transforming it into the invisible warrant of the extant visible order. But the negation of our negations is a good thing, for it puts us into relation with the primal origin. Rebellion is unethical, on Barth's interpretation, because it posits a totalizing claim on reality which no human institution can legitimately make. Barth's critique of revolution shows how crisis is sustained by our attempts to find an ultimate ground with penultimate means. All human revolutions, thinks Barth, only end up affirming, even strengthening, the order of things they sought to overturn. This is because they fail to realize that their agenda or doctrines are not universal truth and that they therefore cannot furnish a universal

solution to the problem of human life together.

In summarizing Barth's argument concerning crisis, we could say that it is the state of things in the world. It becomes intelligible through an interpretation of the world which uses metaphysical concepts, and so affirms the rational nature of human thinking. By bringing thought into relation with the good through raising the question of ethics, it shows that in the presuppositional nature of logic is a clue to understanding the nature of our relation to the good, as this is raised in the context of the ethical question. Logic and moral decision both require a kind of judgment, involving the subsumption of one idea under another to give the subsumed idea intelligibility. The judgment in which we form such intelligible concepts rests on a decision as to what is proper and what improper inference. If the general idea of nature depends upon our construction of it, and that construction in turn results from forming concepts, then the theoretical elaboration of what is presupposed in forming concepts brings to light an original affinity of the idea of nature and the idea of reason. Such a discovery can be made only through the reflexive dimension of dialectical thinking. Dialectic is the ongoing attempt of human thinking to integrate and coordinate the logical and the ethical requirements of thinking "life" as it is. When we contemplate that which is beyond the limit of the possible for finite conception, thought finds itself unable to cognize what it nonetheless perceives to be real. Dialectic is the normative pattern for human reasoning since reasoning is always discovering new facts which require the relocation of what was thought, prior to their discovery, to be a limit. Without a limit we cannot materially *define* and so circumscribe reality. Such limits are established on nonempirical grounds. In Barth's case every limit stands under God as the reality behind all limits we discover.[50]

---

50. James E. Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt, in their essay "Barth, Bohr, and Dialectic," in W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman, eds., *Religion and Science: History, Method, Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 1996) have linked Barth's dialectical method in theology with Neils Bohrs epistemology of complementarity to argue that some combination of the two can produce a natural theology in the context of a "postmodern physics."

III

(a) *The Necessity and Insufficiency of Dialectic* Dialectic is a perennial feature of western intellectual traditions. There are contemporary philosophical projects which give dialectic a high degree of systematic application, characterizing it as the mode of thought in which we seek to coordinate the moments of plurality and unity in a scientific or comprehensive *philosophical* account of reality, understanding, and knowledge.[51] Barth's appropriation of dialectic is deliberate and eclectic, and part of a larger strategy to state his position within the cultural limits of modernity while overcoming the secularizing constraints of modern culture. For example, on the one hand, *against* theologies which model their task on an absolutist and totalizing notion of God he deploys a sort of dialectic which undermines the claim to finality of all intellectual programs by subjecting their *ratio* to the infinity of a divine origin which they can never entirely comprehend. No method can capture the meaning of God. On the other hand, *against* theologies which would pattern their thinking on methods in physical sciences, with their naturalistic assumptions, Barth deploys a dialectic which highlights the paradoxical foundation of Christian existence in the Incarnation.[52]

A certain risk is involved when a theologian adopts a dialectical method. Some think that dialectic in its Hegelian mode is inherently atheistic, for its logical structure presupposes a sort of

---

51. Three systematic philosophical studies of dialectic bear mentioning. Leslie Armour, *Logic and Reality: An Investigation into the Idea of a Dialectical System* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Co, 1972); Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, tr. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1994); and Roy Bhaskar *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (New York: Verso, 1993). Bhaskar focuses the varieties of dialectic strategy with a workable definition, describing dialectic as "any more or less intricate process of conceptual or social (and sometimes even natural) conflict, interconnection and change, in which the generation, interpenetration and clash of opposition, leading to their transcendence in a fuller or more adequate mode of thought or form of life (or being), plays a key role" (p. 3).

52. In his crisis phase Barth uses dialectic in a variety of ways. See Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realitistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 266-74. McCormack detects Hegelian and Kierkegaardian forms of dialectic in *Romans*. The philosophical background of Barth's dialectic is explored at length in Dietrich Korsch, *Dialektische Theologie nach Karl Barth* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996), and Michael Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der 'dialektischen Theologie' Karl Barth* (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1987). See also Edgar Thaidigsmann, "Aufhebung. Eine theologische Kategorie des frühen Barth," *Evangelische Theologie* 43 (1983), pp. 328-49. Thaidigsmann notes also the literary sources of Barth's dialectical rhetoric.

"finitism,"[53] which is contrary to the sort of transcendent reality Barth is arguing for. In Barth's case the risk is amplified by the fact that he accepts philosophical limitations on human reasoning which are similar to positions held by empiricists: the confinement of reason to consciousness of the space time world, an apparent denial of our inherent capacity for direct, or intellectual, intuition, and the belief that the only immediate acquaintance our minds are capable of is with their own representations. That Barth nevertheless speaks of intuition of the divine, of speculative vision, and of a transcendent is part of the possibilities opened up by divine agency and its creative effect on human thought, and not, he insists, a natural endowment of human intellect. In brief: Barth theoretically lays out intellectual geography so as to reserve certain dimensions for God alone, who must then act to supplement our finitely confined reasoning.[54] Dialectic can only lead us to the threshold of divinity, but cannot take us over the line, for in knowing God we are confronted by a unique subject-object relationship, one which does not fit our dialectical pattern. But is such a view of the relation of God and human reason tenable? Can *all* of our knowledge of God be always only negative? Negative judgments prevent idolatrous identification of God and world, and are thus a permanent feature of our reasoning about God. Yet, negation cannot provide

---

53. Thus, for example, Alexandre Kojéve on Hegel: "But very few of his readers have understood that in the final analysis dialectic meant atheism." By atheism, Kojéve means "ontological finitism." See *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* tr. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969) p. 259, n. 41.

54. A recurrent problem in Barth, which will be clearly articulated in the third chapter of this thesis, is whether Barth is a so-called Averroist thinker, whether, that is, he thinks that *theological* truth is differentiated from truth in anthropology and thus need not have the same criteria for judging what is true in our propositional claims. Already in the early phase which concerns me here, Barth denies Averroism. Truth is one. This means that we must treat Barth's more programmatic claims concerning knowledge as contesting the theological assumptions of modern philosophy, its claim to absolute or definitive control of knowledge and truth (meaning). For Barth clearly opposes the modern project of subjectively based truth. Yet, Barth's opposition is only partial. He makes a good start at overcoming modernity, but ends up subscribing to many of its operating assumptions, like epistemological dualism, as expressed in his two track view of language (human and divine). I raise this question here since it presses itself upon the reader of his *Romans* commentary, *but does not receive a satisfactory answer there*. It also alerts us to the sort of argumentation in which he is engaged: he is seeking a new *foundation*, for knowledge which includes theological categories *ab initio* (nonderivatively), but ones distinct from Cartesian self-consciousness. These themes will be dealt with in the final chapter of this thesis. For a current philosophical defence of double-truth theory (Averroism), see Steven D. Crites, "Five Philosophical Points on the Non-Philosophical Truth of Theology: A Neo Averroist View," *Soundings* 53 (1970): 187-207.

a position on which to stand. Dialectic must be supplemented with a dogmatic basis, otherwise affirmation of it is indistinguishable from a romantic affirmation of the infinite possibilities of discursive reasoning.[55] Barth's solution to the problem of rationality or method in theology is elaborated in the next chapter.

Barth's dialectic is peculiar in that it calls for a restraint on reasoning at precisely that point where it should be most exercised, in thinking the source of all that is. The peculiarity of Barth's position could be expressed by indicating that it tries to combine a realist with a critical view of knowledge. His use of reason is critical and realistic, not a naive, but a critical, realism. The realism in his thought is not so much an elaborated epistemological theory.[56] It is more like a practical presupposition concerning God as object which is based upon the common sense certainty of the necessity of the *prior* existence of what we *perceive* in everyday experience. One of the founding principles of the liberal theology against which he is reacting is its anthropocentrism, its belief that theology is reducible to anthropology and that all claims to describe God as obtaining apart from such descriptions are reducible to some aspect of the human mind or the power of subjectivity to first project what it then finds in God. Barth denies that we can have a direct cognition of God, but he claims that God can be immediately perceived in experience. Dialectic is how we retrieve God through remembrance and reflection. In this context dialectic presupposes that God is and has been present in the visible signs which mediate God's (sacramental) self-disclosure. Such remembering operates within a tradition whose creeds are a primary source on

---

55. Dogma is not a negative term, as in its character by enlightenment philosophes and others. I mean by it the conceptual fixtures or framework, which enables theological reasoning. Dogmas are requisites for *theological judgment*, and they are everybit as necessary to a theological epistemology as concepts like reason and inference and fallacy are to philosophical rationality. Dogmas are not the ecclessial property of church politics. For a philosophically relevant discussion, see Rowan Williams, "The Incarnation as the Basis of Dogma," in Robert Morgan, ed., *The Religion of the Incarnation: Anglican Essays in Commemoration of* Lux Mundi (Bristol: Bristol Classics Press, 1989), pp. 85-98.

56. See here the splendid account of Barth's realism as an *eschatological* realism, with its epistemic implications, in Ingolf U. Dalferth, "Karl Barth's Eschatological Realism," in Stephen Sykes, ed., *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 14-43.

which dialectical thinking is brought to bear. The unity of experience is tentatively held as a *presupposition* that the disunity and contradictions of our actual life can and will be brought to a unity in there transcendent origin, who is also their end. Barth speaks most often of *a* presupposition, of a singular notion which gives coherence to the dialectical syntheses and contrasts through which existential concepts are formed. The presupposition is the ground in which the dialectically contrasted life world has a primal but invisible unity:

> Originally, there was no separation. Men dwelt in the Garden of Eden, in which there were no absolute and relative, no 'Higher' and 'Lower', no 'There' and 'Here': such distinctions marked the Fall. The world was originally one with the Creator, and men were one with God. The natural order then, as such, was holy, because holiness is its characteristic mark. [...] The behaviour of men must not be governed by knowledge of the contrast between the primal state and its contradiction. That is God's secret. (R, 247)

Barth's dialectic requires the assumption that *unity in diversity* is the protological pattern of the God-world relationship.[57] We must be careful not to project the conditions of alienated, fallen human existence back on to the primal origin. Barth does not think that theological rationality can be warranted by recapturing a lost innocence in the mode of dialectical reflection, a speculative regaining of a primal experience. His thinking is oriented more toward an eschatological end, than a mythic beginning, or a visionary transcendentalism, though his prophetic mode of address often misleads here. Our distance from the origin is gauged more in terms of moral alienation than of a historicotemporal gap.[58] The purpose of reference to the original is supposed to break the tyranny

---

57. See WGWM, 299: "The great negative precedes the small one, as it precedes the small positive. *The original is the synthesis. It is out of this that both thesis and antithesis arise. Insight into the true transcendence of the divine origin of all things permits, or rather commands, us to understand particular social orders as being caused by God, by their connection with God.* [Emphasis added] Naturally, we shall be led first not to a denial but to an *affirmation* of the world as it is. For when we find ourselves in God we find ourselves committed to the task of affirming him in the world as it is and not in a false transcendent world of a dream. Only out of such an affirmation can come that genuine, radical denial which is manifestly the meaning of our movements of protest. The genuine antithesis must follow the thesis: it is through the thesis that it derives from synthesis."

58. The primal religious consciousness of original bliss, transgression and fall, and redemption is clearly operative in Barth's cosmology. See Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 3-21, and the early study of "crisis theology" by Erwin Reisner,

of the present on our consciousness and prevent our theorizing the present condition of human understanding as the only one possible. We assess the past—like the present, and all of reality—in a dialectical manner. Dialectic is the means, the medium through which thought achieves such understanding as it can of the nature of the real. Present reality, and the historical past, are both theoretically constituted through time, and time is the medium in which dialectic moves.

The German word which names dialectic is *Aufhebung*, which is most often translated as *dissolution*. The pervasive condition of crisis is the falling apart of both concepts and things. That which we conceptualize is in a constant state of becoming. Both thinking and extended substances are subject to change and becoming. The concepts we create and use to fix and hold things in thought cannot accurately do so when thought is tied to perception, to real objects in space and time. Under the influence of crisis *a substance cannot endure* (R, 53), but is continually dissolved *and* established (R, 88). Crisis thus describes the immediate reliance of every substance on the action of God, in relation to which its process of becoming cannot be reduced to any one of its temporal segments. Barth's recurrent references to dissolution and its logical correlate, negation, have this double motion in mind. Barth does not use the concept of *Aufhebung* in the way it is often used in German philosophy to posit an almost geometric polarity of opposition among essences (or of an opposition of an essence to itself), which is then destroyed or preserved through its inclusion in a higher concept or category. He envisions a single original unity or harmony of things in God, which is dissolved through a "fall" and is restored through a divine action of reconciliation. Barth's "absolute" (God) is never essentially dissolved and reconstituted but stands outside of the process of dissolution as the source which draws things back to itself. God is the limit of dialectical reach, but as totally other remains a logically indeterminate reference, or a concept which is the negative determination of all conceptuality.

Aufhebung has a philosophically negative function, in that it disables any claim to

---

Kennen, Erkennen, Anerkennen: Eine Untersuchung über die Bedeutung von Intuition und Symbol in der dialektischen Theologie (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1932).

systematic finality. Yet, such a claim presupposes that we have certain concepts which are not derived from experience, concepts like perfection, the whole, a category, and other invariant criteria which make possible an intelligible ordering of sense experience. In dialectic, the intellect juxtaposes contraries. The intellectual process thus described is one in which two concepts or relata are *opposed*. The dissolution of opposition, and thus *difference*, develops into the affirmation of a *likeness*, through the inclusion of the opposing ideas in a category or concept which is sufficiently broad to include both, thereby furnishing a background of identity for their opposition. Dialectic thus appears to be a logic which contains three distinct moments or thought acts. In the first moment, it contemplates things through the logical relations of opposition, negation and difference, which are, in a second moment, transformed by the reversal of their oppositional (negative) relationship into a positive logical correlate of sameness, affirmation and identity. In a third moment, this movement from opposition, to inclusive unity furnishes the basis for a third concept, which retains the truth of each and can then be logically deployed in new relations. Now this third concept, I would argue, is inchoately, or vaguely, present in the beginning of a dialectical strategy as a presupposition. Without its logically prescriptive role, we would not know when a dialectical transition has succeeded in achieving its end and discursive reasoning should stop. What is described in this logic is a name, itself an object in the sense of being a thought-thing.[59] Presupposition is a postulatory concept or notion through which two contraries may be included in a single judgment or concept, for example, of likeness or unlikeness. Presupposition is the assumption of the priority of unity over plurality. In Barth's procedure, unity is nonvisible and postulatory: it is the harmony which divinity alone is able to achieve, for divinity is the original unity of all things which we experience as contraries.

Barth uses dialectic in three distinct but interrelated ways. It is a hermeneutical strategy for disclosing the meaning of texts, for reconstructing the intent of the author of the text. It is, secondly, a description of ontological development through conflictual interactions in the life

world. Thirdly, dialectic is used by Barth as a metaphor for describing concept formation, that is, as a way of modelling how we come to understand what things are. In its hermeneutic construal, Barth sees dialectic as a tool for interpreting texts, especially biblical texts like the Romans letter he is seeking to explicate. In the preface to the second edition, Barth argues that the goal of interpretation is "a perception of the 'inner dialectic of the matter' in the actual words of the text," (R, 10). "The matter contained in the text cannot be released save by a creative straining of the sinews, by a relentless, elastic application of the 'dialectical' method" (R, 8). Dialectic enables the disclosure of the *meaning* latent in the text. This is illustrated in the way Barth describes the meaning-conferring role which labouring over biblical texts can have:

> The Bible offers us a knowledge of God: we look to it not so much to give us knowledge about this particular or that, as to indicate to us the beginning and the end, the origin and the limit, the creative unity and the last problem of all knowledge. [...] It is our part to confirm it in our own lives by labouring to relate ourselves, our daily task, and our hour of history to God the Creator and Redeemer. It is not a meaning apart from other meanings, for in it all others—the meanings of natural science, of history, of esthetics, and of religion—are at once included and concluded and this meaning in the last analysis will be found to be identical with that of philosophy, so far as philosophy understands itself. It is the meaning *par excellence*, without rivals, without challengers, the meaning *sub specie aeterni*. What more can we desire? (WGWM, 51-2).

A second application of dialectic is its necessary connection to the dynamic life world. By thinking God *through* thinking the world, God is negatively related to the life world. "If our thinking is not to be pseudo-thinking, we must think about life; for such a thinking is a thinking about God." (R, 425) God is grasped by the mind mediately through perception of Gods immediate sustaining activity in the world. Contingency is thus the opening to God, seen in our understanding of the process of becoming. God is the source of the crisis, which from the absolute point of view, is judgment on the world:

> The reality to which life bears witness must be disclosed in the deep things of all observable phenomena, in their whole context—and in their KRISIS. Only dialectical human thinking can fulfil its purpose and search out the depth and context and reality of life: only dialectical thought can lead to genuine reflection upon its meaning and make sense of it. For when our

> thought moves onwards direct and unbroken, when it is comprehensive, it is quite certain that we are not thinking about life; we are not thinking, that is to say, about the KRISIS in which human life is in fact being lived. (R, 425)

"Direct and unbroken" thinking is *totalizing* thinking, a thinking which demands total *control* and arranges the world for exercise of such control. It is a sort of Weberian rationalization of all aspects of human life, with the consequent disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of the world. Only through the reality of God breaking in from a "third dimension" (WGWM, 282-3), *which comes into view for the first time in and with the occurrence of its inbreaking*, can we know the illusory nature of our totalizing pretensions.[60] The meaning of divine transcendence is its exclusion from crisis, exclusion from the necessity of being dissolved and established in the process of becoming what it is. The power of God

> can be detected neither in the world of nature nor in the souls of men. It must not be confounded with any high, exalted force, known or knowable. The power of God is not the most exalted of observable forces, nor is it either their sum or their fount. Being completely different, it is the KRISIS of all power, that by which all power is measured, and by which it is pronounced to be both something and—nothing, nothing and—something. It is that which sets all these powers in motion and fashions their eternal rest. It is the Primal Origin by which they all are dissolved, the consummation by which they all are established [*ihr sie alle aufhebender Ursprung und ihr sie alle begründendes Ziel*, s. 13]. The power of God stands neither at the side of nor above—supernatural!—these limited and limiting powers. It can neither be substituted for them nor ranged with them, and, save with the greatest caution, it cannot even be compared with them. (R, 36)

There are thus two *planes* of meaning in Barth's thought, the higher of which is ordered to the other as its subordinate. These correspond to two qualitatively distinct modes of being. Barth cannot be read as theorizing two worlds, with the world of our experience being an imperfect copy of the transcendent and perfect one. This is ruled out by the fact that the transcendent "world" is experienced only as an encounter with God, an encounter which has no temporal duration. Revelation is experienced as a perpendicular intersection of our horizon of experience, which is a

---

60. This point is made in the discussion of ethics at the end of section II above.

simple "moment." Moreover, Barth's rejection of the metaphysical paradigm, raises questions as to the locus of God in his view of reality as a whole. Barth explicitly denies, for instance, that the divine reality is a supernatural beyond which we can deduce by advancing beyond our concept of the whole. He thinks that God *somehow* contains the meaning and power through which each thing becomes what it is. The precise nature of this relationship is not clearly worked out. Its importance, however, is unmistakable.

Barth deduces from his postulated radical alterity of God, the unsuitability of the world to reflect anything of the divine perfection. By referring to God, Barth is not referring to "some divine thing, or some ideal world contrasted with the visible world," but to "that unsearchable relationship in which we stand as men" (R, 424-5). Each thing and all of reality together is an infinitely complex set of relationships. God is the point which prevents relationality from slipping into total relativism.[61] Note, however, that God as other is a relation, the end term of the search for an ultimate limit to penultimate relations. Yet, there is an implied requirement in the reference to God which Barth does not always acknowledge. If God cannot be known, and so enter into a system of knowledge, why bother with God? Barth, it would seem, must presuppose that God is very much involved in sustaining the world we see, touch, enjoy, and in general experience. This is why he regards reference to God as a natural implication of thinking about the world.

A third basic application of the term dialectic is to describe the process of concept formation and transformation. Dialectic is the method which makes thought *critical* (***krinein***; see R, 8). Something like the following argument for a theological employment of dialectical thinking can be found in Barth's *Romans*:

(1) "It is in the actual tension and movement of human life, in the actual being and having, that our existential concepts and formulations emerge" (R, 425).

(2) "Every conversation about Him [God] ends in disharmony, since it is undertaken by men

---

61. For a discussion of how Christian truth claims respond to relativism, see Brad Kallenberg, "The Gospel Truth of Relativism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (2000), pp. 177-211.

lacking sufficient perception to enable them to keep a firm hold upon the subject about which they are talking" (R, 424).

(3) "To think is to formulate the question, the answer to which is itself the possibility of the very existence of any biological function" (R, 425).

(4) "Thought, therefore, as the search for this answer is not action, but presupposition" (R, 425).

(5) "Since, however, no presupposition exists in its own right, but always presupposes action [*die Voraussetzung des Aktes*], it follows that genuine thought must always be broken thought, and cannot escape the criticism of being merely intellectual" (R, 425-6).

I take Barth to be claiming here at least the following points. First, human thinking begins in, and continues with, its phenomenological condition, the "tension and movement of human life." Knowledge starts in experience and is conditioned by its limits. Reason deduces from phenomena its knowledge of things in experience.

Second, the problem of thinking God, a problem prompted by the fact of the entrance of God into human thought and the result that "human behaviour must inevitably be disturbed by the thought of God" (R, 424) are irresolvable from within the existential conditions of the starting point of human thought. We have "no sufficient perception" [*Uneinsichtigen*] of that to which the word 'God' refers.

Third, Barth conceives of thinking as the process of inquiry. In this process we are concerned with the reality beneath appearance. We want to know what makes possible the diversity of forms in the life world. Thinking in its pure form is thus the quest for a concept inclusive enough to explain the biological and physical processes with which we are familiar and which can be understood as their ground or basis. Pure thought thus turns away from the immanent region of experience. This turn implies, though Barth does not spell this out, that this plane can at most intimate, and never directly manifest, the conditions that make it possible.

Fourth, thinking as the quest for an answer, cannot be exclusively a presupposition, for "no presupposition exists in its own right, but always presupposes action." Barth does not explain

why this is so. He seems to have in mind here the belief that purely formal thought cannot exist without some action toward which it is intentionally directed. Neither are presupposition and act mutually reducible: presupposition guides action, but it is not a substitute for action, which, for its part, cannot be rational action without being informed by some presuppositional structure to guide it. Barth's method supposes something like the view that theory and practice are valid dispositions only when they mutually modify each other. It is the character of the presupposition to be an expanding horizon of experience, which accommodates repeated thought acts (cognition), providing a continuity in change to the process of growth in knowledge.

Fifth, this modification is at the heart of Barth's view of rationality as dialectical. "No presupposition is self originated, but is only the presupposition of an action" [*keine Voraussetzung an sich gibt, sondern nur die Voraussetzung des Aktes*, p. 413]. Genuine thought cannot settle on either side of the thought-action dichotomy but must be in constant motion from one side of it to the other. Action is not thought, but depends upon thought for guidance. Broken thought cannot, therefore, be accused of being "merely intellectual," for intellect is oriented to action as the necessary correlate which gives it its reason for existing. Knowledge grows through the dialectical relation between pure thought and thinking the dynamic life world.

True knowledge is always revisable because it derives from existence which is being dissolved and because it is of the essence of understanding always to be amending, correcting, and integrating as it broadens and deepens. Barth remains ambiguous at this important juncture in the argument where we should like to know if the intellect has some power enabling us to think that ultimate precondition which is the source of the "possibility" of all existence. Is the power of "pure thought" a human faculty? On the one hand, he thinks of our finitude as putting us outside of pure reason and so as excluding a *critical* and supratemporal rationality. All of our concepts are "existential concepts." On the other hand, Barth thinks that this whole argument for the justification of reasoning, can function only if we can *participate* in "pure thought, that is [...] the thought of God" (R, 426). God alone possesses pure thought, which we perceive when "He

encounters us in the dialectic of the supreme categories of our thought" (R, 425). Barth complicates the Greek logos by personalizing its objectivist and atemporal formalism. "As LOGOS—reason—is reminded of its primal origin by our actual behaviour, so our conduct is reminded by LOGOS—reason—of the problem of that action which is existential. Thus, it is our actual observation of life as it is that thrusts us back upon the necessity of hearing and speaking the Word of God" (R, 438).

These three uses of dialectic show it to be a method and not a single concept. Dialectic is the structure within which inquiry moves, guided by a presupposition which furnishes the goal of the inquiry. For Barth, dialectic is necessary to overcome the illusion to which human thinking and moral judgment are prone. Used in a hermeneutical context dialectic gets at the meaning of the text, which lies in potency, awaiting to become what it is not in and of itself. Our knowledge of the world is a knowledge of our awareness of the world, whose objects are lost to us outside of the power of our categories to order them. When God is the object under consideration however, the dialectic finds a limit which cannot be sublated in a higher concept or category. Dialectic is a method of immanent advancement when it is a method of knowing ourselves and our world. In theology it is a way of halting, of finding the terminus toward which all things move, and the source which is for all knowing its highest ground. Dialectic thus enables the defining of limits, and fundamental distinctions in thought. But can Barth really make so much negative intellectual use of a concept of God who is known as the Unknown?

God is supposed to be totally other, beyond representation in our conceptual framework. Nonetheless, God is the repository of reason. This is the meaning of the *pure presupposition.* As pure, it lacks the vagueness of our existential concepts and is in fact the paradigm against which we measure them. Barth's dialectic raises the problem of the *ambiguity* of the agent in knowing. We think of reason as normative precisely because, and when, it furnishes criteria operative *before* inquiry, criteria which make it possible to pick out through inquiries those facts, ideas, or situations we wish to discern. Barth, in a negative way, is doing the same. When God is regarded

as the presupposition which inaugurates the search for truth and as the one who *is* known *as* unknown, then reason is both grounded and destabilized (R, 437-8). Barth rejects, at least in this early phase of his development, a mediatorial solution, such as a doctrine of the analogy of being. For him God is directly felt in experience, but mediately expressed in a language suited primarily for the finite world. All such language will be illusion when it speaks of God, so long as it is taken literally and not subject to dialectical scrutiny. Barth does not resolve this dilemma. Instead, he calls for a repetition of the originary experience in which reason is both founded and undermined. It is founded, for in the high reaches of categorical thought we intuit the unintuitable God.[62] It is undermined, for it is only in and with the awareness of our finitude that we can represent to ourselves the divine infinity. Finite and infinite arise in thought together. Barth rejects a direct realism as a test for and confirmation of our rational products. If things possess no power distinct from that which they have in our representation of them they cannot be the cause of our knowledge of them (see sec. II above), and so their relation to our thought of them is problematic. This reflexively grounded notion of cognition truncates Barth's realist intention to break through to the basis of theological knowledge and speech, for reflection discloses the creative, spontaneous contribution of the thinking subject to all knowledge. For even if it is the case that we *do* know God in the "dialectic of the supreme categories of our thought" (R, 513), if these categories are not causally informed by the things we think through them—things mediated in them—then the entire ontological status of the world is ambiguous for us. Barth concludes, rather despairingly, that "reason itself becomes irrational" (R, 53).

God is not dialectically assimilable. God is "totally other," and this means that God cannot function in any positive epistemic manner, as, for instance, an archetype of all valid knowing. God is negative, *but* Barth seeks to extract a positive knowledge of God from this negativity, for God is "known as Unknown." Barth's dialectic leads us to the aporetic impasse wherein the world

---

62. See on intuiting the unintiutable, Michael Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der 'dialektischen Theologie' Karl Barth* (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1987), pp. 89-95.

is a *medium* for knowing God, but only negatively, since God is not causally related to it. The concept of *origin* has causal connotations, but it is Barth's radical inflation of contingency, to the exclusion of the category of causality, which makes any talk of the relation of God and world chronically vague. Barth's problem is bifocal. It is not simply that we are finite and God infinite that makes intelligent talk about God difficult. It is also the fact that God presents to reason a dialectical event in which God is known and concealed at the same time. God is not the world. Nonetheless, God cannot be known outside of the world, remembering here that the world is the theoretical, categorically construed whole which renders partial experience meaningful. This is the problem which dialectics cannot solve, but only state, and its manner of stating is always paradoxical, always that is a *qualified* and never a *pure* truth. However, only dialectics can disclose this problematic, and that is why it is necessary. Barth uses rational categories (reason, substance) to exhibit the inadequacies of reason *alone* to interpret the meaning of divine action in the world. It is God who determines what the real is, and not human reason. It is the beginning of this insight that is the end of the "world." An end, to be sure, which is also a new beginning:

> The truth concerning the limiting and dissolving of men by the unknown God, which breaks forth in the resurrection, is a known truth: this is the tragic factor in the story of the passion of the truth. When our limitation is apprehended, and when He is perceived who, in bounding us, is also the dissolution of our limitation, the most primitive as well as the most highly developed forms of human self-consciousness become repeatedly involved in a 'despairing humiliation', in the 'irony of intelligence' (H. Cohen). We know that God is He whom we do not know, and that our ignorance is precisely the problem and the source of our knowledge. We know that God is the Personality which we are not, and that this lack of Personality is precisely what dissolves and establishes our personality. The recognition of the absolute heteronomy under which we stand is itself an autonomous recognition; and this is precisely *that which may be known of God*. When we rebel, we are in rebellion not against what is foreign to us but against that which is most intimately ours, not against what is removed from us but against that which lies in our hands. Our memory of God accompanies us always as problem and as warning. He is the hidden abyss; but He is also the hidden home at the beginning and end of all our journeyings. Disloyalty to Him is disloyalty to ourselves. (R, 45-6)

Barth interprets the limits of human capacities and rational competence in hope that the reader will see the need for God as a supplement to reason. *Ironically, we cannot transcend*

ourselves and intuit the Origin directly, without already being bounded by and included in it.

(b) *The Theological and Anthropological Criteria of Rationality* A tension appears in Barth's thought between its dialectical method, dynamically structured to overcome limits, and the postulation of an absolute which cannot be sublated—cannot, that is, be rationally included as a concept in human thought. Thus, although it is claimed that we are dependent upon God for our higher rational operations, we cannot through the dialectical use of reason gain knowledge of God's inner nature. Barth's *Romans* raises in an acute way, the problem of how to relate divine and human reason, and in particular, the problem of the unity of rational experience.

Indeed, I would argue that the *crisis* described in Barth's early thought comes about as the result of two ostensibly irreconcilable criterion for rationality, each making a legitimate claim on human thought. On the one hand, there is an *anthropocentric* criteria of rationality. In this model I as thinker must shape experience into knowledge. The primary source of order is the one which I as autonomous agent impose upon all sensible experience. This imposition gives that experience an order and a meaning it could not otherwise have. The ordering agency is grounded in the higher categories of my mind, which are pure thought by virtue of the invariance in their forms and their capacity to pick out what is true (rational and real) from what is false (sensational and illusion). Application of this criterion gives Barth's conception of reason the *critical* function, which he thinks rational thought of any stripe must possess. Reason emerges most clearly in its critical function for reason alone enables the formation of knowledge out of experience. Thus, to truly judge what is valid (knowledge) in my experience, I must be able to trace through it (as mere appearance) its point of origin. Justification must be demonstrable, must, that is, have more than a private origin. The central problem in Barth's epistemology at this stage is to clearly determine the locus of pure reason. Is it in God, the human mind, or both under specified conditions?

On the other hand, there stands what could be named a *theocentric* criterion of rationality. This criterion thinks God negatively, as supplemental to what is lacking in human understanding. Human understanding is the discursive activity of time-bound human beings. As finite the scope

of our perceptual powers is limited. To account for important aspects of human experience we devise concepts—not derived from any single experience but presumed necessary for any possible experience—of what lies outside of finite perception, as its infinite ground. This includes nearly all of what there is, both in the world of real time and space and in that of my limited experience, most of which "exists" as memory (past) or anticipation (future). God is the being who both transcends and immanently grounds the actual existence of things, including human beings. God is not "a thing among other things, but the *Wholly Other*, the infinite aggregate of all merely relative others" (WGWM, 74), or again, in the context of discussing the goals we posit in ethical reasoning, God is regarded as not one among them, but as the "infinite aggregate of all goals" (WGWM, 154). Barth would reject this metaphysics as an example of "false transcendence" (WGWM, 295-6), yet this is precisely what he is practicing in his rendering of the Pauline text. It is, to be sure, a negative metaphysics, a metaphysics invoked to overcome metaphysics in theology. God as the presupposition clearly functions as an absolute metaphysical concept, that is, as the self-grounded ground of all outside of it. We know God only as an undetermined reference point, an all-determining Archimedean point of all possible relationality, which somehow focuses all of these by being their origin. Much in crisis theology is generated by the contradiction between these two criteria for rationality.

It would be remiss not to take note of the Kantian echo in Barth's commitment to these two criteria. The status of Barth's Kantianism is questionable, but the influence is undeniable. The limits which Kant places on talk about God—that it *not* be conducted as if God could be experienced (cognized) within the scope of space, time, and causality—are clearly at work in Barth's conception of the God-world relationship. Theoretically, God is *not* experienceable in the world, yet God *must* be, and *actually* is experienced there. One sees a Kantian influence in Barth's conception of the *theoretical* (rational) ground of ethics as constitutive of reason, as the same reason which is operative in description of the world, though used differently, namely, as a genuinely original cause not effected by the laws of interaction governing the space-time

continuum. Yet, here again Barth's account of the actuality of ethical experience, of experience of the other as the awakening moment in human ethical consciousness, conflicts with the purely regulative notion of ethics operative in Kant (see Barth's critique of Kantian ethics in WGWM, 152-7). The whole concept of crisis in Barth's early thought is a crisis of the *transition* from these Kantian (and so critical-constructive) methods to a more theologically grounded theology, with its origin in what is given and not what is constructed or made. This transition culminates in his Anselm and reaches its mature form in the doctrine of the knowledge of God in CD II/1.[63]

Rational self-possession (autonomy) is threatened whenever the mind intuits a thing in itself, "noumenon," especially when God is the noumena in question.[64] The violence of Barth's

---

63. I cannot develop here, but should note nonetheless, some of the background texts in which Barth's early Kantian commitment is highly visible. See "Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1909), 317-21; "Antwort an D. Michelis und D. Drews," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1909), 479-86; "Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte," *Schweizerische Theologische Zeitschrift* 39 (1912), 1-18, 49-72; "Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 24 (1914), 21-32, 65-95. These early works of Barth, and other texts also, are discussed with reference to the influence of Kantian and Neo-Kantian thought on Barth, in the following studies: Simon Fischer, *Revelatory Positivism? Barth's Earliest Theology and the Marburg School*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Instructive also is the meticulously detailed study by Johan Friedrich Lohmann *Karl Barth und die Neukantianismus: Die Rezeption des Neukantianismus im »Römerbrief« und ihre Bedeutung für die weitere Ausarbeitung der Theologie Karl Barth* (New York: De Gruyter, 1995). See also Barth's mature assessment of Kant in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* tr. Brian Cozens and John Bowden, (London: S C M Press, 1972), pp. 266-312, which shows Kant's influence to be most influential in the manner in which rationality is inseparably bound up with the question of ethics.

64. This is, of course, something Kant's architectonic denies is possible. Barth's Kantianism, like all of the philosophical strains which run fragmentarily through his *Romans*, is there in critical tension with his more theological concerns. Barth is no obedient Kantian, as Kantians will quickly note in reading him.

Barth's reference to intellectual intuition puts him on the Hegelian side of the debate, against Kant. Yet, the *result* of intellectual intuition has parallels in Kant's thought in what overwhelms pure reason's power to order thought. Barth seems to explain the epistemic dislocations of revelation as a Hegelian event [intellectual intuition] with Kantian consequences [the confusion which results from confounding the mind's rational (*vernünftige*) with its discursive (*verständige*) domains of legitimate operation].

There is in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* an analogue to what Barth thinks occurs when we intuit God as objective or extra-mental, though Kant does not himself believe such an intuition is possible. I am referring to what happens in Kant's account of an aesthetic judgment of the *sublime*. God's infinity transcends boundaries and so definition and conceptuality. However, just as the sublime concerns a judgment of something which is not found in nature because it is something which lacks measurable form (a requirement for judgments of beauty), so Barth's conception of God is an object which lacks form in the sense of being an object without body and possessing properties which are intelligible but immeasurable. Kant says of the sublime that it "can also be found in a formless object, in so far as we present *unboundedness*, either [as] in the object or because the object prompts us to present it, while yet we add to this unboundedness the thought of its totality" (p. 98; § 23). The immensity and totality to the sublime means that, "That is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small," (p. 105; § 25). The

metaphors illustrate how reason is overwhelmed when it confronts *directly* that which impinges upon it from the realm of existence. Barth interprets this experience as a sort of intellectual intuition, a direct contact with the divine, which overflows the conceptual channels set up by the categorial mediation which is normative for cognition. Reason relinquishes control of its object, to which it is discovered to be incommensurate. This intuition shatters the equilibrium which categories impose on perception of sensation, by claiming that we can have a direct experience of an external object which is not derived from sense.[65]

> The thought [*Gedanke*] of a noumena in any manner whatsoever, is frightening, highly disturbing, and destructive of all other thoughts [*Gedanken*]. To the extent that a God exists for a person, that person is more or less clearly and forcefully put in question. A more or less difficult, unbridgeable chasm opens up between one's own being and the deeply threatening, opposing non-being, between actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] and truth [*Wahrheit*]. A more or less powerful doubt arises as to whether the possible may not be the impossible, and as to whether being may not be non-being.[66]

This remarkable claim, un-Kantian in its affirmation of the possibility of an intuition which is

---

sublime is a magnitude which is unbounded but regarded as total, experience of which relativises all other magnitudes and quantities as less formidable. It is misleading to present Barth's theological epistemology as emerging from an aesthetic of the sublime, but there are helpful, because illuminating, parallels between Kant's articulation of sublimity, and Barth's account of the decentring effect which encounter with God has upon thought.

To say that Barth is more Hegelian than Kantian on the question of intellectual intuition, is to say that Barth regards the possibility of the intellect intuiting objects, knowing them as standing in substantial unity with what they are, is altogether appropriate for the intellect, but that it does have the consequence of decentring the mind's categorial (transcendental) structures. Kant's boundaries are transgressed, but the absolute object, God (Hegel's reason), works to theoretically furnish a unity which the fractured categories lose their grip on. Considered from this idealistic viewpoint, Barth's thought is sustained by a theological wholism which supplements the frailties and variables of epistemological particularism.

65. One is reminded of the effect of the experience of the sublime on the judgments of beauty in Kant's third critique. For Barth's reflection on the sublime, see the early essay, "Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 24 (1914), pp. 74-85.

66. See *Römerbrief*, p. 227, my translation. Cf. R, 243. Relating Barth's conception of the experience of revelation to Kant's experience of the sublime, for all its suggestive possibilities, needs to be qualified by the fact that Kant alters the conception of the sublime which he inherited, by denying that it totally overwhelms the rational subject, since whatever elicits it is not an absolute magnitude. For Kant, as Sylviane Agacinski has noted, nothing can be absolutely immense except the voice of reason. Only the law of Reason can impose absolute and universal obligations on *humanity*, and nothing else could be truly sublime." See "We are Not Sublime: Love and Sacrifice, Abraham and Ourselves," in Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain, eds., *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 140.

intellectual, has the effect of revisioning what counts as possible. Again, though, this insight is not developed into a systematic theory. Any such use of reason would be overturned by the concept that it is intuiting the Unknown, who is not directly knowable. Thinking glimpses, but cannot master, the insight into the reality of God.

(c) *The Paradox of the Real and the Rational* All religious speech is paradoxical. "The religious communication of a content of being," notes Martin Buber, "takes place in paradox." As such, it is not "demonstrable [...] but a pointing toward the hidden realm of existence of the hearing man himself and that which is to be experienced there and there alone."[67] The attempt to explain paradox is, as Soren Kierkegaard noted, the surest sign that one has lost that about which the paradox speaks. The claim that one understands paradox, is indication that one does not.[68] Yet, paradox always puzzles, disturbs, and provokes us to understanding and, if possible, resolution. The central dogmas of Christian belief are paradoxically articulated. That Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human is a paradox. That God is absolutely one and an irreducible threefold objectivity to self, is a paradox. That human beings are justified and at the same time sinners, to borrow Martin Luther's terminology, is a paradox. That every act of divine self-disclosing is also a concealment of the true divine nature as it is in itself, is a paradox. Yet all of these are true, if Christian belief is true. Christian paradoxes invariably issue from our conception of God as altogether transcendent of the world. Its paradoxes, however, are mitigated when we understand how it is that the God who exceeds our intellectual comprehension has nonetheless kenotically set

---

67. See Martin Buber, *The Eclipse of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), p. 43.

68. Thus, for example: "The difficulty is only to hold fast to the qualitative dialectic of the absolute paradox and to keep the illusions at bay. What can and shall and will be the absolute paradox, the absurd, the incomprehensible, depends on the passion in dialectically holding fast the distinction of incomprehensibility. Just as in connection with something that can be understood it is ludicrous to hear superstitious and fanatical, abstruse talk about its incomprehensibility, so its opposite is equally ludicrous—to see, in connection with the essentially paradoxical, attempts at wanting to understand it, as if this were the task and not the qualitatively opposite: to maintain that it cannot be understood, lest understanding, that is, misunderstanding, end up by also confusing all other spheres." See *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to* Philosophical Fragments tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Vol. 1, pp. 561-2, see also pp. 580-1.

aside the glory proper to God and taken on human form. The incarnation is thus the focal point for interpreting the interaction between God and the world; it is the event in which divine and human mediation take place from above.

The problem of paradox has taken on sizeable proportions in the philosophical literature,[69] where it is taken as a challenge to the principles of identity, noncontradiction, and excluded middle, the backbone of western logic. Paradox is regarded with suspicion in most philosophical circles, since it deviates from the ideal paradigm for rational clarity and strict adherence to the so-called law of contradiction. Paradoxical speech is descriptive in a way that is distinct from scientific speech. Descriptions in physical sciences, for example, are concerned with the surface behaviours of objects operating within a domain which has calculable dynamics, and whose actions can for that reason be understood by means of a determined set of rules. Description in natural science is suited for prediction, testing, and replication, because the domain in which it occurs and the logic which structures it bear a high degree of formal invariance.[70] Paradox does not so much *explain* the nature of nature, as *describe* a specific set of relations or events, usually ones involving human

---

69. I cannot, for reasons of time and competence, enter the debate here, but refer the reader to the following works: R. M. Sainsbury, *Paradoxes* second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), especially the final chapter, "Are Any contradictions Acceptable?" pp. 135-44; Joseph Grünfeld, *Soft Logic: The Epistemic Role of Aesthetic Criteria* (New York: University Press of America, 2000); Antoine Côté, "God and the Principle of Non-Contradiction," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (1998), 285-98; Timothy Williamson, *Vagueness* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Howard Kainz, *Paradox, Dialectic, and System: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the Hegelian Problematic* (University Park: Pennsylvania State university Press, 1988); and from a less analytical point of view, Eric Gans, *Signs of Paradox: Irony, Resentment, and Other Mimetic Structures* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

70. On the problems of the disparity between description and actual natural occurrence in the sciences, see Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (New York: Verso, 1986). Moreover, that some of the most far reaching scientific theories of the twentieth century and the theories which describe them are descriptively inadequate (have logical inconsistencies), is shown by Ronald Mawby, "When Inconsistencies Threaten: Paraconsistent Strategies in Science and Religion," in Mark S. Shale and George W. Sheilds, eds., (Washington: University Press of America, 1999), pp. 61-73. Mawby claims that "standard logic makes inconsistent theories worthless." Citing worries expressed by Richard Feynman and Paul Dirac he claims that by this standard the theory of electrodynamics and quantum theory are worthless. He does not, of course, claim that these theories are worthless. His claim is that there is a gap between the dynamics observed in reality and the theories by which we think we can precisely describe those dynamics. He calls for developing a logic to accommodate this phenomenon, a paraconsistent logic.

agents. But is paradoxical religious speech then simply irrational? I would argue that while it can be such, it is not such simply in virtue of its paradoxical formulation, for it is possible that paradoxical descriptions have rational content. Paradoxical description can be truth preservative and truth conducive if it is understood as *indexical*. The rationality of paradox comes from the fact that the propositions of a paradoxical description are intelligible, even if the total event they describe lacks features requisite for a full comprehension of it. Without this minimal intelligibility, the paradox itself could not be understood as such. Joseph Arsenault and Tony Brinkley, from whom I take the indexical interpretation of paradoxical speech, develop the concept out of an account of traditional logic.[71]

On its indexical definition paradox is understood as operating differently from cognitive derivation, in that we see in it indications of an existential situation which is indicative and not truth functional. The value of the indexical definition of paradox is that it inaugurates the disambiguating task with which paradox always confronts us. Arsenault and Brinkley describe indexical use as an alternative to more cognitivist treatments of language:

> We consider paradox as a form of statement that *is not implied* and *does not imply* in the way cognitive implication works, but that one draws conclusions from paradox as one does from deictics [demonstrative utterances] or descriptions: one concludes things about the *situation* it establishes or places us in. The formal irresolvability of paradox on the basis of cognitive content suggests that consideration of paradox as indexical—in Pierce's sense—where meaningfulness does not depend on cognitive content but on pointing out ("a pointing finger being the type" of the indexical).[72]

---

71. See "At the Limits of Formalization," in T. R. Flynn and Dalia Judovitz, eds., *Dialectic and Narrative* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 258-9.

72. Ibid., pp. 258-9. This typification of paradox as indexical, with its analogy of the pointing finger, is particularly suggestive in the case of Barth. For Barth frequently refers to the Renaissance painter Matthais Grünewald's *Crucifixion*, with an emaciated Christ, the Word of God, pointing beyond himself heavenward, as the ideal symbol of the indirectness of all revelation. All of revelation is mediated by historical occurrences and elements which become transparent in the event, pointing beyond themselves to God.

An index is nonassertive, and thus nonimplicative.[73] An index describes by calling our attention to a historical occurrence, which it articulates in statements. For Barth the paradoxical claims of Christian religion are truthful claims. They are not, therefore, entirely indexical. The indexical interpretation of phenomena is valuable if it really does enable us to find meaning in the descriptions of paradoxical occurrences, even if these descriptions lack a full logical rigour. Indexicals are suspended between contradiction and true propositions: their truth functionality is indeterminable, but they point to a perceptible and intelligible occurrence in the world. Many propositions about human history are indexical, they describe probable occurrences which we can never directly inspect in a scientifically experimental manner. Paradoxical statements should not therefore be rejected on logical grounds alone, for many of our most powerful scientific theories would not pass the test of absolute consistency. Moreover, paradoxes often concern interactions among humans which are much more complex than descriptions in the field of natural science, and call for different logical strategies in their investigation. Paradoxes which prove contradictories should be rejected. Paradoxes capable of cohering in a more inclusive rational concept should be recognized for what they are: partial descriptions whose completion removes their logically aporetic status. Paradox makes a claim on us since it calls us to further investigate the conditions of its occurrence. "Claim" here is not meant as something intended to be taken for true, but which offers no opening for an inquiry to establish its truth or lack thereof. Paradox claims us in the sense that it invites us to inquire *further* into the conditions which make it a peculiar statement.[74] Some

---

73. Ibid., p. 259. "We note in passing that an index, unlike a proposition, cannot be said to lie." It is used as an indication of a state of affairs in the world. However, as paradoxical statement, it prompts us to further inquiry. For a paradox is not simply a statement whose claims are *not* compatible. It is a statement whose claims *also* appear on some level to be true. In this it differs from contradiction, whose propositions entirely cancel each other out.

74. See on this P. Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* L. S. Mudge, ed., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 95-6. Ricoeur is here proposing a rational theology which eschews the extremes of a philosophy committed to belief in an absolute autonomy of reason, on the one hand, and a theological authoritarianism which, for the sake of a pure heteronomy of authority, demands a *sacraficium intellectus*, on the other hand. Such a theology proceeds by way of "the claim," taken not in the sense of an "undue and unacceptable pretension," but in the more heuristic sense of "an appeal which does not force one to accept its message." I think that indexical logic as a logic of historical occurrence and the attempt to rationally discern its meaning is in keeping with such a conception

apparent contradictions are in fact such. To speak of a contradiction as *apparent* is to imply that given a fuller range of information and upon further investigation the contradiction would disappear. The basic difference between paradox and contradiction is that contradiction is two statements logically cancelling each other out, whereas paradox contains two statements which appear not only incompatible, but also true. Philosophical inquiry asks: Under what conditions may the initially incompatible statements turn out to be coherent?

The claim that Jesus Christ *is* God and a human being is the paradoxical ground and paradigm of all revelation claims. It is a strange thing to claim, something which initially causes puzzlement, doubt or denial. Jesus of Nazareth is the engine of reversal (R, 107-8), the power through which God works to transform the crisis leading to death, into a crisis unto life. However, such a profundity can only initially be expressed in the paradoxical claim of his divine and human nature:

> Here is the necessary qualification. [...] In Jesus revelation is a paradox, however objective and universal it may be. That the promises of the faithfulness of God have been fulfilled in Jesus the Christ is not, and never will be, a self-evident truth, since in him it appears in its final hiddenness and its most profound secrecy. The truth, in fact, can never be self-evident because it is a matter neither of historical nor psychological experience, and because it is neither a cosmic happening within the natural order, nor even the most supreme event of our imaginings. Therefore it is not accessible to our perception: it can neither be dug out of what is unconsciously in us, nor apprehended by devout contemplation, nor made known by the manipulation of occult psychic powers. (R, 97-8)

The fact of revelation focuses on the appearance of Jesus Christ in history. This is not self-evident, but paradoxical, and suggests that paradox is not the terminus of God-talk for Barth. If all that we say concerning God is a paradox, then no rational discourse about God is possible. Paradox, I would argue, is the initial form in which divine revelation strikes the average modern rational person. It invites, and requires, a further inquiry, one in which all of the dimensions of divine agency are included. Speech about God is not a description of the world which challenges

---

of theological rationality.

the rationalist or scientific description, even if it implies something different about the *same* reality. Now, the whole of Barth's paradoxology is captured in the phrase "impossible possibility." Jesus the Christ is the embodiment of its meaning. "In so far as our world is touched in Jesus by the other world, it ceases to be capable of direct observation as history, time, thing" (R, 29). Incarnation reinscribes the meaning of the word 'God'. Christ is revelation *and* concealment. It is primarily on account of its Christological mediation that "knowledge" of God is a knowledge of the "unknown." "The positive relation between God and man, which is the absolute paradox, veritably exists. This is the theme of the Gospel [...], proclaimed [...] under pressure of a necessity from which there is no escape. It proclaims eternity to be an event. We declare the knowledge of the Unknown God, the Lord of Heaven and Earth" (R, 94). Jesus is the medium of the revelation of God in so far as "In Jesus, God becomes veritably a secret: He is made known as the Unknown, speaking in eternal silence; He protects himself from every intimate companionship and from all the impertinence of religion" (R, 98).

The grand paradox (Jesus the Christ) is *impossible* according to the point of view of a "natural," "unbroken" thinking, a thinking which is linear, and which theorizes a plane of immanence as a metaphysic of ultimacy which regards finitism and its conditions as total. For such thinking Jesus as the Christ is a contradiction. Against the totalizing tendencies of this position, Barth posits an Other from a dimension outside of immanence, which shatters the immanentist illusion of ultimacy, though not its relative validity. Barth regards the finitude which conditions all human reasoning as confinement to a "plane of immanence,"[75] which limits the possibilities of reason. It refuses to theoretically close off that plane to another which is not reducible to it. Naturalistic thinking is unnatural, Barth claims, because it will not let the full

---

75. On this term see, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* tr. H. Thomlinson and G. Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 30-60, esp. pp. 59-60: "Perhaps this is the supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think *THE* plane of immanence as to show that it is there, unthought in every plane, and to think it in this way as outside and inside of thought, as the not-external outside and the not-internal inside—that which cannot be thought and yet must be thought, which was thought once, as Christ was incarnated once, in order to show that one time, the possibility of the impossible."

weight and implications of the crisis conduct it to the limit at which God comes into view. The violent metaphors for revelation are given their intensity by the assumption that the plane of immanence was somehow presupposed as an absolute and insuperable dimension. Ingression into such a closed plane can have only violent consequences, for *revelation is the contradiction of that which theorizes its impossibility*. Barth is seeking to reiterate the integrity of an empirical rationality which is a natural aptitude of human nature and a use for reason in which it is able to understand the alterity of God as a object it cannot think. The immanent is illusory only when one claims for it the status of an absolute, and then the claim itself is the locus of the difficulty.

As against this immanentistic reduction, it could be asserted from a different point of view, that Jesus the Christ is *possible*. The two conflicting viewpoints, of course, are schematizations of two irreconcilable versions of ontology, of the really real which underlies the ambiguity of appearance. Because Barth asserts the priority of unity to plurality, he rejects any attempt to resolve paradox by a double-truth theory, according to which what is true for the divine mind is not the same as what is true for human standards of judgment. This unity underwrites the coherence of all thought, and is achieved by a synthetic activity of mind. The Averroist solution is "double-entry bookkeeping" and implies that knowledge of God is not genuine knowledge.[76] Jesus Christ as divine is not simultaneously possible and impossible. This would be flat out contradiction. The judgment of impossibility and possibility attaches to the criterion by which *we* judge a description to be paradoxical. How does one acquire such a new criterion? We acquire this criterion only in the act of revelation or divine self-disclosure. This act transforms the plausibility

---

76. "We succeed at times in forgetting what we know, in forgetting the original unity of the soul. We contrive for a little to be satisfied to have our knowledge split into a thousand parts, each man clinging with jealous eagerness to his own fragment, the spiritual bond being cast to the winds—you take your biology! You take your history! I have my religion!—you in your small corner and I in mine. It is a fact as inexplicable as it is undeniable that there is also a presupposed original NO which holds us captive, and that sometimes in the alleged interest of threatened religion and sometimes, *vice versa*, in the alleged interest of threatened culture, we feel we must oppose a special truth about this world to a special truth about God; but this is to establish a system of double-entry bookkeeping which converts the knowledge of God offered in the Bible into what it is not. For the fear of the Lord which is offered us in the Bible is not something apart from other things: it is the beginning of wisdom" (WGWM, 57). See also WGWM, 55.

of the paradox of Jesus Christ, for in it we intuit the reality of God as mediated in a human form. In the immediacy of the revelatory event we gain an insight which overturns the whole moral order, and issues in a renewal of the mind. However, since the crisis of revelation illumines the world as a paradox—because the world is in contradiction to God's will—it appears to be more than a concept. It can only be expressed in our "natural" epistemic condition as a paradox, an impossible possibility. Faith seeking understanding does not generate (project) its object, but comes to life in and with its apprehension. When Barth refers to the presupposition as *the* invisible basis of all visible forms and processes, which may nonetheless not appear as a thing or process among others, he is postulating a relationship between human speculative apprehension and God as an unknown entity. How does this presupposition shape thought?

The presupposition impinges on thought in the same way that the new criteria for judging the Christ does, i.e., in the "moment" of insight which Barth here takes revelation to be. Barth thinks that it is through memory that we apprehend the divine. Revelation discloses a forgotten, lost, direct dependence upon God, and enables the reception of revelation in the moment of insight.[77] This knowledge of God gained by way of revelation is not the acquisition of a new set of empirical data. The world of things is the means, not the end, of revealed knowledge. Revelation does not occur *within* time and space (history), but outside of it.[78] This is why it is not subject to critical testing using criteria not drawn from its own manifestation or reality. It occurs in eternity, which is glimpsed as an ephemeral "vision," and not directly related to the conditions of experience as such, even though it first comes to light there as a crisis. We access God by seeing through the world, in the sense of theoretical structures of thought in which we apprehend the

77. There is an unmistakably platonic suggestion in Barth's argument here. "Men are sinners only because of the election and vocation, only because of the act of remembering their lost direct dependence upon God, only because of the contrast between their pristine and their present relation to Him" (R, 242-3).

78. On this interpretation, Barth would understand the pure categories of our understanding as concepts free from the contingency of temporal processes. It is in these categories that we encounter God, not in historically determined experience.

most common concepts for experiencing reality, its transcendent ground—a sort of speculative thinking. Revelation reverses the anthropocentric locus of meaning, giving our experience of the world a paradoxical form. Paradox, with the aid of dialectic, leads beyond the temporal and historical to a speculatively grasped insight into the truly real basis of reality. The achieved standpoint is in tension with the first or normative point of view of finite human reasoning, but held together in dynamic tension with it. The newly discovered viewpoint does not simply replace one totalizing conception of reality with another. It undermines all totalizing language by countering it with an anonymous absolute being, the Unknown God. The paradoxical "impossible possibility" inaugurates the unending task of understanding the world in light of the insight (*Einsicht*) which revelation affords. For paradox to come to life and not simply succumb to contradiction, we need not deny the world of normative experience, as if denying one of the two conjuncts of a contradiction. If the world is itself open to new forms and to the ground of its own act of existence (assuming that there a single ground), then paradox can be used as a tool to lead thought to the presupposition in which this world and its invisible origin are coordinate, not contradictory. God is always giving the world, making it out of *no initial conditions*, but out of *nothing*. Paradoxical language presupposes that visible difference can be understood in light of an invisible unity and thus it opposes all positivistic conceptions of reality, with their monistic ontologies and their fixation on a single methodology for demonstrating allegedly scientific truths.

Paradox, then, is not contradiction. It is an index of a state of affairs which calls for further rational inquiry and resolution. The transcendent word enters time, so time and eternity cannot be absolutely antithetical. The diastatic opposition which Barth posits (see II c, above) dialectically undermines itself. Thus, we see Barth transforming eternity into an "event" (R, 94), since to know God, who is eternal, is to participate in the divine life, and this means that eternity must impinge upon time, the time of being human. Time and history *are* the medium of knowledge, not hindrances to it. It is only when we take the conditions of time and history as self-grounded that they fail to disclose their dependence upon what transcends them. In Barth's early

thought, neither the thinking subject, nor the natural context of thought are constant, for both are subject to existence, which is a process, not a final state. The standpoints which we occupy are themselves part of the flux of change and becoming. Barth was aware of this, as this Heraclitean passage shows:

> 'Standpoint,' however, is hardly the right word. For our position is really an instant in a *movement*, and any view of it is comparable to the momentary view of a bird in flight. Aside from the movement it is absolutely meaningless, incomprehensible, and impossible. By 'movement,' to be sure, I do not mean either the socialistic movement, the social movement in religion, or the general, somewhat problematical, movement of so-called Christianity. I mean a movement from above, a movement from a third dimension, so to speak, which transcends and yet penetrates all these movements and gives them their inner meaning and motive; a movement which has neither its origin nor its aim in space, in time, or in the contingency of things, and yet is not a movement apart from others: I mean the movement of God in history or, otherwise expressed, the movement of God in consciousness, the movement whose power and import are revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This must be the gist of all our thinking about the Christian's place in society. (WGWM, 282-3)

(d) *The Limits of Dialectic* Barth's thinking is problematic for philosophical analysis, not only because it is a prophetic mode of expression, or because he is intentionally eclectic, but also because Barth refuses rational systematicity. Barth resists systematically philosophizing about God for he thinks that the product of such a method will invariably be an illusion, mistaking itself for a cognition of the ultimate reality. All thinking is subject to illusion for Barth, because it is indirect. It enjoys familiarity with its object through constructing it in thought. All such constructions reify their products, that is, they present them as an object which comes from outside of thinking and so conceal their human origins. Dialectic has the merit of enabling some familiarity with the world while undermining the viewpoint, thus preventing erroneous reliance on merely human inventions. The fragmentary character which results from this antisystematic bias yields the unenduring combination of belief in the possibility of knowledge (truth) with the cognitive

impossibility of attaining to such knowledge.[79] Dialectic is as close as Barth comes to a *systematic* mode of thinking, but he is not making trails so much as burning bridges with his dialectic.

The task of the next chapter is to show how Barth supplements what is lacking in his dialectical epistemology. Before leaving the theme, we must take note of the fact that Barth limits the power of dialectical reasoning. God *is* understood by means of dialectic, "but this possibility, the possibility that God *himself* speaks when he is spoken of, is not part of the dialectic way a such; it arises rather at the point where this way *comes to an end*" (WGWM, 211). Barth continues:

> It is evident that one is under no divine compulsion to listen to the assertions of the dialectician. In this respect the dialectician is no better than the dogmatician and the self-critic. The real weakness of the dogmatician and the self-critic, their inability really to speak of *God*, the necessity which is upon them always to speak of something else, appears to be raised even to a higher power in the dialectician. For the very reason that he refers *everything* to the living truth itself, the inevitable *absence* of that living truth from his own references must be only the more painfully evident. (WGWM, 211)

Dialectic is necessary, for it alone can enable us to move out of our fixed position and advance toward a more inclusive one. Dialectic takes us to a limit in thought which it cannot transcend. As such it functions negatively. It prevents our confusing God and world, and so it hinders idolatry. But Barth's dialectic does not fit well with his theology. The question which Barth's dialectic seeks to answer is this: How can we know God, when encounter with God dissolves our rational faculties?

IV

(a) *For and Against Religion* The themes covered in the preceding two sections already intimate Barth's attitude to religion. His theory concerning religion can be stated paradoxically: Religion is the snare which constricts human freedom the more deeply it is adhered to and practiced, and yet

---

79. See here the perceptive study of Karen Carr, *The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth Century Responses to Meaninglessness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 51-84. Carr describes Barth in his crisis phase as an "epistemological nihilist" and an "alethiological realist," that is, he is agnostic about knowledge but affirms the reality of truth.

religion is the unavoidable fate of all human beings in so far as they strive to realize the goodness of being human. Barth's position is presented dialectically. I begin with his case against religion.

Barth claims, *first*, that religion is the most salient obstacle to thinking from the Godward point of view (*von Gott aus*).[80] To ask if there is a God is to ask an appropriate question. We can answer it "either from the criminal arrogance of religion or from that final apprehension of truth which lies beyond birth and death—the perception, in other words, which proceeds from God outwards" (R, 37). Religion is an obstacle to apprehending truth because it does not disclose truth but conceals it in the form of illusion. "Instead of counteracting human illusions, it does no more than introduce an alternative condition of pleasurable emotion" (R, 236). Religion, thus understood, promotes a culture for the full growth of "godlessness," when it should—seen "from God outwards"—be the end of all illusions.

The *second* claim Barth makes is that religion obstructs faith because it fails to comprehend the fact that God cannot be grasped within any intellectual or theological program. That God is wholly other entails that no system can comprehend God. Human beings repeatedly speak "of God from the welter of their experiences, [but] mean in fact themselves" (R, 47). The besetting fault of religion is its anthropomorphic reflex. It continually fuses the concept of God or divinity in the formal sense with the material interests of religious authority. This does not mean that religion fails to distinguish God and humanity. On the contrary, religion is typified by its pretension to control the difference between God and human beings.

This control is expressed in the form of the *third* great flaw of religion, its tendency toward dualisms. "More than any other human possibility religion is scarred with the dualism of 'There' and 'Here', presupposition and fact, truth and reality; the religious man above all others is not what

---

80. "The question 'Is there then a God?' is therefore entirely relevant and indeed inevitable! But the answer to this question, that is to say, our desire to comprehend the world in its relation to God, must proceed either from the criminal arrogance of religion or from that final apprehension of truth which lies beyond birth and death—the perception, in other words, which proceeds from God outwards. When the problem is formulated thus, it is evident that, just as genuine coins are open to suspicion so long as false coins are in circulation, so the perception which proceeds outwards from God cannot have free course until the arrogance of religion be done away" (R, 37).

he is intended to be. A dualism controls the whole world of religion, and, consequently, there sin—*abounds* " (R, 231).[81] Dualism is that intellectual device by which all the complex distinctions within reality are reduced to two metaphysically basic domains. In religion dualism distinguishes God from the world, and in this very act places itself in control over God. Religion "ascribes" to God the highest place, and in that way gains control of the relationship to God.[82]

A *fourth* claim against religion is that it resists the invitation of the divine to engage in its own dialectical overcoming. Religion is dialectically overcome when it yields to the divine initiative which dissolves *and* establishes religious practice. Religion does not dialectically comprehend God. Rather, it dialectically overcomes its representations of God, refusing to attribute absolute status to them. The reality (*noumena*) of the experience of God dissolves all of our images of him. God is in no way obliged to channel grace through religion, though this, too, is a possibility. Its refusal of the divine initiative comes from its positivistic attitude toward its own constructions and presumptions: religion is divinity on earth, so it makes no sense to speak of

---

81. "Faith, as the ground of knowledge and as the creative power in history, is here [Rm. 4: 17] distinguished from the whole dim world of mythology and mysticism. There is no question of overtopping or deepening or enriching this world by calling into being another 'inner' or 'higher' world. There is no question of the 'cosmic-metaphysical' or of imposing two, or three, or even seven, other worlds upon the concrete world in which we live. There is nothing but the final and--because there is no escape from it—the unique contradiction between life and death, between the things that are and the things that are not" (R, 141).

82. "We assign to Him the highest place in our world: and in so doing we place Him fundamentally on one line with ourselves and with things. We assume that He *needs something*: and so we assume that we are able to arrange our relationship to Him as we arrange our other relationships. We press ourselves into proximity with Him: and so, all unthinking, we make Him nigh unto ourselves. We allow ourselves an ordinary communication with Him, we permit ourselves to reckon with Him as though this were not extraordinary behaviour on our part. We dare to deck ourselves out as His companions, patrons, advisers, and commissioners. We confound time with eternity. This is the *ungodliness* of our relationship to God. And our relation to God is *unrighteous*. Secretly we are ourselves the masters in this relationship. We are not concerned with God, but with our own requirements, to which God must adjust Himself. Our arrogance demands that in addition to everything else some super-world should also be known and accessible to us" (R, 44).

Dualism is a strategy for resisting the sovereign claim of God. "Opposition to God emerges in the critical distinction between seen and unseen, relative and absolute, independence and primal union. And this possibility comes into being through the divine commandment; through the intrusion of the possibility of religion [...] So it is that religion becomes the occasion of sin. Religion is the working capital of sin; its fulcrum; the means by which men are removed from direct union with God and thrust into disunion, that is, into the recognition of their—creatureliness" (R. 248).

God as opposing religion. Religion in its givenness, its anthropological inevitability, makes itself the arbiter of all claims to religious validity. Whenever religion understands itself—and it is its essential nature to so understand itself—as already in conformity with God's will, it destroys faith, regarded as the individual's intuition of God. Whenever religion demands to be the singular mediation of divine knowledge, it displaces the immediacy of faith.

With magnificent subtlety Barth, in the first chapter of his book (R, 34-54), presents an account of the dialectical struggle which occurs when merely human religiosity is confronted with a direct perception or intuition of God, as happens in revelation. That intuition lights up for thought the possibility that religiosity as such may be completely mistaken in its pretension to be or embody divine virtue. This moment is dialectical in that it confronts religion with the possibility of transcending its own anthropocentric presuppositions, and moving across a threshold from scepticism to belief. This moment reverses religious self-confidence, disclosing the god of religion to be a "No-God," an idol projected from within human ideals. There is a moment in the apprehension of divine action towards it in which the religion of the "No-God" sees that its own course is really a "night" in which it is lost, and even though it knows that nothing it does can avert death, religiosity persists in its course. When this decision to reject the crisis and to persist in religion is made a transition occurs, but it is not a dialectical one(*Aufhebung*), not the first of a series of self-evacuating gestures in which faith transcends religion and reacquires that lost naivete of direct communion with God, but a destruction (*Zersetzung*).

A *fifth*, and final, claim against religion is that it refuses to accept the paradoxical character of revelation. Human beings "continue to prefer their 'No-God' to the divine paradox" (R, 41). Paradox occludes any dogmatic finality, any totalizing claim with respect to God, for its very form reminds us of the dual nature of our thinking and speaking about the God who is totally other. All of our claims about God are *our* claims. When we refer to God in our language, it is an indirect or derivative use of our language, involving the recognition that God acts prior to our awareness of God to make present what our thinking on its own cannot. This, for Barth, is our direct intuition

of God, but intuition is not mystical experience. In this encounter the mind is directed to God as the beyond of all that it can comprehend, as the one who is totally other.

Barth speaks of the "mists" of religion which are the romanticising effect of trying to domesticate what can only be pointed to as beyond our ken (R, 49-51). This intuition of the unintuitable is a capability humans have as humans but is not one they can harness and invoke at will. It cannot, therefore, be rationally developed in a constructive manner. Religion errs because it seeks to transform a momentary intuition of God as noumenal into evidence of a faculty or capacity which humans naturally possess and which operates categorically, like a religious *a priori* (Ernst Troeltsch).[83] Language is linear, temporal, and indirect (a representational activity). Faith as intuition is transcendental, timeless, and external to normative human cognitive processes. "The man of God," writes Barth,

> is aware of the true and tragic and paradoxical state of affairs. He knows what he is about when he adopts a point of view which is no point of view, and when he in no wise regards himself as excused by his vocation. The men of God know that belief is faith only when it is the product of no historical or spiritual achievement. They know that faith is the ineffable reality of God, that clarity of sight (i. 20) is no system, no discovery of research, but the eternal ground of perception. (R. 58)

For these reasons, Barth argues that if faith is to prevail, then religion must be gotten rid of. This, to be sure, is only one side of the dialectic.

(b) *The Necessity of Religion* The other side of this dialectic affirms the flawed but necessary role of religion in human life and culture. Barth's intolerance of alternative

---

83. Ernst Troeltsch was a formidable liberal theologian, who tried to solve the problem of the origin of religious meaning after the Kantian strictures on metaphysics, by reference to a postulate "religious *a priori*." See Ernst Troeltsch, *Religion in History*, tr. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), pp. 33-45. On the nature and use of the "religious *a priori*," see Mark D. Chapman, "Apologetics and the Religious *A Priori* : The Use and Abuse of Kant in German Theology: 1900-20," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 43: 470-510, for a treatment of the development of the concept of a "religious *a priori*." Barth opposes the *a priori* as a *method* since it invariably assigns to human reason a power it can only be given *in relation* with God, and can never possess as a deep structure. Thus, he complain, with Troeltsch in mind: "Even the concept of the religious *a priori*, which played so big a part in religious philosophy around 1910, would not have to be rejected absolutely or intrinsically if it were not for the unfortunate fact that on the basis of a right or wrong understanding of Kant it is understood as a capability or property grounded in man as such and as the corresponding freedom of control" (CD I/1, p. 193).

interpretations, ones which he sees a supplanting the absolute claim of the gospel, is motivated by his belief that out of such judgment redemption comes. "We demand," he announces programmatically, "the subjection of all human being and having and doing under the divine judgment, precisely in order that it may always and everywhere await the divine justification, and because, seen from God and for God, nothing can ever be lost" (R, 116). On this side of the ledger Barth makes his argument with several claims. *First,* religion is unavoidable. Even though religion is the occasion for sin, we cannot escape sin by fleeing from religion (R, 241-2). "Religion is the misfortune which every human being has to endure, though it is, in the majority of cases, a hidden suffering" (R, 259).

A second aspect of the inevitability of religion is that it is bound up with the sociality of the human. Human beings inexorably form religious institutions and practices which reflect their inner ideas. "Religion in some guise or other overwhelms me like an armed man; for, though the ambiguity of my existence in this world may perhaps be hidden from me, yet nevertheless my own desires and my vitality press forward into the sphere of religion, and I am defenceless against the pressure" (R, 245). To be human, thinks Barth, is to be confronted more or less clearly by the problem of God's existence. The fullest treatment of religion in *Romans* is in the discussion of chapter seven, and comes under the heading of "Freedom." In the apostle's letter that chapter discusses the chronically compromised human will. We do what we judge to be morally wrong (contrary to the Law), sometimes even when we will not to do it. Barth elevates this struggle of the individual, Barth makes into the paradigm of religious practice. "It is, then, inevitable that I should do what I ought not to do: that quite inadequately and unworthily I should formulate the relationship between the infinity of God and my finite existence, between my finite existence and the infinity of God—in terms of religion." (R, 245).

This is the driving concept in Barth's construal of crisis. If dialectical thinking is the only rational tool sufficiently strong to break the bonds of religiously generated illusion, yet is itself subject to the dialectical reabsorption into the conditions of religion, then there can be no rational

justification of the faith as a condition of theology. Barth seeks to undermine the illusion of authority which religion seeks for itself as the official interpreter of the data of revelation. Yet, Christian religion confronts philosophical dialectic with the possibility that it may itself be absorbed into religion's counterdialectic, a dialectic which interpretively redescribes and reintegrates the world of experience in accord with its own conception of God as absolute source. Religion has at its core a dialectical activity of its own. It is capable of integrating all of the data of phenomenal experience into a systematically structured understanding of the world as a whole. The logic of its claim to truth involves some such structure.[84] Barth's strategy, that of seeking to restore a subordination of culture to the Word of God as *the* determinative category of reality, backfires on this very point. If God is beyond knowledge, or, what amounts to the same thing, known only in an atemporal, nonpersonal, and totally discontinuous manner from all other knowing, then dialectic cannot grasp God. If so, then every dialectical strategy or move is on parity with every other, including those which promote contrary claims. True, these can be synthesized with *their* contraries, giving the impression of advance or resolution, but all that really happens in such encounters is another broken aporia, whose positive (assertive) moment bears within it the aporia of an immanent countermove. To present such encounters as the pattern of truth is contradictory, for truth as such makes an absolute claim on us. At most, dialectic *so conceived* can offer us only a world in actual or potential flux between each of its parts, which come to light in the dialectical fixing of concepts. In Barth's case, what happens is that autonomous religion absorbs theology's claim to lead faith to its proper object. There is, for religion, no beyond, for every gesture of pointing is absorbed into the structure of a monistically theorized whole of religious knowledge, in which to say "God" is to secretly project the human ego's own idealized aspirations.

That this could happen undermines Barth's strategy for redeeming religion through a dialectical confrontation with revelation. This, it seems to me, is the weakest point of Barth's

---

84. See Bruce Marshall, "Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths," in Bruce D. Marshall, ed., *Theology and Dialogue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 69-102.

attempt to think God *as* mediated in a crisis of consciousness and knowledge. Unless it is corrected, Barth's extreme othering of the divine will perpetually outrun any efforts to rationally ground talk about God:[85]

> The time when there was no commandment is beyond our understanding. All we know is that the union between God and man has been changed from divine pre-supposition to human supposition, and that, consequently, every human position has suffered dislocation. On the very brink of human possibility there has, moreover, appeared *a final human capacity—the capacity of knowing God to be unknowable and wholly Other; of knowing man to be a creature contrasted with the Creator, and, above all, of offering to the Unknown God gestures of adoration. This possibility of religion sets every other human capacity also under the bright and fatal light of impossibility.* (R, 250; emphasis added)

Barth's conclusion is predictably paradoxical. Even though religion is not compatible with faith, it is nevertheless, "the final word," at least on "this side of the resurrection" (R, 313). Religion appears in a plurality of historical forms, and whenever it "displays strong and earnest godliness it is always attractive" (R, 183). This interpretation of the meaning of religion is all the more striking when we recall that Barth applies it above all to his own Christian religion. Barth denies that he is foregoing his obligation as a theologian when he attacks religion so strongly. He regards the Church as "the mystery of God," which directs us "towards hope, and towards hope only" (R, 413). However, Barth's strategy of clearing the ground for the new intellectual edifice leaves no adherents for his religious utopia. "Rightly understood, there are no Christians: there is only the eternal opportunity of becoming Christians—an opportunity at once accessible and inaccessible to all men" (R, 321). Gareth Jones summarizes nicely the predicament of religion in

---

85. The absurdity of Barth's *extreme diastatic* assumption is expressed in his equation of evil with human finitude as such. "*Evil* means, in Christian language, the necessary condition of all visible human action. *Evil* is the inert mass of human activity as such. *Good* is not a second possibility contrasted with *evil*. *Good* is the impossible possibility of redemption from *evil*. *Good* is the dissolution of *evil*, its judgment. *Good* is the impossible possibility of redemption from *evil*. *Good* is the justification of men by God" (R, 467). It is worth noting that late in his career Barth rejects his early excesses, among which he includes the ideas of diastasis, the wholly other inbreaking from a complete beyond in purely perpendicular angle leaving no extension in time, the infinite qualitative distinction between God and world. These ideas where "said somewhat severely and brutally, and moreover [...] in part heretically." See Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, tr. Thomas Weiser and John Newton Thomas, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), pp. 42-44.

Barth's crisis thinking:

> What happens is that Barth's model squeezes the life out of religion, catching it between an absolute understanding of the gospel (which is correct), and an authoritarian model of theology (which is not). What results is an attenuated understanding of religion in which the relationship between the individual and the collective—which is *the* ecclesiological question and is therefore fundamental to theology—is reduced to the existential moment of decision, in which the individual lives or dies, rejecting religion entirely as the false offering of the devil.[86]

V

I have sought to show in this chapter how it is that Barth appropriates the Pauline text and interprets it according to a philosophically inspired conceptuality. This conceptuality is philosophically fragmentary, because purposely eclectic. There are Platonic themes in Barth's commentary, as well as influences from Neo-Kantian epistemology, Kierkegaard's philosophies of existence and paradox, Hegelian dialecticism, phenomenological descriptivism, and Nietzschean nihilistic despair. These are all used for Barth's own peculiar purpose, and that purpose is to reject hegemony in any and all forms, whether it be in the forms of ethics, politics, theology, or piety. Whatever hinders the free relationship between God and the believer is rejected or dialectically subordinated to the paradigmatic relationship of faith, which is the timeless, transcendental "moment" of the intuition of God.

Summarizing the use of reason in Barth to this point, it could be claimed that Barth uses reason to undermine any authority which is not God's own. Reason undermines itself, as in the refusal of religion to dialectically give up the alleged ultimacy of its standpoint. Reason is just one of a number of authorities which must be negated in the act of affirming them. However, when one negates reason by categorically denying it any enduring form or structure, "reason itself

---

86. Gareth Jones, *Critical Theology: Questions of Truth and Method* (New York: Paragon House, 1995), p. 27. J. A. Veitch argues that Barth's more mature thought on religion comes to stress its positive possibilities, dialectically countering the early negative treatment. See "Revelation and Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (1971), 1-22. More recently, J. A. Di Noia has sought to mitigate the one-sidedness of interpretations seeing religion in Barth as purely negative, in his essay "Religion and the Religions," CC, pp. 243-57. Both writers take the concept of *Aufhebung*, with its ambiguity, as the conceptual hinge of Barth's view of religions, indicating how the negative conception must have an affirmative counter pole.

becomes irrational," and then the dialectic itself is mortally wounded. Barth immediately sees the flaws in his position. As a newly appointed university professor, Barth is confronted by the rational method of theology as a pressing issue. In the decade between the second edition of *Romans* (1922) and the publication of his *Anselm* (1931) one sees Barth moving more and more to a rational justification for talk about God. I would argue that such an assessment is definitely a part of Barth's mature thought, and that the increased reliance on reason in Barth's thought brings about the development of a rational method, whose details I develop in the next chapter. Dialectic remains an integral part of Barth's method throughout his life. What changes in the period from *Romans* to *Anselm* is the discovery of a form of conceptual necessity with respect to conceiving God, which acts as an anchor for the dialectical method.

I conclude that in this first major turn of Barth's career the dominant use of reason is the dialectical one. However, dialectic is not sufficient of itself to arrive at the God of theology, at the mode of rational discourse proper to the object of Christian faith. Dialectic in this phase is always polemical, always generating aporiae, and always suspicious of claims to knowledge, especially absolute claims. The breakthrough in the Anselm study is not that Barth suddenly abandons dialectic, as von Balthasar has argued,[87] or that he awakens to the realization that reason is central to his task. Of this he is always aware. The breakthrough is in the discovery of a method which does justice to the reality of God, the propriety of dialectic as an abiding feature of human reasoning, and the overcoming of the problem of the identity of the agent in the knowledge of God, a problem for all methods which are phenomenologically grounded and must deal with the role of the reflecting subject in the act of faith.

---

87. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* tr. John Drury (Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1971), pp. 73-150.

CHAPTER THREE: Barth's Reading of Anselm

I

Barth's Anselmic Rationality It is in his most explicit methodological work that we see how Barth uses reason. In his *Anselm, fides quaerens intellectum* Barth thinks that he has found the key to the uniqueness of theological rationality and given it a "foundation" which is not tied to philosophical method. The basic claim of Barth's study is that Anselm of Canterbury's definition, formula, or insight into the unique character of our knowledge of God holds the key to a theoretical understanding of the nature of theological rationality. Anselm has argued that God is "something than which a greater cannot be thought," and then proceeded to use this claim as a critical criterion, exploiting both its affirmative and negative implications for our understanding of the meaning of the word 'God'. Barth takes this insight to be the product of a divine revelation and for this reason thinks it is proper to see it as a starting point for theorizing what talk of God's existence may mean. Barth's procedure is both negative and positive. He denies that we can know God in himself, but affirms that we can know God within the limits of our finite and conditioned reasoning, when that reasoning is lifted up to a plain of existence at which it cannot arrive by its own powers of reason. Faith and reason are not antithetical, as in much of modern philosophy. Faith is inherently rational, but it is not self-evident what the content or shape of its rationality is. Faith seeks (desires) its source, and the method Barth devises is an account of how it may find it, and of what are the minimally necessary conditions for its successful conclusion.

Barth's argument depends upon an affirmation of the power of reason and is in fact modeled on a theory of concept formation. He offers a sort of metaphysical account (though I recognize he would not approve of this designation of it) in which all of existence is related to the divine existence. It is a study which relates knowing to being and which seeks to find certainty for its knowledge (of God). The one argument has two phases each of which is unified through the definition of God which Anselm presupposes as the logical engine of his argument. The focal

point of Barth's treatment is the *Proslogion*,[88] though Barth masterfully interprets Anselm's argument in the context of his entire body of writing. The concept of existence with which Barth begins is qualitatively different from the concept of existence with which he ends. The former is a general existence in which subject-object correlation is the basis of reasoning, whereas the latter is a kind of existence which is the perfect unity of subject and object in a single being whose existence is distinguished by its singular necessity. Knowing general existence relies on an analytic difference between subject and object. Knowing God's special existence relies on a synthetic unity of human subjectivity (including its binary subject-object thinking) which is accomplished through participation in the divine self-knowledge. Since the divine self-knowledge includes the conditions for all possible knowledge and thus our own transcendentally schematized reasoning, employing the method he does enables Barth's to schematize how theological reasoning can be grounded in truth. Perhaps more important than Barth's interpretation of chapters 2-4 of *Proslogion*[89] are his methodological reflections which precede the interpretation. For it is there that we see the larger conceptual framework for the proof. Barth claims that human reasoning itself is confined to an immanence which it cannot transcend without the prevenient initiative of divine agency. An act of God elevates the mind to this realization, and the proof is simply the attempt to exhibit what happens in this event. The task of this chapter is to grasp the most important features of Barth's reading of Anselm. The following chapter will critically develop the results of this one.

The argument which Barth offers has two basic moves. In the first move, it is argued that

---

88. We should at least note the fact that proper understanding of the *Proslogion* requires that we have some sense of Anselm's meditation on first philosophy in the *Monologion*. The *Monologion* is a series of reflections and arguments which culminate in a designation of the ultimate substance as the Triune God of Christian tradition. Barth frequently refers to the *Monologion*, especially when he is illustrating the novelty and advancement which Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* represents. See on the importance of Anselm to the refounding of metaphysics in modern philosophy (especially his relation to Descartes's *Meditations*), the highly original metaphysical essay by Gerald Galgan, *God and Subjectivity* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).

89. Chapters two, three, and four of Anselm's *Proslogion* Will be abbreviated hereafter as P2, P3, and P4.

where God is thought as *something than which a greater cannot be conceived* it can be shown that God exists not only in the mind as a concept, but in reality also. The first step proves that God is objective. The second step proves that God is not only objective but that, unlike *all* other objects which exist God's existence is a *necessary* existence. God alone so truly is that we cannot even conceive the possibility of his nonexistence. Barth elaborates the consequences of this real and necessary existence for his theological methodology, whose central argument is that mental necessity follows ontic necessity and implies that the rational constitution of the object contemplated precedes and informs the rationality of the concept in which we think of God. There is then an account of how it is that the fool can "say in his heart" that there is no God. This was the problem which apparently prompted Anselm's original thought experiment, since he takes "to think in the heart" and "to understand" to be equipollent. "To say in the heart" and "to think" are optimally identical acts of thought. However, to *say* that God does not exist is to say something which cannot be thought. The fool appears to do what is impossible.

II

General Existence and God Barth's interpretation of P2 relies on a model of concept formation to show that it is logically impossible for God to be merely an intellectual entity, without also existing in reality. Barth begins with a model of concept formation—a theory concerning how our sensible perception becomes intelligible in mental representation. It is a phenomenological approach in that it refuses to posit an absolute independence of thought and its object. Such independence is real as the ontological precondition of knowing. However, in the methodological inversion of the order of being and knowing, the inversion in which we start with what we know of objects even though our knowing follows upon their actuality (existence), we must find our way from ideas to their source. Finding the *origin* of our ideas and discovering the *nature* of things through them, are two basic problems of knowledge. Barth insists that these two questions, of origin (in mind or in reality) and nature (logical conceptual definition) are strictly separable, such that to answer the one does not automatically answer the other. In the grand scheme of Barth's

argument, God will turn out to be the one being in whom both origin and nature simultaneously occur, and they occur in a way that is fundamental for all of our reasoning activity.

Reasoning develops in and through a primary relationship between subject and object. Knowing is an event in which the subject assimilates her thought to a thing mediated through sense perception. Conception is the mental modification of sense into idea and through this process we are able to identify things in space and time. We name the object we perceive, which facilitates its identification (and reidentification). All knowledge is a knowing in and through the event of concept formation. Our understanding of existence depends upon the "event" in which the actual entity in question is conceptualized. It is in

> the actual event of thinking (*cogitatio*), by virtue of the act of thought (*cogitare*), [that] there takes place a representation of what is thought (*quod cogitatur*)—(something is thought)—so that it can be said of what is thought in this event and by virtue of this act: it exists in and with this event (*est in cogitatione*)." (*Anselm*, 110)

Existence in the understanding is a modification of mind which occurs when we think an object; it is how the object can be said to be *in* the understanding. Barth anticipates that his opponents will concede that we can form a concept of God in our understanding, but they dispute the ontological status of this concept. Understanding (*intellectus*) and thinking (*cogitatio*) are distinct acts of mind, which nonetheless require each other. Understanding (*intellectus*) is

> a special form of the *cogitare*, so that this rule is to be applied to them too. From these premises it follows that where something becomes known, as for example the object described as *quo maius cogitari nequit*, a representation of this object takes place by virtue of the act of knowing (*intelligere*)[90] and within the event of knowledge (*intellectus*), so that we may say of it: it exists in and with this event (*est in intellectu*). (*Anselm*, 110)

The rule referred to here is the one which posits a logically necessary connection between the act of understanding and existence in the intellect. Barth is here arguing that understanding a thing involves concomitant operations of two mental capacities. A thing (*res*) is represented in the

---

90. The existence of this object is "in und mit deisem Ereignis da" (*Anselmbuch*, 113).

mind only through the act of mental gathering (*intelligere*), and the power of *intellectus* to gather depends upon a concomitant mental skill of noticing what belongs to the composition of the thing in the understanding. *Cogitatio* is the act of regulating the understanding process and is separable from understanding by the fact that it has for its direct object only the mental act and not its sensible substructure. It is nonetheless true that Barth thinks of thinking as blind without the understanding.

All that is claimed here is that whenever there is an intellectual act it is accompanied by and results in the existence of a representation in thought. Understanding as the life of thought and cognition as the ordering of thought into concepts are mutually dependent occurrences and mutually interpreting ideas. Only in the act of concept formation can we discern the existence of the power to form concepts. In the reflexive query into the origin of concepts we understand the workings of cognition as the transcendental schematizing of experience, and in the threefold concurrence of cognition, understanding and conception (propositional definition), there exists as an event [*Ereignis*] a framework for understanding what it means that something has existence in the intellect.[91]

Existence in the understanding does not provide us with *any* insight into the *nature* of the object we entertain in thought. The three aforementioned aspects of reasoning are internal mental states and reflect a superficial form of the objects gathered by means of them. The fact that we can assert *that* a thing is does not yet tell us *what* it is. This distinction supposes a difference between external phenomena and internal nature, or principle of existence. As Barth expresses it, we are not informed by the *event* itself whether the event is *caused* by "voluntary or involuntary deception

91. Existence in the understanding means "to exist in knowledge, in thinking, in thought: an object that exists as something that is thought; to be something that is thought of as existing" (*Anselm*, 108).

(in respect of the extramental existence of the object represented)" (*Anselm*, 110).[92] Whether our mental representation is a sensible impression from an object, or a mental construct of our own invention mistakenly regarded as objective, is not decidable from a purely mental starting point. Nevertheless, existence in the understanding is a necessary precondition if we are to advance to the more complex understanding of existence as *both* in the understanding and in reality.[93] But there is a difficulty with Barth's rendering of the two forms of existence which must be addressed.

Barth takes the difference between existence in understanding and existence in understanding and reality to be the difference between an epistemological account of knowing a thing and an account of the same knowing as complemented by a knowledge of its external existence. Yet, he seems to then internalize both of these forms of knowledge, as though both modes of existence were altogether internal or mental. The fact that a thing's "existence in knowledge and awareness of its existence in knowledge are to be distinguished" (*Anselm*, 119) is hardly a basis for a reality reference. For awareness is itself a mental mode. Does this mean that what separates existence in understanding from existence in understanding and in reality is the mere reflexive act through which we add to the event of knowing our awareness of the object's factuality? If, in other words, actuality or factuality is itself a judgment, then using these terms does not apprise the mind of any advantage for distinguishing mental from real. The problem here comes to this: if existence in reality is affirmed simply by an additional judgment (of the *origination*

---

92. It seems to me that the problem of *illusion* which this remark suggests requires more careful consideration (Barth gives it such in his polemic with Ludwig Feuerbach). In any case, it is a fundamental difference between his thought and Anselm's that Barth does *not* think that we can solve the problem of illusion by a theory of concept formation, for such a theory discloses a transcendental ground of thinking, which indicates the need for a supplement to conception if cognition is to achieve certainty.

93. If the goal of the argument is to demonstrate an existence that is more than intra-mental, it remains true that establishing the intramental existence of God *when* the name of God is uttered is indispensable to achieving that proof. Arguing as he does from concepts or definitions of things, it is imperative that Barth be able clearly to define God in a propositional form, and have a name or thing in mind, to follow out his method. Otherwise, how shall he know when he has found it. It is "absolutely essential to make sure that the existence of God" in the sense of existence in knowledge is clearly identifiable (*Anselm*, 119). This initial move is not yet a solution to the problem of doubt (the *dubium* of the Fool), but it is prerequisite to the possibility of a solution.

of an image in some thing outside the mind), then it participates in the ambiguity of all mental representations. We are not, therefore, *certain* that such a judgment can put us in touch with the *origin* of our representation outside of our mind. Barth's description of understanding as an event, whose structure comes to mind only in the act of understanding itself is an attempt to bind reason to its phenomenological matrix.

Barth does not think that the phenomenological method can advance us far in theology, but certain features of Barth's method nonetheless resemble the phenomenological mode of reasoning.[94] The phenomenological ground of Barth's method is based in a simple distinction in the knowledge of existence which divides it into two possible modes.

1. There is a knowledge of existence *in intellectu*, and

2. There is a knowledge of existence *in intellectu et in re*.

The central problem of the proof is to *understand* the existence of God in such a way that God can be understood to exist as an object which precedes the thinking in which it is understood. Barth argues that (1) is essential to achieving the overall proof. If we cannot have some conception of God, we cannot reason concerning God. It has the further advantage of redeeming appearances, in that the mode of knowing *in intellectu* is fairly exclusively a phenomenal mode, a knowledge of mental appearances or images. Theological reasoning does not eliminate primary phenomenal awareness, but critically develops it, by relating it to an other, in this case the name of God which Anselm has hit upon. Knowledge is—since God is the source and origin of

94. I follow here the description of phenomenology given by Quentin Lauer, describing it as follows: "every attempt to get away from the speculative constructionism and to limit oneself to the data which are presented in consciousness—describing rather than explaining them—is to that extent phenomenological, at least in method." Phenomenology is concerned with the "kind of being an object of knowledge has in being known," as Lauer explains, adding that this method does not identify being with being-known, but asserts that "the only key we have to being is in examining its being-known." See Quentin Lauer, *Phenomenology: Its Genesis and Prospect* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), pp. 1, 7; See also the valuable discussion of the history of phenomenology in the twentieth century, in William A. Luijpen, *Phenomenology and Atheism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1964). For a recent assessment of the prospects of phenomenology in theological studies, see *Modern Theology* 16 (2000), pp. 301-45.

all[95]—ordered to God. Understanding begins with the concepts and ideas we have in thought and seeks their primary origin. Is it mental, physical, metaphysical, or some combination of these? Barth seeks to order the certainty of ideas in conformity with the threefold distinction laid out above. The more certainty we can have concerning the objectivity of an idea or representation, the closer it approximates reality. Thus ideas traceable to the ontological plane of (2) are more certain than those confined to (1). Ideas *exist*, which is to say that the mind of which they are a modification is *real*. The possibility of illusion consists in the fact that the mind may reflect either outer experience or its own internal complex operations (memory, perception, or various modes of consciousness). The problem created by this possibility is that of finding criteria for discriminating the real and the merely mental. The problem supposes that *as mental* states, ideas do not, upon analysis, contain features which mark them out as objective in origin. Some added feature, such as the awareness of their origination in external objects, is needed to confer certainty on them. The difference between ideas in the mind alone and those in the mind and in reality is that the latter retain a certain impact [*stößt*] from the objects they represent.[96] The ideas or thought things on level (1) are simply in the understanding and enjoy a mitigated degree of existence. Those on level two are both in the understanding and also an understanding of a thing as existing. As such, these latter reach out beyond the limits of our awareness and our reflexive consciousness of it.[97]

The overall trajectory of Barth's argument takes it beyond the confines of transcendental phenomenology. Barth's existentialism, his resolve to always take account of the standpoint of the

---

95. "Thus all that is not God exists, so to say, enclosed within the purpose of God's conceiving" (*Anselm*, 97-8).

96. It is true that Barth denies intellectual intuition (*Anselm*, 114), but some such operation is what seems to be required by the dynamic of concept formation he is describing here.

97. "We may conceive of a thing as existing without knowing whether it exists and even although it has existence only in our knowledge. Its existence in knowledge and awareness of its existence in knowledge are to be distinguished; moreover, we would obviously have to distinguish between its existence apart from the limitation of knowledge, its real existence that is not merely intended or imagined, and the knowledge of such existence—*knowledge that strikes out beyond the limits of knowledge and knows real existence*" (*Anselm*, 118-19; emphasis added).

thinker as finite and empirical in its concrete immediacy, prompts him to retain the phenomenological standpoint.[98] There is, however, a tension between the more or less deliberate, but inevitable, transcendental philosophical implications of this standpoint and the transcendent and realist reference to God which is necessary for the grounding of theological rationality, as well as the ethical and political obligations which are implicit in faith—its commitment not only to believe but to *act* in the world and to shape the quality of the world through this action. Barth's breakthrough in Anselm consists in the belief that the descriptive power of a phenomenological method cannot be abandoned, but that the certainty which faith *knows* cannot come to expression within its operational limits. That God is something than which a greater cannot be thought can become known only in attempting so to think God. That the same God is also "something greater than can be thought,"[99] puts a negative limitation on any and all such thinking. The practice of the method outlined here trains the mind to understand how God may and may not be known.

Within the limits of the argument of P2, with its characterization of existence in general and the operative assumption that to exist in the mind *and* in reality is greater than to exist solely in the mind, it is shown that God cannot be a merely mental entity. But this does not mean that we simply conceive God like any other objective thing—which is in the mind and in reality. For God's existence for thought is not the same as God's existence *in se*, in himself. It cannot, of course, contradict that actual existence, and this means that if there is to be an argument at all there must be *some degree* of continuity between what exists for understanding and what God is in himself. Barth thinks that the most reason can achieve is a recognition that the continuity in question involves a negative limitation of our thinking about God. P2 is the *first step* in establishing the proper locus of that limitation: it proves— given the name alone and the assumption by faith, that God certainly exists—that God's existence *cannot* be exclusively or

98. One is struck by the degree to which he holds this standpoint as a "scriptural philosopher," as Peter Ochs calls him, when one comes to his description of "creation as actualization." See also CD III/1, pp. 344-65.

99. See *Proslogion*, chpt. 15, in Schufreider, p. 349.

solely intellectual in nature.

The event of knowledge in which we understand God as existing is not an adequate measure of God's identity or of the mode of God's existence. Our own understanding tells us of a greater possibility, namely, of a being who exists with all the descriptive attributes we can ascribe to God in thought, but who also exists in reality. The most decisive proof of the *existence of the thing in the understanding* is the proof of the *understanding of the thing's existence.* But this can only come after the proof of the intellectual existence has been conceded.[100] That is, we can only seek beyond the intellectual existence of God (the name Anselm discovers) the reality of the being it signifies if we first acknowledge that something in our understanding signifies God. Barth is in fact proceeding in the reverse order of his own account of Anselm's method, but he is confident in doing this, since he thinks that Anselm's name for God is a certain datum of divine revelation. Barth thinks that Anselm's formula does not originate in the human mind but that it comes from divine revelation.

The conclusion of chapter two of the *Proslogion* states that any and all conceptions of God which argue that God is a purely mental entity are necessarily false. The same judgment which generates the idea of the real and, in representing it, internalizes reality, puts it at a discursive distance and it indicates that any conception of God generated in thought must, if it has the reality

---

100. It is characteristic of modern thinking to start with the thinking subject and prove or determine existence therefrom. It may also be an important deviation from Anselm's own treatment. Recall here Barth's advertisement that he is not following Anselm in this respect (*Anselm*, 92). There are also echoes of John Calvin's theological methodology as it is expressed in the *Institutes*. According to Calvin the order of teaching inverts the order of being *on which it is actually dependent* and to which it is thus consequent. Calvin is aware of the close connection between self-knowledge and knowledge of God. He opts for starting with knowledge of God, which amounts to accepting the givenness of God in Spirit. Likewise, while we have a "twofold knowledge of God" (*duplex cognitia Dei*), a "primal knowledge" of God as Creator, and a "redemptive knowledge" of God through Christ, it is only in knowing God as redeemer, argues Calvin, that we can know God as Creator. This is because the original natural knowledge of God in the creation is obfuscated by the noetic effects of sin. I think Barth is following Calvin here by putting first noetically what is in fact primary ontologically. Things must exist *before* we can know them, yet we must first, so Barth proceeds, know of an existence in knowledge before we can trace it back to its existence in reality, if there is such a possibility (not all conceptual existents have extramental causes *Anselm*, 111). See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* tr. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2 volumes, I, pp. 39-43; see also Book II, chapter vi, pp. 340-348.

of God as a reference, recognize that God is something outside its own activity, and especially its representational activity. The link between the existence independent of mind, and the existence that is in the understanding and in reality is a genuine link but not one which can be disclosed by any reflexive analysis of the event of thinking, such as a transcendental deduction. All such deductions employ some aspect of those intellectual categories they are supposed to explain and thus involve a regress which no reflexive thought can resolve. God is *not* a being existing solely in the understanding, but God must *at least* exist there for argument to begin.

It is at the end of P2 that we see the critical importance of Barth's claim that the name is the real engine of the proof and that this enables us to transcend thought. The name—*something than which a greater cannot be thought*—is not derivable from any other source than revelation. God must be the disclosing agent of this truth concerning God's nature. Thus, although Barth sometimes refers to the name of God[101] in Anselm's proof as a concept or a definition, it is nonetheless not something which directly describes God. It exists in understanding but is not a creature of understanding. It is intended to keep thought on the limit between thought and reality, between knowing and being, when the being of God is under consideration. To treat the name of God as though it could be so deduced would be to transform its essentially negative role in the understanding into a positive claim about the actual nature of God. The argument must remain in negative form. The impossibility of the merely mental existence of God is warranted, thinks Barth, in that

> All that is proved is just this negative. The positive statement about the genuine extramental existence of God (in the *general* sense of the concept 'existence') does not stem from the proof and is in no sense derived from it but is proved by the proof only in so far as the opposite statement about God's merely intramental existence is shown to be absurd. (*Anselm*, 128;

101. "Anselm's hypothesis is certainly an expression, but not as Gaunilo thinks empty words, but the Word of God—not as Gaunilo thinks, an expression given to be understood in isolation, but a Word of God within the context of his revelation, to which also belongs the revelation of his existence. It declares the Name of God from which Name we certainly cannot derive his existence, as Gaunilo interpolates, but from which the impossibility of his non-existence (on the assumption of his revealed, unique existence as Creator—which Gaunilo ignores) is perceived and which makes it possible to recognize in thought the existence of God that is believed" (*Anselm*, 131).

emphasis added)

The genius of Anselm's argument is that accepting his definition as a name which exists in the mind, one is committed to the extramental existence of the "something" it indicates. It does not presuppose divine existence *ab initio* (though Anselm clearly thinks God exists as presupposition *as well as* conclusion of his argument). However, it does require, on pain of contradiction, that God exists both extramentally and necessarily. The conclusion of the argument in P2 is this: *God exists* (is *actu*). "God has at least as much objective reality as all other things" (*Anselm*, 155). P3 builds upon this conclusion by narrowing and specifying the unique mode of objective existence proper to God.

III

The Special Existence of God One of the questions the proof raises is why we need to advance beyond the argument of P2 at all. Have we not proved that God, defined in Anselm's terms, is indeed the sort of essence which, if God exists, must indeed be more than a merely mental entity? Has it not been proved merely that hearing and understanding this name purchase it a minimal (mental) existence? And has it not been proved that once we take Anselm's argument and develop its implications concerning maximal goodness and maximal greatness we will see that God's existence is beyond all positive descriptions we can create? Barth thinks that we have indeed proved all of these in following Anselm's argument. He also believes, however, that the true goal of the argument is not yet achieved in chapter two of *Proslogion*.

P2 is a necessary first step to proving what comes in P3. We will not and cannot advance to the step in P3 if we have not understood the move made in P2. The logic of the argument in P2 is repeated in P3. It is this definition alone which gives the two arguments (of P2 and P3) their unity, and it is the assumption of its truth which justifies the argument of P3.[102] If P2 establishes

---

102. "*Intelligere* means to see into the noetic rationality and therefore into the noetic necessity of the statements that are revealed, on the basis that they possess ontic rationality and necessity as revealed statements, prior to all *intelligere*, to all 'proof' and therefore not based on proof. This can only happen in theology as such. But it can happen and it is what in fact has happened" (*Anselm*, 144).

that God is conceivable because God has objectivity, it raises questions concerning what sort of object God is. For God is *not* objective in that we find God as one among the objects we can discriminate by normal perception.[103] Nonetheless, the being of God must have some sort of *continuity* with other beings, and this in turn presupposes that the divine existence is detectable in general existence, a perception which can provide the basis for a proof of God's unique existence. It would seem to be a logical requirement of this strategy for proof, that God's existence must be differentiated in degree or intensity, but not entirely different in kind, from other beings. Without this assumption of continuity, it is difficult to see how Barth could argue that the "special" existence of God, argued to in the interpretation of P3, could be "lifted out of" the general existence established in P2.

What P3 argues for is an epistemological *greatness*, a greatness which can be exhibited in the rational sphere. In the *Monologion* God was greater than everything (*omnibus*), in the *Proslogion* he is greater than whatever is conceivable. The latter work reaffirms God's ontological superiority *but ties the meaning of greatness to the operations of the human mind which conceive it.* The strategy in *Proslogion* is to develop a metaphysical proof by treating it in relation to the meditative or speculative powers of mind which mediates it. Rather than listing and coordinating various attributes of God and specifying how these obtain in God, it appeals to the conceptual medium in which all knowledge is intentionally developed, and it does so in a partly speculative and a partly logical and analytical way. God's existence can be represented in contemplation, seen in creation, and intuited in reflection, but never as an essence. God's presence is always mediated, never direct. Anselmic rationality is formed in a dialectic of attraction and repulsion. It propels the mind to think about God in ways limited only by the ways in which God's glory appears in and through the act of creation, and is therefore infinitely attractive. It is repulsive in that it demands

103. The evidentiary force of perception, the fact that we take as undeniable the existence of *perceived* objects in our sphere of awareness, is, I think, the true source of Barth's notion of necessity. Like all sense based perceptions it is analogically extended to God. We perceived God in a special mode of objectivity, which I discuss in the concluding chapter.

that no version of the All, of totality, will be a comprehension of God, since God is beyond rational comprehension. This elusive aspect of Anselmic rationality derives from the novelty whereby Anselm defines God negatively in relation to the human mind. The theoretical space created in this metaphysics contains a positive content—the *idea* which structures the mind's relation to God; and a negative limiting of this idea—the fact that the theoretical space, like Einstein's space, is indefinitely expanding since that object of which it is a microcosm is itself infinite. This is God's freedom from, and freedom for human thought.[104]

The argument in P3 is an extension of the conclusion of P2. Barth can even describe the mode of existence argued for in P3 as "lifted right out of" the conception of existence operative in P2.[105] The difference is that in P3 the limitation placed on this concept is removed. The revealed name is shown here to be beyond the power of cognition to grasp it. However, understanding is informed and fulfilled (given content) only when it *tries* to conceive God as the origin of its own desire for knowledge. the infinite mode in which God possesses all that we can grasp as finite.[106]

At the beginning of P3 Anselm says: "It is possible to conceive as existing something which cannot be conceived as not existing, and this is greater than what can be conceived as not

---

104. The claim here is not that in intuiting God the finite mind becomes infinite. The claim is, rather, that because the *domain of the thinkable* is constituted by an infinite being, the *theoretical* activity of thought as the task of finding thought's *limit* in thinking an object it cannot comprehend, is illimitable. If thought's domain is illimitable, then thought has infinite tasks. Infinity is thus a source of affirmation and negation, of creation and destruction. It is a source of creativity for ever new concepts can be derived. It is the source of negation since every new discovery and insight overturns the possibility of an *intuition* of the whole, and so eliminates the possibility of a single intuition of the absolute. Infinity provides thought with passion (Kierkegaard), its inexhaustible desire for otherness. Infinity, regarded as the most abstract description of God's greatness, provides a limit which thought cannot comprehend, and so cannot ultimately name once and for all. In this way theology proper both stimulates reasoning, and indefinitely postpones its final closure.

105. "It [P3] lifts the concept of the Existence of God right out of the plane of the general concept of existence" (*Anselm*, 132).

106. "The limitation of the concept of existence—*esse in intellectu et in re*—with which it was applied to God in *Prosl.* 2, now disappears. Our chapter affirms the exception that is made here: the revealed Name of God has more power than the positive knowledge that we can have of the existence of other things *in intellectu et in re*. It compels in him who hears and understands it a recognition not only of the actual impossibility of the thought that God does not exist but also of the impossibility of that thought ever being conceived" (*Anselm*, 134).

existing." A thing which is not conceivable as not existing *can* be conceived, and this is a higher order of being than that proper to a thing which, though conceivable, is nonetheless imaginable as not existing. For the first time in the argument, these two modes of existence confront us in the form of two distinct modes of objective existence. In P2, objectivity as correspondence between idea and thing verifies the existential status of ideas. To the internal judgments in which the idea is formed is added another, that of its extension into space and time. All existence is existence within the divine being.[107] In P3 we are confronted by another set of concepts, one of which is greater than the other. There are two ways of categorizing things which exist *in the understanding and in the reality*; (i) we can conceive of things which actually exist but whose nonexistence is not a contradiction; or (ii) we may also conceived of a being which exists but whose nonexistence is contradictory. Barth makes two important claims based on these distinctions.

First, the *esse in intellectu et in re* applies to both of these distinctions. These two sorts of things "and their existing side by side are conceivable" (*Anselm*, 141). Reality is compatible with both a necessary and a contingent mode of existence. The existence of God whose nonexistence is contradictory, is compatible with the existence of all other things. The distinction here calls for an ordering of these two sorts of existence, not the elimination of one by the other. The relation between these two sorts of existence is more than logical, for it is grounded in life.

Second, to conceive of these two sorts of being side by each is to form a relationship of

---

107. See Marcia Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study of the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 134, on how Anselm chooses proof by definition, since he understands it as a theory of necessary reasons which insure the inferences from idea or word (sign) to thing. See on the same theme, David Brown, "'Necessary' and 'Fitting' Reasons in Christian Theology," in W. J. Abraham and A. W. Holtzer, eds., *The Rationality of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 211-30. Anselm presupposes an ontology which regards the *sign* as a faint *image* of the *object* which originates it, and on which it is dependent as its ontological ground. Barth subjectivizes the whole relational network, so that for him "all that is not God exists, so to say, enclosed within the purpose of God's conceiving" (*Anselm*, p. 98). The failure of human thought, even at the height of its speculative powers, to form a concept of God, is compensated for by the assumption of the human cognitive process into the divine self-knowledge, a sort of participation by illumination. Only in this state of direct perceptual relation can Barth's argument be seen in its negativity, for, only with the aid of concepts can we see the inconceivability of God. This act of illumination is what Barth means by saying that the "concept" of God's special existence is lifted out of the "concept" of God's general existence. There is a fine discussion of this super-structure of Barth's thought in Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell,1988), pp. 112-26.

'greater' and 'smaller', beings of a higher and a lower order. According to the "principle of progressive order" we can relate these two sorts of being in the same way we relate existence in the understanding alone as compared with existence in the understanding and reality:

> It is now no longer a contrast between something that exists on the one hand merely in thought *and* on the other hand in thought and objectively *but* a contrast between something that certainly exists objectively as well as in thought but yet which is conceived as not existing [*aber doch als nicht-daseiend Denkbaren*] *and* on the other hand something existing objectively and in thought but which is not conceivable as not existing. (*Anselm*, p. 141; emphasis added)

The two sorts of existence considered in P3 parallel those in P2, but with an important difference. Both are conceivable and thus fall within the domain of the rational. The objective existence (*vere esse*) of P2 is a genuine objectivity and it provides the logical basis for the distinctions made in P3. However, the objectivity of existence in P2 is dependent upon a dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. It is thus never completely free from the subjective conditions in which it is conceived. God is objective in that we think him in this dialectical manner whenever we think of existence in general. The objectivity of P3 is not dependent upon the subject who conceives it, and is thus not dialectically conditioned. The being conceived in this way is based in itself, beyond the limits of whatever is conceived in a subject and object dialectic. It is necessary precisely in that it is outside of the totality of reality which is not necessary in that it can be conceived as not existing. Barth elaborates this important distinction:

> Out of the general *vere esse* there now rises significantly before us a *vere esse* whose reality has its basis neither merely subjectively nor merely subjectively and objectively but is based beyond this contrast *a se*, in itself. A being to which *vere esse* in this latter sense applies, whose existence is therefore independent of the antithesis between knowledge and object [*dessen Dasein also der Dialektik von Erkenntnis und Gegenstand gegenüber unabhängig ist*], such a being is obviously a *maius*. It belongs to a higher level of existence than a being to which *vere esse* applies merely in the general sense, which however genuinely it may exist, is subject to this antithesis and whose existence can therefore be denied in theory by the same thinking as has to assert its existence in fact. This first being exists not only in reality but *exists as the reality of existence itself*, as the criterion of all existence and non-existence which is always presupposed in all thinking of the existence and non-existence of other beings; consequently it cannot be conceived as not existing. *Whoever thinks of these two beings side by side*

has conceived this 'greater' over against a 'smaller'. (*Anselm*, pp. 141-42; emphasis added)

This passage captures precisely how general existence can give rise to a particular conception of God's necessary existence. It also shows that Barth's conception of theological method involves speculative methods for exhibiting God's existence in relation to the rest of reality.[108] Barth's use of the "ontological argument" is intended to acknowledge and transcend the aporetic and vitiating dialectic of the knowledge-object relationship. God, Barth is arguing, is the one and only object which is present to thought but is not *originated* in the event of thinking. God's glory is not mitigated by its presence in mind, a mind for which God alone *truly* exists. What we must avoid is characterizing the object which is present as *something than which a greater cannot be conceived*, as though we could transcendentally deduce it as a product of my intellectual possibilities. This concept is not the greatest creation of the human intellect, it is rather unlike a concept at all in that it is not graspable, not limitable by any set of descriptions or any definition. The Anselmic formula is above all intended to keep thought open, to not fall into the trap of thinking that we can define the infinite God.

This passage (*Anselm*, 142-3) also shows how the logic of Anselm's hypothesis in P2 is also operative in P3. In P2 we saw that if we attempt to construe *something than which a greater cannot be conceived* as an intellectual creation we come into a contradiction. We can think of a mental entity, however superlative, as "greater" by adding to the concept we have of it the supposition of its existence in reality also. Therefore, whatever the nature of the object conceived turns out to be, it cannot have a solely mental existence. Thus, we know that *something than which a greater cannot be conceived* has a mode of being that is greater than anything merely thinkable. In P3 the concept of God is used to rationalize the choice between two modes of

108. Barth's conception of *speculative thinking* is something like that of Anselm, for whom it was not obscurantist escapism, but "analyzing the basic structures of reality," as Paul Tillich notes. See Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From its Judaic and Hellenic Origins to Existentialism*, Carl E. Braaten, ed., (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 158-9.

existence *in the understanding and in reality*. We are again asked to decide which is greater: a conception of a thing as existing *in intellectu et in re* (as in P2) which is as such conceivable as not existing or an identical kind of existence but with that additional property that it is logically impossible to conceive of it as not existing. If objects whose existence are bound up with the dialectical opposition of mental and real (P2) are inherently conceivable as non-existent, then the object whose existence is both real (actual) and cannot be thought of as not existing is clearly "greater" than those objects which are conceivable as nonexistent.

That these two sorts of objects are conceivable says much about the power of conception. On Barth's interpretation it is the unique feature of Anselm's hypothesis about God which, when used as a criteria to judge between specific sets of alternatives, show God to be the one whom thought reveals to be unthinkable. This can only mean unthinkable *within* a transcendental schema which would attempt to organize all of reality within a single system of ideas. God can only come to view on the margin of such a system, not because God is not real, but because God is to us the most real of real things. Anselmic rationality uses reason to show the negative power of reason to understand God. Human reason is a divine gift. As such it will always come to a negation in its own efforts at conceiving and speaking about God: God is known *in and through* the world but does not *originate* in the world.

If God is the sort of being that cannot fail to exist and thus cannot even be conceived as not existing then the sort of existence proper to God's being is unique. Here the *vere* of the *vere esse*, which opens both chapters (2 and 3) of the *Proslogion*, bears a double meaning. In the order of knowing, true existence is *first* of all what exists in thought and reality. The correspondence of thought with reality is the test of the truth of a concept. Truth in this sense is tied to the activity of perceiving and conceiving. Reflection on the cognitive judgments developed in this dialectical sphere indicates an opening to transcendence. Just as the inner subject is open to and dependent upon the outer object to conceive it, so the contingency of those objects discloses a dependence of this sphere on a more comprehensive one for its existence. Therefore, the true existence (*vere*

esse) in P3 is qualitative different from the true existence (*vere esse*) of P2, since the truth (*vere*) of its existence (*esse*) is not tied to a subject and object interdependence. It is, rather, an autonomous existence, grounded in itself, and as such able to ground all else. In the interpretation of P3 we see how Barth understands objective reality to depend upon God, and not God upon objective reality:

> Thus, he and he alone is objective reality. Because God exists in the inexplicable manner which thought cannot dismiss, as he does exist as bearer of his revealed Name, for that reason there is objective reality and the possibility of its being conceived and so there is also the possibility of conceiving of God as existing at all (in the sense of *Prosl. 2*). In which case absolutely everything that exists apart from him exists, as it were, coupled to his Existence and is therefore conceivable as existing only in relation to the conception of his Existence (that cannot be denied) and so, apart from this connection, is ever conceivable, also as non-existing. (*Anselm*, 155)

God's existence, then, turns out to be necessary existence. There is no category, concept, or kind of thing under which God may be placed. God is beyond our categories, but not incompatible with the sort of existence which comes to mind through them.[109] The truth that God exists necessarily is thus crucial, for it is the logical ground of truth as such. God grounds truth by acting as an Archimedean point of necessity, against which all non-necessary occurrence can be measured and evaluated. Out of itself alone, human reasoning can furnish no absolutely necessary condition for explaining or grounding the infinite possibilities of the nonnecessary, random collocation of atoms which constitute things. God is not conceived of as a blind, mechanistic absolute, but as a person who loves in freedom and gives rise to reality out of a *will* to do so.

Faith's understanding occurs between a limit of maximal affirmation and a limit of maximal negation. It knows that the object it believes is greater than anything thinkable; every existent is a

---

109. God's necessary existence is *necessarily* related to contingent and nonnecessary existence as the ground and source of all that is not proper to God, since it is only the thought of God's necessary existence which makes other things contingent. Without insight into the character of God's necessity, we could not assert the contingency of the creation as a whole. The originating relationship of *the* necessary being to nonnecessary *beings* is the basis of a qualitative boundary between the reality, duration, kind, magnitude, and the life of what is given with God. That the relationship is not directly perceivable is the result of the fact that all our knowledge of God, and so our knowledge of his relationship to creation, is based upon God's actual acting in creation, and this acting, according to Barth, is acting in accord with that *freedom* essential to God.

pointer to the origin which transcends its existence. It also knows that God cannot be thought; the qualitative superiority of God is beyond our thought.[110] The creative ambivalence of this in between does not arise from an uncertainty concerning the *existence* of the object believed, but from the double requirement that we think God with our concepts and language (signs) and that there is no universal, no constant characteristic called God, which more than one entity shares. Barth embraces the existential conditions of thought. He attempts to think through them to an object which is defined as *that than which a greater cannot be conceived*. He begins with a realist model, whose intellectual posture is passive and receptive, assuming the objectivity of what is perceived. He constructs a logic of ascent, arriving at the object which is beyond all objects. This object turns out to be a subject, the perfect paradigm of rational self-consciousness and control. It is thus able, at least in theory, to compensate for the weaknesses and limitations in our capacity to think it. This compensation, I will argue, is best construed as a participation in the divine self-understanding. However, it is not a participation which renders null and void human reasoning. At the heart of Barth's use of reason is a triadic structure. It resembles philosophical models in that it is immediately grounded in a dialectic of thought and being, or of subject and object cognition. It presses on beyond this to make a claim for truth as the only principle able to rightly coordinate our knowledge of the world. Truth is not simply scientific, not, that is, reducible to a correspondence between mental representation and object represented. Subject-object epistemology invariably succumbs to the fragmenting pluralism typical of transcendental philosophies of reflection.[111] Subject and object correspondence requires a larger framework for its own intelligibility, namely, a realist metaphysics, which structures and trains reason to detect correspondence. Barth is aware

---

110. In chapter 15 of the *Proslogion* Anselm confesses: "Therefore, lord, not only are you that than which a greater cannot be thought, but you are something greater than can be thought." See Gregory Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic: Anselm's Early Writings* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1994), p. 349. Understanding God occurs, in the traditional parlance, between glory and holiness.

111. See here the brilliant treatment of philosophies of reflection in Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain in the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 14-54.

that theological thinking occurs within a larger economy of representation, and that the rationality of theology consists in understanding and using signs in which knowledge is transmitted and through which it grows.[112]

IV

The Priority of Ontic to Noetic Necessity In his study of Anselm Barth does several things which characterize his mature thought. Chief among these is to develop, in the form of an epistemological theory, an understanding of how we know what we know when we say that we know God. The most important feature is the way in which Barth argues that God is known as truth through a self-presentation and self-presencing action. Barth draws from Anselm's realism a logic in which God's necessary existence is supposed to effect our rational reconstruction of God in thought. This does not involve the construction of a concept,[113] as much as a pragmatic method for judging the validity of theological reasoning.[114] Human conception, to be right, must follow on the reality of God. The ideal follows the real, and not the converse. Barth conceives of rationality in distinction from philosophical method by inverting the order of linguistic reference. Instead of beginning by asking how our knowledge of language and its limits can make knowledge of God possible, Barth asks what our talk about God, centred on the reality reference of Anselmic

---

112. See, for example: "But God gives Himself to be known—and this is the limitation that we have to bring out in the idea of impartation—in an objectivity different from His own, in a creaturely objectivity. He unveils Himself as the One He is by veiling Himself in a form which He Himself is not. He uses this form distinct from Himself, He uses its work and sign, in order to be objective in, with and under this form, and therefore to give Himself to be known. Revelation means the giving of signs. We can say quite simply that revelation means sacrament, i.e., the self-witness of God, the representation of His truth, and therefore of the truth in which He knows Himself, in the form of creaturely objectivity and therefore in a form which is adapted to our creaturely knowledge. In what, then, does the limitation of this our knowledge consist, if it cannot consist in a quantitative limitation?" (CD II/1, p. 52)

113. "Strictly speaking, there is no divine predicate, no idea of God which can have as its special content what God is. There is strictly speaking only the divine Subject as such and in Him the fullness of His divine predicates. Properly speaking the idea of God can have only this divine Subject as its content and the divine predicate must be sought only in this Subject as such, outside of which it can have no existence and cannot therefore become the content of an idea." (CD II/1, p. 300).

114. I follow Ingolf Dalferth's interpretation of Anselm in this "pragmatic" interpretation of its value, since I think that Dalferth retains the best of Barth's interpretation, critically overcomes its excesses, and also shows how Barth's project can have currency for philosophical theology today.

rationality, tells us about the possibilities inherent in human language. While Barth rejects natural theology as erroneous, he does have a way of including nature, by treating the ground of its representation in human rationality. God makes himself to be an object of my thought. In this way, Barth attempts a reversal of the modernist anthropocentrism, according to which God is invariably anthropomorphized in and with the justification of the subjective grounds of our conceptual representation of God. Anselmic rationality transforms the discovery of the prior agency of God in our reasoning about God, into a logically necessary argument concerning the existence of God which comes to light in faith.

(a) *The Deduction of Noetic Rationality from Ontic Necessity* Barth advances an argument in which the passivity of reason in the advent of the experience of God is emphasized. The logic of this argument is one in which being precedes knowing as its cause, and the necessity of being is the cause of the rational necessity in which we form the idea of God's greatness. God's greatness includes ontological and moral aspects. The following reconstruction indicates the deduction of rationality from necessity.[115]

[1] **The *necessitas* that is peculiar to the "object of faith is the impossibility of the object of faith not existing."**

[2] **The *necessitas* that is "peculiar to knowledge of the object of faith is the impossibility for thought to conceive the object of faith as not existing or as existing differently."**

There is then a *necessity* which is proper to thought and a necessity proper to being. A similar relationship obtains for *rationality*.

[3] **The *ratio* that is "peculiar to the object of faith is that its existence conforms to law and that it exists in this particular way."**[116]

---

115. The following argument concerning necessity is developed in *Anselm*, 49-53.

116. Note here the way in which the general or universalizability of "conformity to law" is conflated with "particular" existence. It is one thing to assert that a thing has intensive properties which constitute it. It is a further thing to argue that the thing so defined is instantiated. Barth insists that God is not only definable—possessed of a nature—but that there *is* such a nature.

Rationality so understood assumes the existence of a rational nature which can "understand an existence and a particular existence that conform to law." The object of faith has the power to appear to a rational nature capable of grasping it. The object of faith is an inherently rational being (*gesetzmäßiges Sein*).

[4] **"The *ratio* is the understanding of this knowledge in so far as it characterizes it as the understanding of the object of faith by a being capable of comprehending an existence and a particular existence that conforms to law."**

The *ratio* peculiar to the object of faith as a law-constituted entity is taken up into the concept of the object of faith. From [1] and [2] Barth infers that

[5] **"Ontic necessity precedes noetic."**

Likewise, from [3] and [4] he infers that

[6] **"Ontic rationality precedes noetic."**

The relationship between *ratio* and *necessitas* is very close in Anselm's usage. The two categories are mutually reenforcing and explanatory, such that where one is present the other is also. Thus,

[7] **The "basis peculiar to the object of faith is consistent with its own particular rationality; ontic necessity is consistent with ontic rationality."**

And, in keeping with the pattern,

[8] **The manner in which the knowledge of this peculiar object is established is consistent with its peculiar rationality; "noetic necessity is consistent with noetic rationality."**

The basis (*besteht*) of the object of faith is intrinsic, being expressed in the conformity it has as an object to its own law-constituted nature. Because knowing follows and reflects the object known, our knowledge of the object of faith finds its rational justification in the rational nature of the object and not elsewhere. It is both constituted and understood in light of its own law of existence, which is peculiar to it.

From [5] and [7] Barth derives,

[9] **"Ontic necessity precedes even noetic rationality: the rationality of the object of faith also consists in the recognition of its own basis."**

From [6] and [8] he derives

[10] "Ontic rationality precedes noetic necessity; the establishing of knowledge of the object of faith consists also in the recognition of the rationality belonging to the object of faith."

The rationality which our knowledge of the object of faith possesses is a rationality peculiar to, and precedent of, our knowledge of the object of faith; it is intrinsic to it. The object of faith is constituted by the perfect knowledge of its own existence and nature. Our knowing knows itself the recipient in this knowledge of God. Virtually all of our knowing involves analogically incorporating new experiences with preceding ones. Things are different with the concept of God. The interposing of God as a supra-conceptual noumena has a violent and decentring effect on the balance wrought by the dialectical negotiations of normal conception. As subjective and personal God, who is the object of thought, is always more than categorial cognition (shaped by and for thinking three dimensional objects in space and time) can and in *fact* does think. In reason's pursuit of its ultimate object, it is overtaken in the awareness that this object is a subject, indeed, is the subject. The understanding which faith seeks is possible only as an understanding in truth. The objectivity requirement of spatiotemporal cognition, entirely necessary in its place, is merely preliminary in thinking not only what is but also what is true, a thinking which knows things both in their nature as objects, and in their nature as subjects of the whole, that is, of divine intending and creating. One does not attain this later perspective by first eliminating the former: one can only attain God through the medium of existence (objects). However, this is not saying that truth adds a new ontological feature to the cosmos. Truth is rather the implicit meaning of things which comes to light only in seeing them "from God outward." *Intelligere* is above all the common assent of *credere* and *intelligere* to *veritatem* (truth).[117]

---

117. "After all that we have said there can be no question but that the fundamental meaning of *intelligere* in Anselm is *legere*, to reflect upon what has already been said in the *Credo*. In recognizing and assenting to truth *intelligere* and *credere* come together and the *intelligere* is itself and remains a *credere* while the *credere* in and by itself, as we have seen, is also an embryonic *intelligere*. But *intelligere* means still more than that: to read and ponder what has been already said—that is to say, in the appropriation of truth, actually to traverse that intervening distance (between recognition and assent) and so therefore to understand the truth as truth" *(Anselm*, 40).

God alone is ultimate, and the relationship which God bears to the things which are distinct from him are prescribed by the order which God determines for them. Recognition that the rationality we see in the world has a basis in the necessary and rational nature of God is not at all like the claim that God wants to be everything or the claim that God is in some sense the sum of all that is, or that God is the process of its becoming. The distinction of God from creatures is not overturned by the *logical* claim that the visible is grounded in an underlying invisible form or pattern. The necessity transferred to creatures governs our cognition of their form and representation of their existence. It also governs the factuality of their existence, which forces us to acknowledge their being as we perceive them. This *de facto* necessity is itself derived from God, and differs from God's necessity in that there is no contradiction in our conception of their nonexistence, as happens when we imagine death or destruction. The rationality of the real is itself grounded in a more basic determination.[118] Thus, Barth argues that

[11] **"As ontic rationality is itself not an ultimate but is only true rationality when measured alongside the *summa veritatis*, the same is true of the ontic necessity that is consistent with it. It is in the Truth and by the Truth, in God and by God that the basis is a basis and that rationality possesses rationality."**

Rationality is thus a relational concept depending on truth, which is the will of God. This implies that the relationship of correspondence is insufficient as a criterion of truth. Truth is that which determines the rational nature of things and our representation of them, but which is only indirectly present in them, discernible in the rationality of their existence. It is because rational form, which we can perceive, has an "original affinity" with the mind of God that our grasp of created objects can indicate a transcendent origin for their existence, which is a nonnecessary mode of existence. Barth draws the further inference that *necessitas* precedes rationality.

---

118. This problem is intensified when Barth disconnects the logic of his argument for God's existence as necessary, from the way faith holds that God is necessary. The logical case, Barth thinks, *does* prove its point—given the axiomatic role Barth assigns to Anselm's definition of God. But *even if it did not* Barth would still believe that God is one than whom a greater cannot be conceived. This mitigates the rational integrity of Barth's argument, but it points to the fact that Barth thinks of truth as the condition which includes rationality: the order (*ratio*) which things exhibit is included in and subordinated to a divine will which adds to the recognition of existence the judgment of its goodness.

[12] **"Inasmuch as the concept of necessity, though as substantiation it has noetic content too, possesses original affinity with the ontic and inasmuch as the concept of rationality, though as reasonableness it has ontic content too, possesses original affinity with the noetic—to that extent necessity must precede rationality. We see the same result if we take the problem back to the concept of truth. In so far as Anselm clearly interprets truth in terms of *rectitudo* but on the other hand interprets righteousness in terms of itself, he subordinates the knowledge of God to the will of God."**

Barth then draws two conclusions from the mutual entailment of *necessitas* and *ratio* in Anselm' s thought:

[13] **The "'rational' knowledge of the object of faith is derived from the object of faith and not *vice versa*. That means to say that *the object of faith and its knowledge are ultimately derived from Truth, that is, from God and from his will.*" (emphasis added)**

And he further concludes that

[14] **"The concept *necessitas* [...] explains what is meant by 'rational' knowledge."**

It is the intrinsic rationality of the objects of experience which is the criterion of whatever truthfulness our conceptual adequation with them may possess. In true knowledge the rationality of thought and the rationality of things is comprehended in the affinity which these have in their mutual origin in God. Logical necessity derives from ontological necessity. Thinking activity is true when it is not only logically accurate, i.e. forms concepts through rules, but also when it is recognized that things have a form which thought must repeat if it is to be true. Thinking cannot make the determination of truth from within its own dialectical dynamic, since the causal relationship between subject and object is commutative: the object causes thought, but thought also causes the object through representing it. To the consciousness of an object must be added the rationality of its act of existence (What is its nature?), and this can be logically determined only when we can judge the fundamental difference between necessary and contingent. Necessity is the judgment that a thing is this thing and no other. What can come under such a judgment is real, and is capable of existence. Barth construes the role of the "object of faith" as one of determining the nature of what is true by providing a standard of necessity. The necessity in question, however,

comes to light in a quest which is prompted by faith. Faith is the initial condition which sets in motion a search for its origin in what lies beyond it. Conducted in the way Barth here presents it, this search has metaphysical implications for how we think about the unity of reality. It is in *this* context that the present deduction belongs. Faith initiates this philosophical movement of thought because faith presupposes, and then seeks to show, the meaning of truth.[119]

The passivity of reason in its reception of the idea of God thus gives rise, in good dialectical fashion, to an action which has a criterion of rationality that enables it to judge what is germane to its task as a theological science. The domain of human inquiry which Barth is concerned with in his *Anselm*, is theology and how it can be practiced scientifically. The goal of the demonstration of the proper order of ontic and rational necessity, is to find in the vast body of theological literature the object *about* which this literature communicates. Barth wants to conceive "by reflection the hidden law of the object of faith [...] that thereby he may be able to show forth and so be able to know the thing believed" (*Anselm*, 53). This deduction is methodologically paradigmatic, for in it one demonstrates the character of theological knowledge as scientific, while showing how our thinking can be true with respect to the tasks and goals of theological knowledge. Necessity is the concept which expresses the singularity of the divine existence, marking it our from all other forms of existence. When our thinking corresponds to *this* necessary object, it shares in the necessity of God. The foregoing analysis is how Barth thinks of the result of such a discovery of necessity.[120]

(b) ***Truth as Presupposition of Proof*** The task Barth sets himself is to understand the relationship between our concepts of God and God's inner nature. The logic of such a relationship

---

119. "The fact that it is in faith that the truth is presupposed to be the known measure of all things means that the truth is in no sense assumed to be to hand. The truth comes, i.e., in the faith in which we begin to know, and cease, and begin again. The results of earlier dogmatic work, and indeed our own results, are basically no more than signs of its coming" (CD I/1, pp. 14-15).

120. See Robert Brown, "On God's Ontic and Noetic Absoluteness: A Critique of Barth," *Scottish journal of Theology* 33 (1980), pp. 533-49 for a critique of Barth's way of establishing necessity as inconsistent with biblical ways of conceiving God.

is worked out in the preceding section. Truth is more than logical, and Barth tries to show how logic and experience combine to produce understanding. Truth is the basis of unity not only for being, but also for our knowledge of it. This unity is actualized in existence, which Barth comprehends as the common fact comprehending God, world, and knowledge. Meaning and truth are for Barth inseparable. We cannot have an *a priori* grasp of meaning which is divorced from existence, since existence is the dimension in which meaning and truth unite for perception. Since truth is identical with God, or, the identity which things have in right relation to God, we can never know quantitatively the full truth. Truth for us is standing in the right relation to ultimate truth, and then also grasping in thought the right relation among things. Truth is propositional also, in that truthfulness can be a predicate of our utterances. When it is such it is the communication between subjects of what the individual has understood. To speak, then, of truth as the presupposition of the proof of God's existence, is to anticipate that the process of inquiry into God's nature will be capable of a rational articulation, will produce knowledge. Truth has an ontological, a logical, and an existential dimension which together produce true knowing, speaking and living.

Barth uses the metaphor of three concentric circles to express how we go about confirming that the content of our thought, or a propositional sentence describing it, has or lacks truth value. Barth does not begin with a sceptical rejection or bracketing off of phenomenal experience. Truth saves the phenomena by seeking *through* them their basis.[121] The decision to begin with

121. Barth would agree with Maurice Merleau-Ponty that it is only against the background of something outside of reason that truth can come into view. "By these words the 'primacy of perception' we mean that the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception is a nascent *logos*; that it teaches us, outside of dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the task of knowledge and action. It is not a question of reducing human knowledge to sensation, but of assisting at the birth of this knowledge, to make it as sensible as the sensible, to recover the consciousness of rationality. This experience of rationality is lost when we take it for granted as self-evident, but is, on the contrary, rediscovered when it is made to appear against the background of non-human nature." See *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, James M. Edie, ed., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 25.

perception makes it possible for Barth to argue to the truth of a presence mediated therein.[122] The proof should thus conduct the mind into the presence of God as the proper object of theology. As a methodological exercise, it should do this in a paradigmatic way—a way which can demonstrate what theological reasoning is like. The unity of truth obtains for us in knowledge, existence and something than which a greater cannot be thought.

The inner most of the three circles is the sphere of *knowledge.* Knowledge partakes of existence to some degree in that concepts or propositions are intentionally entertained in the understanding. The name which Anselm attributes to God is such an entity. It includes the existence proper to all objects of thought, an existence in the understanding. The problem Barth is concerned with is how to move from the knowledge of a thing in experience (*esse*) to the nature (*essentia*) or grounding principle of the thing experienced. Such a problem supposes that familiarity with existence is insufficient to gain knowledge of a thing's nature. An object *subsists* when it is conceived as existing "not just in human thinking or for human thinking" (*Anselm*, 90). Yet, *essentia* and *esse* may also "belong to an object in such a way that its existence is presupposed in an act of human thinking—for in so far as it is conceived it is conceived as existing" (*Anselm*, 90). Indeed, all intellectual entities are thought of as objective, that is, we form concepts of them

122. For a perceptive argument that truth is not simply a property of propositions or of logical systems alone, but something which must *also* be confirmed and proved or tested in experience, see the insightful study by Robert P. Scharlemann, *The Being of God: Theology and the Experience of Truth* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981). Relevant to the present context is Scharlemann's attempt to break free from the deleterious consequences for theology of Kant's epistemology. Scharlemann, who is clearly influenced by Barth in his thinking in this and other of his works, comments: "In the present book an effort is made to show how the true or, as the case may be, the false can be experienced in theological assertions. To couple experience and truth breaks with a pattern fixed by Kantian philosophy, in which experience is always directed to objects that can be exhibited or presented to the physical senses. Truth, obviously, is not a physical object. To speak of the possibility of experiencing it is, therefore, to make use of a division different from the Kantian. Though the Kantian division is taken as virtually self-evident inmost contemporary science, with the possible exception of quantum physics, there is a good reason for not adopting it: it is simply inadequate. Above all, the division of everything into objects of experience, which are physically perceptible, on the one side, and the pure forms of thought on the other, with a nod in between to the transcendental objectivity that is constituted by the forms of time and space, leaves out of account the whole realm of reflective objects to which truth belongs. Such things as truth are neither physical objects nor pure forms of thought, nor are they transcendental conditions of experience; for they are objects that appear, although that to which they appear is reflection instead of physical sensations." (p. 2)

on the assumption that their existence is more than mental. This view of reasoning requires us to make a decision concerning the relationship of the *act of thought* to the *presupposition* of its objective existence. The intellectual mode of apprehending an object is sufficiently distinct from the object to raise a question concerning their relationship. The problem arises from the fact that even though a concept may not correspond to any extramental existent, "it may be that statements logical and meaningful in themselves can be made about the potentiality and reality of its nature" (*Anselm*, 90-1).

The circle of knowledge is contained within the circle of *existence*, to which it is closely related. Knowledge is knowledge of objects (and presumably of persons also) which exist independently and fully in themselves in a way that they do not exist for thought. The problem of existence is the problem of how to establish when concepts in the mind have also an existence in reality. To understand and solve the problem of existence, two sets of distinctions are introduced into the concepts of existence (*esse*) and of an object (*res*). On the one hand, there is the distinction between (i) *a thing existing in the understanding*, and (ii) *understanding a thing to exist*. The former sort of existence does not require that the thing thought exist otherwise than in thought. Anselm uses the example of an artist's conception of a work before it is actually complete in material form. The work *exists* in the mind of the artist. The latter sort of existence is "added to" the first sort, as, for example, when the artist completes the statue and it subsists apart from the idea of it in the understanding. A second distinction is made with respect to the concept of a thing. A thing can be, on the one hand, in *the intellect alone*, or, on the other hand, *in the intellect and in reality*. Purely intellectual existence is equal to potential existence. Potential (intellectual) and real (actual) existence are thought of as closely related, so that "when an object is thought of as having potentiality of existence and reality of existence it is also *thought of as existing*, be that mere hypothesis, poetic license, deception or error" (*Anselm*, 91). Whenever we think an object as combining intellectual and actual existence then it is, *at least for thought*, understood to exist. This implies that the actual extramental existence of objects we *regard* as actual is not something which

our conception of an object can indicate to us.[123] We cannot, therefore, prove the actual existence of conceptual existents, from within the vantage point that the argument begins. The fact that existence belongs to an object contemplated and that it is not therefore hypothetical, false, or otherwise illusory, "is not contained in the thought of its power to exist or of the reality of its existence" (*Anselm*, 92). Barth thus presents existence as a dialectical movement between potential (intellectual) and real (actual).

The analysis of the spheres of knowledge and existence indicates that the question of objective existence requires a "special thought" and a correspondingly distinct knowledge and proof, if these are to come to mind. The question becomes that of the extent to which knowledge is not merely "what we *think*, but *what* we think" (*Anselm*, 92). To what extent is our idea not simply a thought-thing, but something standing over against our thinking of it? To what extent does a datum of knowledge originate also in the circle of existence? The answer to this question is that a thing is specifically known as both in the understanding and in reality when we know it as *partaking in truth.*

The sphere of truth is the third concentric circle. It is the "last outer circle by which the existence and within the existence, the existence in thought, must be enclosed if a thought, that is an object that is thought, is to be true" (*Anselm*, 92). Barth summarizes the relationship between these three concentric circles of existence, explaining their interaction:

> The object then is first of all in reality, then following from that it exists, then as a consequence of that it can be thought. Without the middle step of existing what is thought could not be real. Anything *in intellectu solo* (that is excluding the *esse in re*) would be *falsum*; on the other hand, what is *et in intellectu et in re* is identical with what is real because it could not be *in re* had it not first existed in reality. As we heard earlier, the truth of a statement depends on this: that it describes as existing something in fact

123. Barth's text is dense here, but the whole notion of proof of existence depends on what he argues here (*Anselm*, 89-100). Barth seems to be repeating Kant's critique of Anselm's ontological argument, to the effect that there is no difference between a conceptually well defined concept or nature, and its actual existence. Existence adds nothing to the nature of the thing analyzed. Barth treats the predication of existence as an intellectual *judgment*, which as such does not get us beyond the phenomenal sphere of its origin and the transcendental conditions of its being intelligible.

> existing. The question of the knowledge of an object must go further than knowing it as existing (that means, in knowing it as having power and reality of existence). To be true knowledge, to be knowledge of the truth, it must press on to knowledge of the existence of the object thus known in itself, to knowledge of its objectivity. Not till the question of knowledge reaches this second outer circle, not till it probes whether the object exists beyond mere thought, is it really in earnest. Not till then does it press into the third, or inclusive realm of truth. (*Anselm*, 92-93)

Truth is not simply a relationship among states of consciousness. It is, rather, symbolically communicated. Language is the medium in which the intellect forms propositions, which are descriptions of mental states. Words are signs which have a built in ambiguity about them. They are partially mental and partially real, since they mark in thought the images of the things which they signify. Signs have an existential status to the extent that they are objects of thought. Signs are thus mental and real things. This double reference of the sign—its simultaneous intensive and extensive orientation and reference—gives all propositional claims concerning existence an ambiguity. That language can be paradoxical has its explanation in this referential ambiguity. For if words as signs of things are only partly similar to what they signify, then the task of demonstrating the objectivity and therewith the truth (as adequation of thought and thing) of our ideas is problematic. On the one hand, such an ambivalence in the definition of a sign is necessary if any statement is to describe or explain things in themselves, for if signs (ideas) are understood as contradictory to realities, then we cannot know the relationship of our thought to things outside of it. Signs must, therefore, as such be similar to the existing entities they represent, otherwise they could not serve as media to and from reality. On the other hand, this same ambiguity could lead to an indefinite postponement of the judgment as to what is true (objective). For, truth requires *necessity* in the inferences which form the concepts with which we propositionally express it. The ambiguity of signs (words) implies that we cannot through the analysis of language alone form an adequate conception of truth. The symbolic or linguistic mediation of truth poses serious questions for the plausibility of Barth's proof.

Anselmic rationality tries to cope with this problem[124] by introducing a distinction, noted earlier, between contemplating a thing as existing in the understanding, and understanding the thing contemplated to subsist independently. It tries to account for the "impossible possibility" of denying the existence of *something than which a greater cannot be conceived*, by distinguishing two kinds of objects over which this statement may range. When we regard the sign 'God' as an object, then we can deny that such an object exists. Its existence is a modification of mind on which it depends and without which it would not be. However, when we see *through the sign and alongside it* the object it intends to stand for, then we cannot deny the existence of 'God,' for in this latter relationship, typical of truth, 'God' and necessary existence are mutually interpreting. Barth takes this distinction to be the source of the intellectual error that is always committed in the statement, "God does not exist." The "existence" denied when thought remains confined to this level, is, when compared to the *ultima ratio*, nonexistent.

Truth is linguistically mediated in the broader sense that it is transmitted by audits,[125] sentences, stories, and reports spoken by human beings, with a specific intent and in the context of a community of belief which takes certain concepts a standard for rational discourse about God. We hear of God through words, we learn of the nature of God through creedal descriptions built up over time and intended to repeat the founding truth of religious belief. Theology is largely an exercise in the interpretation of signs, and the learning of truth is closely tied to finding ways through the vast array of signs to their underlying unity in God. "In its grasp of the Christian message faith is assuredly nothing less than the awareness of a *vox significans rem*, of a coherent

---

124. See P4 for Anselm's solution.

125. See on the spoken transmission of truth T. F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (New York: Oxford, 1969), pp. 23-4. Torrance discusses "audits" as part of the complete mediation of Christian truth, in distinction from the traditional bias toward the visual in our understanding of understanding. See also, Colin Gunton, "Transcendence, Metaphor, and the Knowability of God," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1980), pp. 501-16; and for a fascinating Catholic study of auditorially communicated meaning, see Francesca Murphy, "The Sound of *Analogia Entis*," *New Blackfriars* 74 (1993): 508-21 and 557-65. There is a fascinating phenomenology of the auditory in Don Ihde, "Auditory Imagination," in F. J. Smith, ed., *Phenomenology in Perspective* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1970), esp. pp. 210-14 on auditory imagination as inner speech.

continuity that is expressed logically and grammatically, which, having been heard, is understood and now exists *in intellectu* (*Anselm*, 24). Barth argues for an independence of the object of faith, and a priority of existence to knowledge. However, all such argumentation is enveloped within the linguistic matrix of all of our reasoning. We can only claim exception for the paradox attaching to all language by an appeal to *this* description as unique and so deserving of special consideration. Barth recognizes the fragility of knowledge, and, as the next chapter shows, has a view of language which seeks to overcome the deficiencies in our use of it by interpreting words a having their primary meaning in God, and thus subordinating our use as derivative.

> Truth is not primarily in knowledge, but only secondarily so. It is first truth in objects: it is primarily truth in itself. Truth that was only in knowledge would be a broken reed. The same could be said of a truth which was true only in knowledge and in objects but was not true in itself. But at least it is in the first place a criterion of truth that it should be truth not only in knowledge but also in objects. (*Anselm*, 123)[126]

Integral to truth as the presupposed structure of rationality, as well as of reasoning, are the logical and grammatical constraints common to claims to intelligibility. The laws of logic, grounded in the law of noncontradiction, apply to theological reasoning also. Theology's scientific domain is the community of believers (the church and its creedal construction of reality). In reasoning concerning how God is understood through and in that context of meaning, the theologian presumes that the knowledge of God lies beneath the surface of the creedal documents

---

126. See also *Anselm*, 45-6, where the order of existence to truth is reiterated: "The primary result of these various relationships is the conception of a *ratio* peculiar to the object of faith and we can say: if an ontic *ratio* were to be proved by means of the knowing *ratio* of the human faculty of making concepts and judgments, after the object of faith is given by revelation, then this conception would not be correctly interpreted until we take into account that Anselm recognizes a third and ultimate *ratio*, a *ratio veritatis*. Strictly understood the *ratio veritatis* is identical with the *ratio summae naturae*, that is with the divine Word consubstantial with the Father. It is the *ratio* of God. It is not because it is *ratio* that it has truth but because God, Truth, has it. This Word is not divine as word, but because it is begotten by the Father--spoken by him. The following holds good only of all those other *rationes* with which the *ratio Dei* is not identical but which as the *ratio* of his creation participate in the *ratio Dei*: Truth is not bound to it but it to truth."

describing God, and is never self-evident.[127] Truth about God is mediated in creeds and other texts which require interpretation. Barth sees reasoning as operative in the discovery of the inner meaning of texts, a meaning which can only be disclosed through the intellectual work of interpretation. Barth's description of this activity is an illustration of how he thinks we come to understand truth through texts.

> Within it [the *Credo*], now this Article, now that Article figures as the unknown *X* which is solved in the investigations by means of the Articles of faith *a, b, c, d,* [...] which are assumed to be known (without assuming knowledge of *X* and to that extent *sola ratione*). The inquiring theologian with his capacity for forming concepts and making judgments, is never assigned the function of determining the fixed point or fixed points from which the argument is to proceed. His function is rather as follows: on the one hand, a selection from among the points fixed previously (elsewhere, or in another way); and on the other hand—and this is his proper task—the formulation, *according to the rules of logic and based upon the law of contradiction* (and within the limits it permits), of the definitions, conclusions, differentiations and correlations necessary for the resolution of that *X*. And so, not mastering the object but being mastered by it—he achieves true noetic *ratio* of the object of faith; he attains to the *intellectus fides*. (*Anselm*, 55)[128]

Truth is thus presupposed as the intentional structure in which God gives unity to the diversity of particular things and to the whole of reality. It is only because God is the *ultimate truth* that lesser truths can obtain. Human rationality, when properly functioning, is itself the means by which we understand what things are. The only way we can do this is to understand them in their acts of existence. Because acts of existence are separable from natures or essences according to which they unfold, it is possible to have a knowledge of the nature of a thing, without perceiving the thing as existent. This distinction, between nature (*essentia*) and its actualization (*esse*) is vital

---

127. "The truth of the matter, however, is that the central affirmations of the Bible are not self-evident; the Word of God itself, as witnessed to in the Bible, is not immediately obvious in any of its chapters or verses. On the contrary, the truth of the Word must be *sought* precisely, in order to be understood in its deep simplicity. Every possible means must be used: philological and historical criticism and analysis, careful consideration of the nearer and the more remote textual relationships, and not least, the enlistment of every device of the conjectural imagination that is available." See Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, tr. Grover Foley, (Grand Rapids: Erdmanns, 1963), p. 35.

128. Barth takes theological *ratio* to involve "explaining the mutual parts of the *Creedo*" (*Anselm*. p. 66).

to Anselmic rationality, as Barth interprets it. This concept of truth raises questions concerning the relationship between existence, reality and understanding. Truth precedes, is superior to, and orders understanding and existence. Participation in truth thus supplements what existence alone lacks, or possesses less fully. Truth is thus indispensable for proof, since proof is simply the delineation of the conditions under which the claim, "God necessarily exists," can be logically drawn out. In Barth's thought these "conditions" include the totality of what was, is, and will be, as these are the work of the God whose existence he seeks to show.[129]

(c) *What is Proved In Anselmic Rationality* Can God's existence be proved? That depends, obviously enough, on how one conceives of proof.[130] Proof means exhibiting or showing how reasons given for a conclusion support the claim which the conclusion makes. There are many strategies of proof (such as mathematical, experimental) but the sort of proof Barth has in mind is very similar to R. G. Collingwood's understanding of philosophic proof.

> Our knowledge that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides depends (I speak for myself) on the proof. These are cases ... in which we intuitively apprehend the conclusion without the proof; but normally the proof is our only source of assurance that the conclusion is true. In philosophy this is not so; we know this normally without any proof at all; and the service which the proof does for us is not to assure us that it is so, but to show us why it is so, and thus

---

129. See also Daniel Day Williams, "The Concept of Truth in Karl Barth's Theology," *Religious Studies* 6 (1970), pp. 137-45; and Rowan Williams, "The Unity of Christian Truth," *New Blackfriars* 70 (1989), pp. 85-95.

130. Anselm's argument has provoked the strangest sort of division among the best minds in philosophical history. Aquinas and Kant thought it a mistake, whereas Leibniz and Hegel are convinced that it is a central truth of Christian knowledge of God. Katherine Rogers represents one end of the faith-reason spectrum, taking the *sola ratione* to mean that reason can prove God's existence independently of divine revelation. See Katherine Rogers, "Can Christianity be Proven?: St. Anselm of Canterbury on Faith and Reason," in Joseph C. Schnaubelt et. al., eds., *Anselm Studies: An Occasional Journal II* (White Plains, New York: Kraus International Publication, 1988), 459-79. On the other end of the faith-reason spectrum, in relation to Anselm's argument, is Robert S. Hartman, who defends the revealed status claimed by Barth for the rational insight which drives the argument in P2 and P3 and gives the conclusion plausibility. See his essay, "Prolegomena to a Meta-Anselmian Axiomatic," *Review of Metaphysics* 14 (1961), 637-75. An energetically argued and fascinating middle position, which denies that Anselm's insight is in fact a divinely revealed name and which interprets the argument as a pragmatic rule for formulating theological descriptions of God and God's agency, may be found in Ingolf U. Dalferth, "Fides quaerens intellectum: Theologie als Kunst der Argumentation in Anselms Proslogion," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 81 (1984), pp. 54-105.

enable us to know it better.[131]

Barth understands proof as drawing out the implications of that rationality which is present in faith, due to the rationality of faith's object. Fundamental to assessing Barth's project is the fact that he sees proof as a movement of thought which is a transition *from faith* (credere) *to an enjoyment in the understanding* (intelligere) *of the object believed.*[132] It is not the case, however, that Barth presupposes God's existence as such and in itself to be necessary for his argument to advance. The object with which the argument begins, as noted above, is a thought-thing. Such an object enjoys a diminished but real mode of existence, and possesses a logic which is clarified in the fact that the object contemplated is a name, a material content.[133]

A controversial feature of Barth's strategy is the way in which it begins with our common sense familiarity with objects, a dimension he calls *existence*, and then seeks to argue to something partly similar to, but largely dissimilar from, the initial existential starting point. Barth seeks to tie into the psychological certitude of immediate experience, as expressed in his use of the subject-object paradigm, and take this certitude into a transcendent level of discussion of an object which is purely subject (lacking physical properties). This beginning with existence gives the argument an

---

131. R. G. Collingwood, *Essay on Philosophic Method*, p. 140, cited from M. W. Sinnett, "Another Mathematician's Apology: Theological Reflections Upon the Role of Proof in Mathematics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993), p. 347. Barth himself takes up this theme using, strangely enough, the same Pythagorean example as his starting point. See his *Ethics 1928-29*, discussed in the concluding chapter.

132. "The Proof that is to be worked out on the assumption of this designation of God will not be an analytic but a synthetic proposition. In that it corresponds to its object" (*Anselm*, 89).

133. This point has clearly set forth by Robert Scharlemann. "It is often overlooked—Barth's 'Barthian' or 'neo-orthodox' reputation tends to overshadow interpretations of his theology—that in his treatise on Anselm's name of God [...] what Barth spoke of as the presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) of faith was not the existence of God. Barth did not claim that faith presupposes the existence of God which then understanding tries to make clear or demonstrate. Instead, what faith presupposes is the identification of God with the name 'that than which no greater can be thought'. And the point of the demonstration is to show that, given this name, the mind, by nothing more than a reflection on the meaning of the name, can arrive at the knowledge of the real existence of the one it names. Barth was explicit in recognizing that the Anselmian-Augustinian phrase involved is not a definition of the essence of God but, initially, the formulation of a rule of thinking. But it is that rule given in a *name*, that is to say, in a thought-object which, when reflected upon, leads the mind to a knowledge of what it names." See "God as Not-Other: Nicholas of Cusa's *De li Non Aliud*," in Robert S. Scharlemann, ed., *Naming God* (New York: Paragon House, 1985), pp. 117-8.

empirical force. It speaks of God as an *object*, and it emphasizes that God does exist like other objects, with the attendant obligation to explain how reason can *correctly* (truly) represent the object of inquiry by imitating its structure in intellectual representation. However, this realist tendency is qualified by the negative element, which implies that no direct reference to God is possible, not because God lacks reality, but because God instantiates it so excellently that it escapes all of our categories for conceptualizing reality.[134] Reference to this mysterious God is accomplished by use of a logical argument, one which involves a combination of negative and positive factors.[135]

The negative factors are indicated in two claims—first, that God is greater than anything which can be conceived. This greater is important, for it is clearly not a positive description of God. The comparative form of the claim reflexively distances any concepts from this object. The negative element is thus applied to reasoning about God's nature. The second claim not only states that God is greater than anything we *can* think of, but also stipulates that God is something which cannot be thought. There is thus a double negativity at work in Anselmic rationality, the total effect of which is to subordinate reason to God's nature. The failure of reason to comprehend God is not a flaw of reason. On the contrary, reason's power and limit are noticed only in the attempt to grasp its own basis in God. Nonetheless, reason must recognize that God is its negative limit, otherwise it would confuse the creature and the creator, which is folly. God's nature is

---

134. "Every theological statement is an inadequate expression of its object. [...] Every one of the categories known to us by which we attempt to conceive him is, in the last analysis, not really one of his categories at all. God shatters every syllogism" (*Anselm*, p. 29).

135. To refer to the mystery of God is not to purposely obfuscate the problem of knowledge with respect to God. Mystery is our awareness of the inscrutable but true conjunction of two freedoms, the divine and the human, in the disciplining of faith and knowledge by obedience or action in the world. The divine mystery is not eliminated by human knowing, but is rightly regarded as an integral aspect of our attempts to know the being we speak of in theological and philosophical discourse. On this important theme see, for example: Michael B. Foster, *Mystery and Philosophy* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1957); Denys Turner, "De-Centring Theology," *Modern Theology* 2 (1986): 125-43; "The Art of Unknowing: Negative Theology in the Late Middle Ages," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 473-88; and Mark I. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Theology and Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

incomprehensible in virtue of the fact that it is unique. Thus, underlying the negativity of the argument is a superabundant positivity. However, the positive element in Barth's argument is not a given structure in human reasoning (say, its transcendental subjectivity, an alleged religious *a priori*, or any other capability it possesses as intellect), but the donating activity of God's self-presencing. Barth sees the basis of reality in a God who accommodates human finitude and creatureliness and not in a God who is accommodated to the conditions (real or imagined) of reason as decisively constituted before any of its interaction with existence. Reason is partly given in and with the make up of human intellect, for otherwise no proof (no rational discourse) could come about. But it is largely constituted by that which is given to it and that upon which it acts. This is true of its empirical, as well as its metaphysical, uses.

Barth applies his conception of reality as a relationship of three concentric circles to the question of a proof of God's existence. He argues as follows: (1) "The real meaning of Existence as attributed to God, even if attributed only in thought," is that "it is impossible to conceive of God as existing only as a concept" (*Anselm*, 97). (2) Existence generally means existence obtaining without respect to a thing being thought or not. (3) An object's reality and its being thought of logically entail that it exists. (4) Reality by itself "demands both its existence and true thinking of its existence" (*Anselm*, 97). (5) Cognitive comprehension of an object's existence in reality depends upon its prior reality. (6) The decision as to whether an object exists and is being rightly conceived is made in neither the sphere of existence nor that of knowledge, but is made outside of these spheres, "on the basis of Truth itself" (*Anselm*, 97). "This decisive Truth is God" (*Anselm*, 97). The conclusion of this argument is that God is the repository of truth and that he as such *decides* when our cognition and the existence of its objects are rightly related, i.e., when we are thinking something real and thinking it in the way that its own nature requires.

The centre of the proof is Anselm's initial description of God as *quo maius cogitari nequit* (something than which nothing greater can be conceived). The operative implication of this description is that *God is that which it is greater to be than not to be*, which is a quantitative claim

about power, and God is at the same time *something which possesses all those attributes which it is better to have than to lack*, which is a claim about goodness as perfection (greatness). The God so described is regarded as fundamentally different from all of created reality; God has supremely what it has by way of dependence and participation. Now, the previously noted distinction between essence (*essentia*) and existence (*esse*)[136] becomes a way of expressing this fundamental difference between God and all that is created, which is everything else that is not identical with God's nature itself. The sort of reasoning by which we distinguish merely intellectual existence from existence both in the intellect *and* in reality is made possible by the fact that the variety of natures existing in time and space are already participating in the ultimate truth from which they derive. We noted above that Barth thinks of the rationality of thought as capable of dependence on objects outside of thought because both partake of a *ratio* which is theirs by participation in truth. It is possible through the power of memory or rational representation, to conceive of a thing without its presence affecting thought. This suggests a separability of the *what* of things (their *essentia*), by which we make identity descriptions, from the *that*, or, the external actualization of the things thought of (its act of existing, or *esse*), through which we make demonstrative descriptions. When a thing is present to us and forms our concept of it through its standing out from mere idea into the sphere of existence, it is impossible to use language to both name the thing *and* deny its existence. In the absence of the object, and thus contemplating only its idea, one can describe it and deny its existence. This second sort of judgment is what the fool does: he makes a rational, because intelligible, statement which is false because the fool has not understood that to name God as the object of my experience, God as present in mind through God's own presencing action.

This chapter is intended to elaborate the meaning of Anselmic rationality in Barth's study of

---

136. Barth thinks that the logical breakthrough in the *Proslogion* over the *Monologion*, is that the former is able to keep these two metaphysical concepts separate, and to use the distinction to show a dependence of the intellect on a donation from outside of it in order to think of God as existent. The impetus of this distinction is to continually keep thought moving *away from itself* toward a goal which is infinite and thus incomprehensible.

Anselm. It claims only to show how Barth reads Anselm, and makes no claims concerning the more elaborate task of checking Barth's interpretation. Indeed, Barth's book tells us more about Barth than Anselm, even though his historical and philosophical grasp of Anselm's texts and culture is formidable. Anselmic rationality is primarily the attempt to show that there is one necessary being and that being is identical with the one we call God. The rational purpose of the proof is not apologetic, but didactic. It is not intended to bring about faith, for it cannot get under way without faith's operation in the beginning. It is not, however, a simple reiteration of biblical assumptions. Theology, as science, begins when scripture quoting ends.

The proof, as Barth conceives of it, rehearses the transforming event of revelation and seeks to give this event a foundational place for all of our thinking about God. *After* God enters the life of the mind, a knowledge is operative on the understanding which changes its former measure of itself. Reason is seen to be remotely related to God's own internal awareness, which is a self-differentiated three-in-oneness, in which one being is (somehow) objective to itself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If God is such that it is not possible even to conceive of God's nonexistence, then here is a certainty which transcends all of the certainties which philosophy seeks to articulate and use. Indeed, here is a certainty which can then underwrite all such quests for certitude in thought. God's existence is a precondition for all other existent things, but it is not self-evident to us, even if it is such to God himself.

Knowledge of God's reality-existence is analogous to other empirical beliefs in that it compels us to assent to it as a deliverance of immediate conscious experience. God is wholly immanent, and therefore self-evidently present with the things of extended space. God is wholly transcendent, and can act outside of space-time, and thus outside of the confines of empirical reasoning. The faith with which this argument begins has this same epistemic status: we are certain that there is an object we are experiencing, but we know nothing of its nature or inner constitution until we take further steps and test the meaning of our experience. The proof is how Barth tests faith. The interplay of rationality and necessity is the way in which the certainty of

belief, enters into the understanding. Such reasoning, though, is not a substitute for faith. It is a special confirmation of it, which has lasting consequences for how we reason concerning the God it indirectly describes. Thus Barth tries to hold together the twofold nature of reason as a critical self-understanding, as well as an understanding sent on its way by faith.

Barth's argument clearly seeks to ground theological reason without making *systematic* use of philosophical categories. The problem here is that if reason is to be a practicing critical reason, one which limits the scope of its own application through analysis of its power to discriminate real from illusory, value from fact, or interpretation from event interpreted, then it must have at its disposal a way of relating its own activity to a standard outside of itself. For critical philosophy, too, the problem is how to deduce the origin of my ideas, or how we may get back to the thing-in-itself?[137] Critical reason is propelled by a scepticism it never completely overcomes, so it can never arrive at a certitude which can function for it as a criterion for ordering the degree to which its own thinking products are its own or partake of what is real. Barth's argument answers the problem of certainty in reasoning: it argues that thought, its objects, and the origin of both coincide in God, but in a God who cannot even be entertained theoretically as nonexistent.

Barth suspends, though he does not eliminate, the creedal and scriptural sources of our knowledge of God and treats Anselm's insight as a hypothesis which he wishes to test. Based on a distinction between merely intellectual and both intellectual and real, he concludes that God *cannot* be a merely intellectual entity. Based on a distinction between God as the only necessarily existent being and all other beings, Barth concludes to the fact that *truly* to think of God is to be unable conceptually to deny God's existence. To truly thinking of God is to be in God's presence—to have God present to the mind through gracious inclusion in God's life. If it cannot convincingly argue from existence to God, then Barth's argument makes no sense.

---

137. For a fascinating study of Kant's problem of the *Ding an sich* which interprets the thing-in-itself as modeled on the way God is object in negative theology, see Merold Westphal "In Defense of the Thing in Itself," *Kant-Studien* 59 (1968), pp. 118-41.

What is at stake here is not just the right way to seek God, but in addition God's presence, on which the whole grace of Christian knowledge primarily depends, the encounter with him which can never be brought about by all our searching for God however thorough it may be, although it is only to the man who seeks God with a pure heart that this encounter comes. (*Anselm*, 38)

CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusion

I

Summary of the Argument Presented [138] In presenting Karl Barth's conception of the necessity but insufficiency of reason in our knowledge of God, I have explicated three themes in Barthian rationality. First, I argued that philosophic reasoning is a metadiscourse which determines the bounds of rational thought for both philosophy and theology. Philosophy and theology have a basis in truth so that these disciplines operate in similar ways. They differ in the orientation of their tasks: with philosophy grounded in human subjectivity, and theology in God, the "Object who is always subject."[139] Theology begins with a revealed concept which also constitutes it. This concept derives from an event and takes us to the border between thought and existence. This concept is the thought of the inextricable and nonidentical union of thought and existence. Theology moves from the top down, conceptually redescribing the world in light of the truth it is given in the event of revelation, and an accumulated body of creedal beliefs. Barth does not regard philosophy as a universal method. Its classical role in the modern period was to determine for each intellectual discipline (history, biology, literature, etc.) what *its* methodological constants are, but not to determine *a priori* what its content ought to be. It is a metadiscourse, but

---

138. Questions raised in the course of this summary section will be dealt with in subsequent sections of this chapter.

139. In a later essay contributed to a Festschrift for his philosopher brother Heinrich, Karl focuses on the *sequence* by which the practices of philosophy and theology arrange the "*order* of the components of the one Truth." Many problems are shared by philosopher and theologian. "The matter of idea and appearance, the *causa prima* [...] and those *causa secundae* [...] moved by it, the 'thing in itself' and its theoretical-practical apperception, the *logos* [...] and reason, the spirit and its self-development, transcendence (perhaps also essence) and existence, being and existence,—signified in that way or similarly, conceptual pairs, sharply distinguishing and precisely connecting at the same time, appear also to be situated in the inquiry and the doctrine as well as the discussion of the philosopher. And at least something like an analogy of endeavours intrudes here and there." The only order possible for theology is to follow after the incarnational dynamic of concrete revelation. "For the path of Jesus Christ clearly leads from above to below and from there back towards the above, from the condescension of the Creator to the elevation of the creation and not the reverse." Any rational ascension from creation to creator must be guaranteed by the prior *elevation* of the thinker. To rightly know God, one must first be included in the circle of the divine self-knowledge. This is the vantage point from which theology must take its start, not as some ecstatic flight away from the real, but as that point *from within the real* to which God's revealing act and word directs us. See "Philosophy and Theology," in H. Martin Rumscheidt, ed., *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth: Essays and Comments* (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 1986), pp. 82, 90.

not in the sense of constructing or possessing some one truth to which all rational inquiry must conform. Philosophy is a metadiscourse in the sense that it discovers the nature and limits of rationality, from which it need not follow that rationality has any universal datum which all rational discipline must contain. Philosophy cannot prescribe for any and every rational inquiry how it must proceed. Philosophy is a metadiscourse primarily in its elucidation of logical principles. Erroneous reasoning is erroneous reasoning in all intellectual disciplines.

One important philosophical discovery is that human reasoning operates in a tension between two fundamental orientations in thought: realism and idealism. Those occupying these distinct and contradictory orientations each think that they are closest to the truth. The realist interprets transcendence as an epiphenomenon of the soul's operations registering in the human mind, and offers to explain the real character of the spiritual (mental) dimension which idealism claims to be better able to explain. Each of these orientations seek to dialectically include the other. Barth regards philosophy as *synthetic* in character, seeking to include through its dialectical movement more and more insight into reality and truth. Theology cannot avoid philosophical language and concepts. However, theology must not repeat within its own domain of reasoning the attempted dialectical absorbtion in which philosophy's foundational polarities (idealist and realist) seek to include their opposite in a reductionistic monism. Nor can theology simply reduce the ideal and the real to its own mode of conceptuality, producing a dialectically achieved concept which then purports to be absolutely true or authoritative. The advent of the theological alters the conception of reason at its source or origin. It does not insert an idea of God in the place of either ideal or real and thereby seek to displace these orientations of thought, and what comes to understanding through them. We need not choose between ideal and real, for theology provides a new vantage point or reference in relation to which both ideal and real are seen as problems for faith seeking understanding, and not absolute opposites within which understanding faith must take its place. Reason must be a critical reasoning, which implies the distinction in thought between a discursive temporal function of thinking and a nontemporal and categorial set of

concepts for judging discursive thought.[140]

The improper demand that theological rationality occupy philosophy's own foundational structures, excludes *ab initio* the possibility of an alternative viewpoint to the one which philosophy furnishes. Barth's strategy involves starting with philosophy's purportedly absolute foundations in an idealist and realist polarity, and then making this philosophical position itself one pole in a relationship which has God for it opposite, other, or complement. This is not a violation of Barth's warning not to replace philosophy's dialectic with one of its own, for God as opposite is not simply an idea or concept which counters other ideas or concepts. God is a living, dynamic being, with mind, will and power which can and do deviate from human mind, will, and power. As such, God as other is not fixable in the symmetrical way that ideal and real are fixable as polar complements or opposites. Moreover, as was shown, God is infinite and this infinity puts an end to all proportional analogies which compare God and creature (about which more discussion will soon follow).

Second, it was shown that the particular sort of knowledge which concerns Barth is knowledge of God. This undertaking is problematic in at least two senses. First, because in Barth's understanding faith in God is a prerequisite for understanding God. Faith is prerequisite

---

140. On Barth's relationship to philosophy, see also: Graham White, "Karl Barth's Theological Realism," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 26 (1984), pp. 54-70; Mark Helme, "Barth and Philosophy," *Heythrop Journal* 22 (1981), pp. 285-89; Daniel Day Williams, "Brunner and Barth on Philosophy," *The Journal of Religion* 27 (1947), pp. 241-54; James Kincade, "Karl Barth and Philosophy," *The Journal of Religion* 40 (1960), pp. 161-69; J. C. Thomas, "The Epistemology of Karl Barth," *Heythrop Journal* 18 (1977), pp. 383-98; John E. Smith, "The Significance of Karl Barth's Thought for the Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 28 (1972), pp. 15-30; Jean-Loup Seban, "Barth, Karl (1886-1968)," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 10 volumes, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1: 651-56; Jacob Taubes, "Theodicy and Theology: A Philosophical Analysis of Karl Barth's Dialectical Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 34 (1954), pp. 231-43; Josef Smolík, "Philosophy of History (K. Barth and J. L. Hromádka)," *Communio Viatorum* 12 (1969), pp. 113-20; Dietrich Korsch, *Dialektische Theologie nach Karl Barth* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996); Trutz Rendtorff, ed., *Die Realisierung der Freiheit* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1975); Alastair McKinnon, "Barth's Relationship to Kierkegaard: Some Further Light," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 13 (1967), pp. 31-41. Three works are indicative of the growing interest in Barth's thought on ethics. Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Nigel Biggar, ed., *Reckoning with Karl Barth: Essays in Commemoration of Karl Barth's Birth* (London: Mowbray, 1998).

not in the obvious and banal sense that only if one believes God exists does one believe that God exists. It is requisite in that given a specific name for God one can reason to certain profoundly important conclusions concerning God's nature. This name as a criterion for argument is a matter of faith since Barth thinks that the name which can give rise to such important argumentation is a revealed name, not an inherence in the natural structure of reason and/or reality. Nature and knowledge of God are *given* in distinct ways, ways which Barth insists must remain fundamentally and permanently distinguished. Second, because Barth so understands the nature of human knowing and the accessibility of the divine being, that knowledge of God can only occur as a miracle. Reason is understood as that power of a higher faculty of thought which schematizes our perception of the world. Reason is basically dialectical in form, and this means it has the power to integrate diverse kinds of practical reasoning. Dialectic is for Barth a *Realdialektik*, an interaction of thought with the processes of existent things through an internalization of that in their existence which is communicable to human sensing.[141]

Barth's conception of dialectic is limited to things which are related in time and space and since God is totally other, no dialectical understanding of God is possible. Barth's conception of reason is fragmented and paradoxical. Reason must think its origin in order to understand its own character, but it cannot do this, for the presence of God causes the structures of reason to dissolve. The most one can do is glimpse God in the higher categories of thought, and thus in a highly abstract manner. Barth affirms a constructive activity of the mind, but one in which memory and a "thinking after" (*nachdenken*), or reflection on what has been given in experience, is the goal of construction are normative. Revelation is not insight into structures of natural reason disclosed by *a priori* reflection on reason in isolation from the world. Revelation is an event which shatters,

---

141. Barth's position seems to involve something like an intellectual intuition of physical objects, yet his acceptance of a Kantian view of knowing would rule this out. Barth is not sufficiently systematic in his description of the philosophical ideas he uses to ascertain how he imagines this dialectical interaction to be thought through. For a philosophical ontology which has much in common with Barth's, see Julian Hartt, *Being Known and Being Revealed*, (Stockton, California: College of the Pacific Philosophy Institute Publications, 1957).

because it overwhelms, the categories of reason. In its most important operations, reason is passive, for it is essentially a tool for gathering knowledge of reality, and reality has an integrity of its own not altered by our thinking of it. It is thought, and not things, which are altered in our acts of cognition.

The third claim advanced here was that Barth's Anselmic rationality is an attempt to solve the problem of how the object of faith is related to a reason which is dialectically constituted. Here, the emphasis shifts from thinking to its ontological conditions. Barth never thinks of faith and reason as antithetical, but as complementary.[142] However, he accepts the modern account of theoretical knowledge as setting the limits within which the question of reasoning about God must be answered. Anselmic rationality has a Cartesian *form*, in that it presents the problem as an epistemological one: How can I know the ontological status of the idea of God? Is this idea purely intentional, or does it have extension also? Barth's reconstruction of Anselmic rationality discloses a Kantian influence: It accepts the restriction of pure reason to the domain of phenomena, which are problematically thought to originate in noumena. Barth tries to argue that God can be known through the context of existence in general. God is "objective" just in the sense that God is able to be active in and through the domain of nature. Nature is the proper context of experience.

---

142. "In believing the Christian owes everything to the object of his faith: the incomprehensible fact that he may not only be in relation to this object, but may be active in this being. [...] Faith is simply following, following its object. Faith is going a way which is marked out and prepared. Faith does not realize anything new. It does not invent anything. It simply finds that which is already there for the believer and also for the unbeliever" (CD I/2, p. 742). Faith is a receptive disposition of mind. Faith is a knowledge with three distinct aspects. "It is an acknowledgement, a recognition and a confession [*Anerkennen, Erkennen, Bekennen*]," all of which are variations on the German concept of *kennen*. "And as the object and the basis is the same in every case, so in every case it is an active knowledge. Why a knowledge? As we have seen, underlying it there is the presupposition of a creative event—the being and activity of Jesus Christ in the power of His Holy Spirit awakening man to faith. As the event of a human act on this basis, faith is a cognitive event, the simple taking cognisance of the preceding being and work of Jesus Christ. But we are not dealing with an automatic reflection, with a stone lit up by the sun, or wood kindled by a fire, or a leaf blown by the wind. We are dealing with man. It is therefore a spontaneous, a free, an active event. This active aspect is expressed in the three terms: acknowledgement, recognition, and confession" (CD I/2, p. 758). For a study which develops this following after aspect of faith, see Robert Scharlemann, *The Reason of Following: Christology and the Ecstatic I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. pp. 116-30, where he develops a concept of reason as *acolouthetic*, alongside reason as theoretical, practical, and aesthetic. See also CD I/1, p. 214.

Experience is not simply the relationship which holds between a thinking subject and an object. Experience is a complex interpretive framework into which new relationships are integrated.[143] The proof of God which Barth develops combines psychological and logical factors. The experience of natural objects is so entirely bound up with the thought of their existence, prior to any analytic activity we bring to bear on that experience, as to command our assent of necessity. It is the psychological compulsion of this aspect of experience in general, which Barth analogically shifts into the experience of faith that God is real or objective, even though God is an unparalleled object. Barth's claim is not that the logical operation produces the experience of God. It produces understanding, which is for him the chief benefit of the method he is developing. The God who is *something than which a greater cannot be conceived* is conceived as a contradiction whenever this God's nonexistence is taken as possible, i.e., as something which is buried in the recesses of the human mind and is therefore discoverable therefrom.

Thinking of God in this manner is thinking with ideas which are transparent to what is communicated through them. Ideas have an ontologically ambivalent status which gives them a double reference. In that reference in which ideas are discovered to be modifications of the human mind and so direct our thought to their subjective origin, ideas are mental entities. They originate in the mind which creates and manipulates them. In a second reference, ideas can direct our thought to the objects which they represent in thought. When ideas operate in this second sense, in forgetfulness of their subjective origin, they are what I call transparent and as such they are not

143. Barth thinks that experience is the complex domain in which we come to know the world around us. Knowing an object, a thing in the world, is being determined by it in such a way that we are aware of our awareness of an object, we are, that is, conscious of the identity of the object with our thinking of it *and* the difference between the object and my thinking it (see CD I/1, p. 198). Experience is our capacity to be shaped by the objects we perceive, to become them in the mode of mentally representing them. But it does not follow for Barth that God, as experienceable, is a datum of our environment. Against the "Cartesian" imperative that "nothing [...] is it to be recognized as religiously valid but what can be found in the reality present to us and produced again out of our direct experience" (Karl Holl), Barth argues that "we do not find the Word of God in the reality present to us. Rather—and this is something quite different—the Word of God finds us in the reality present to us" (CD I/1, pp. 195-6).

obstacles to perceiving objects.[144] The idea which proves God's existence must be transparent if it is to relay the objectivity (existence reference) which is the goal of the proof. God himself, according to Barth, establishes this objectivity whenever our ideas are used to refer to God. It is established through the activity of God who is more than idea. When we contemplate this idea, it overtakes us. This is the meaning of *participation* in Barth's thought. We know God through being included in God's own self-knowledge.[145] The event of revelation, which is what is meant by the knowledge of God, is not different in *form* from any other kind of valid knowledge of reality.[146] The truth of knowledge—and this means the *certitude* we may possess concerning the power of our ideas to communicate reality—is, in the case of our knowledge of God, ensured by the action of God himself (presence as inner perception of *his* other). This action is our participation in God, and participation is itself mediated by "sound reason:"

> The power of the transition [from ignorance and unbelief to faith and knowledge] is the power of this particular divine seeing and thinking and speaking. Its effect is, therefore, something that takes place to and in the reason of each one. It is a receiving in which the divine seeing and thinking and speaking in Jesus Christ finds its response in a human, Christian seeing and understanding and knowing, in an awakening and enlightenment of the reason. To bring about this response is the operation of the power of which we speak. In accordance with the nature and the particular attitude of God

144. In the discussion of Descartes below I elaborate on this ontological duality of ideas.

145. "From eternity and in eternity God is knowable to Himself. For this reason and in this way He is also knowable among us and for us. It is because this is so that the foundation of our knowledge of God is so sure, and the knowledge of God such a powerful and irresistible event. How can there be opposition, how can there be doubt and difficulty, when we have to do with the actualization of an eternal possibility, God's own possibility? When God is really known, the decision which is made contains within itself the cognizance that God is knowable, and that He is knowable on the strength of His own being and activity. Although this decision is taken only in faith, in time, and in the dialectic of our thinking, which is a human and not a divine thinking, it has all the weight which is proper to it, because God is knowable to Himself." (CD II/1, p. 67)

146. "The secular form without the divine content is not the Word of God and the divine content without the secular form is also not the Word of God. We can neither stop at the secular form as such nor can we fly off beyond this and try to enjoy the divine content alone. The one would be realistic theology, the other idealistic theology, and both bad theology." (CD I/1, p. 175) On the tension in Christian thought between the logical form of its conceptuality and speech, and God as the ultimate content described in penultimate descriptions, see Dietrich Ritschl, *The Logic of Theology: A Brief Account of the Relationship between Basic Concepts in Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 78-97.

> to each one, it will be the particular answer of each one. But it will be a logical answer corresponding to the logical attitude of God. In virtue of this power man will be one who sees and understands and knows. If it did not have this effect it would not be this power. (CD IV/2, p. 313)[147]

I want to conclude this study of Barth by a consideration of two aspects of his thought, one focusing on its subjective and epistemic side, the other a consideration of his ontology of knowledge. A comparison with the method of Descartes shows surprising common ground between he and Barth on this question, but it also highlights the distinctive way in which Barth regards reason as operating in his own science, that of theology. The final section in this chapter contrasts the classical doctrine of analogy of being with Barth's attempt at a radical reversal of that tradition in his concept of the analogy of faith.

II

Barth's Cartesianism[148] For Descartes human reason is theoretically grounded in special features of the mind's natural constitution: the innate idea of God[149] which guarantees that reasoning will have a valid outcome. But how does this claim work in Descartes? The idea of God possesses formally (objectively) the perfections of God by which all ideas are so constituted that the natural power of reasoning, which is informed and constituted by the idea of God, can

---

147. Paul Ricoeur has noted that the notion of participation involves the concept of analogy as part of the logic which explains how participation occurs. "To participate means, approximately, to have partially what another possesses or is fully. As a result the struggle for an adequate concept of participation underpins the struggle for an adequate concept of analogy." See Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, tr. Robert Czerny, et. al., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 274.

148. For a good general introduction to what is meant by Cartesianism in Christian theology, see Gordon E. Michalson, "Cartesianism" in Alister E. McGrath, et. al., eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), pp. 67-71.

149. The *idea* of God is "simply the concept corresponding to" the expression (*Letters*, 105; to Mersenne, June 16, 1641). See Meditation 3 (PW 2: 26); *Letters*, 104. See also PW 1: 303-4, and 199-200, where it becomes apparent that the designation of ideas as innate is intended to answer the question of the genesis of the idea of God. "When people have an idea of some intricate machine, they generally know where they got the idea from; but we do not in the same way have a recollection of the idea of God being sent to us from God, since we have always possessed it. Accordingly, we should not go on to inquire into the source of our being, given that we have within us an idea of the supreme perfections of God" (*Principles*, Pt. 1, §20; PW 1: 199-200). This possession amounts to the innate capacity in our minds for "summoning up the idea" of God (PW 2: 132).

have certainty of the truth of its ideas, whenever they are clear and distinct ideas.[150] On this model of cognition God does not act directly to invest ideas in the human mind. God always acts through things and ideas are the fundamental currency through which intellectual contact with things takes place. Yet, for Descartes (contra the scholastics) we do not derive from things our knowledge of their natures. The movement is always from ideas in the thinking subject outward.[151] In Descartes's method something strange happens to ideas, which become the media of our knowledge both of ourselves, of God, and of the natural world.

It is part of Descartes's originality that he should speak of the *idea* of God at all. The tradition knows of ideas (exemplars of things) *in* God, but never an exemplar *of* God in idea.[152] In Descartes the ontological status of ideas is ambiguated. Ideas possess a reality of their own quite independent of their representational functions. The idea of God is rather like a paradigmatic and perfect criterion which formally structures clear and distinct conception so that when I clearly and distinctly perceive an idea in my mind, this self-awareness is already a guarantee that its content is also true. The invention of mind consists in discriminating within the power of thought

---

150. See here, in addition to Meditation 3, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, a. 30 (PW I, p. 203). Clear and distinct perception is true because our minds are the effect and abiding light of God's natural ordering of things. The "light of nature or faculty of knowledge which God gave us can never encompass any object which is not true in so far as it is indeed encompassed by this faculty, that is, in so far as it is clearly and distinctly perceived" (PW 1: 203).

151. See his letter to Gibieuf, 19 January 1642, (*Letters*, p. 123): "You inquire about the principle by which I claim to know that the idea I have of something is not *an idea made inadequate by the abstraction of my intellect*. I derive this knowledge purely from my own thought or consciousness. I am certain that I can have no knowledge of what is outside me except by means of the idea I have within me; and so I take great care not to relate my judgments immediately to things in the world, and not to attribute to such things anything positive which I do not first perceive in the ideas of them."

152. See Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene, "Ideas, in and before Descartes," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995), pp. 87-106. The authors note how Descartes transforms the traditional concept of ideas. His criterion of clarity and distinctness conflates the objectivity of ideas and their subjective imitation of an object, so that an idea is "both the act of thinking and what is thought of *as* the object of thought" (p. 99). That Descartes's first readers were confused by his description of God as an ideas in the mind is stated in Caterus's objection.

a normative faculty (and method) for judging the veracity, or lack of it, in our perceptions.[153] The idea of God is thus thought to be constitutive of the possibility of offering justification for the sort of rationality which Descartes is seeking.[154] Descartes is not saying we directly intuit God.[155] God is already given in the light of nature. What the method does is bring this to mind in such a way that we see that without this specific God there could be no grounded rational discourse, *and* without reason there could be no knowledge of this God, in the imaging of whom our very minds are alive. The idea of God is sufficient to prove the world since it contains "more objective reality" than any ideas of "finite substance" do.[156] If it is possible, thinks Descartes, that any of my ideas could be proved merely probable (and so less than certain), then *none* of my ideas will have the status of knowledge. It does not follow from this that when *some* ideas are capable of being shown certain, that all will immediately have this status. When Descartes invokes the *existence* of God, he is devising a method which is *formally* similar to what Barth tries to work out in his own method.

---

153. In Ian Hacking's economic summary, Descartes "invented" the mind by "putting sensations and beliefs into the same organ." See Ian Hacking, "Is the End in Sight for Epistemology?" *The Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), p. 579. On how Descartes uses clear and distinct ideas foundationally to order, and even amend, ideas which are not clear and distinct (a class which includes all ideas other than God and the self), see Alan Nelson, "Descartes's Ontology of Thought," *Topoi* 16 (1997), pp. 163-78.

154. See on Descartes and the onto-theological basis of his metaphysics in Jean-Luc Marion, "Descartes and Onto-Theology," in (ed.) Phillip Blonde, *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 67-106.

155. On the light of nature in Descartes, see Gary Hatfield "Reason, Nature, and God in Descartes," in *Essays on the Philosophy and Science of René Descartes*, in Stephen Voss, ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Commenting on the remark that God is the efficient cause of all things (*Principles* I, a. 28; PW 1, p. 202) Hatfield outlines the interplay between reason, God and nature in Descartes's metaphysics. "Knowledge of God's attributes is here attributed to human reason, but only as a result of divine will. It is by God's will that we can know his attributes, such as immutability. *The knowledge revealed to us by the divine will in this instance is not a gift of revelation, known through the light of grace; it is known by the light of nature. But the light of nature itself, and its ability to afford knowledge of God, is a gift from God.*" (p. 276; emphasis added) That we know of God by the natural light, through the idea of God innate in us all, is itself true only as God wills it to be so. Descartes "frees himself from the alleged tension between knowledge dependent on God and knowledge of God" (p. 277). The circularity of this relationship is very like Barth's use of the Anselmic idea of God: it is an idea which is instrumental in the reasoning which exhibits its reality.

156. See Meditation 3, PW 2, p. 28.

Barth denies that we have direct knowledge of God. However, in his notion of God's own twofold objectivity we enjoy the immediacy of direct perception, while preserving the negative limit—as the Creator-creature boundary—in knowledge of God.[157] He thinks that the dialectical form of human knowing deprives it of theoretical certainty, which Anselmic rationality provides and that any theoretical grounding or justification of knowledge in general requires a logical necessity. The certainty of knowledge does issue from the ability of the knower to justify that knowledge by showing how it could emerge out of an analysis of epistemic structures. The certainty of faith cannot eliminate doubt entirely, since faith never claims a decisive or final form to knowledge of God. Nonetheless, he does devise a rational method which he takes to be valid and to rely on rules for governing thought in its search for the underlying meaning of the real. Barth's rejection of extratheological criteria for judging theological truth claims is based in his conception of God, not in irrational commitments. One *must* express theological claims, including the claim that theology is not beholden to philosophy, in the same language and conceptual medium as the one in which philosophy works. What Barth ultimately rejects is not philosophy, but *metaphysics*, and this only when it is proposed as the rational criterion for making theology scientific. Theology, like any science, can only claim to be scientific when it conforms to the object it is trying to understand. In this sense theology is scientific, which implies that theology must always be revising its claims in keeping with what it discovers concerning its proper object.[158]

For instance, it is only in the event of revelation and in the consequent reflection on it that we come to understand why natural theology cannot present a valid understanding of how God is known in and relates to the world. It is because God *is* God's revelation that any conditions for its interpretation must derive from the event itself. The knowledge acquired by revelation is not contrary to rational knowledge, it is simply not derivable from *theoretical justifications* for that

157. I discuss this conception of objectivity later in this chapter.

158. The proper object of theology is the believing community's talk about God. However, since God is the content of this talk, God is indirectly the object of theological concern.

knowledge. However, Barth does take up and apply those theoretical justifications when he devises a model of revelation which is an analogue to a specific model of concept formation. The doctrine of God as Trinity is for Barth the *theoretical* justification of the possibility of knowledge of God.[159] For Barth, the *possibility* of knowledge of God is not a function of the possibility of knowledge philosophically conceived (metaphysics). This is what is meant by his repeated denial that he is developing an *a priori* method. It is, rather, a function of the fact of such a knowledge actualistically conceived in the concrete, historical occurrence of Jesus as the Christ. What can only be negatively present in philosophical rationality, grounded in an autonomous human reason, is present positively in theological rationality, which differs in its concepts and language only, but importantly, in that it sees their possibility a originating in God and not in ourselves. In its theological employment, reason is a mirror, not a lamp.

Reason is the medium, not the end of thinking for Barth. Descartes and Barth both think that God is necessary to explain the metaphysical basis of knowledge (its possibility), but there is an important difference. In Descartes's method God is operative through a natural process in which the human mind is thought capable of discovering truths which God plants in nature, including human nature. The human mind differs from God mainly in that God possesses the innate and implicit truths which human substance has in its mode as finite, in the inimitable mode of infinity proper to God alone.

Descartes's philosophy of God relies heavily on a conception of infinity as a *positive* property of God. The idea of God is logically superior, but temporally consequent upon the idea of self: the idea of God has much greater logical explanatory function, but is reliant on a method of cognitive discovery for our knowledge and use of it. On closer analysis the idea of God thus known contains properties which the human self could not possibly invent or attribute to it. The

159. The claim here is not that For Barth the Trinity is a theory as opposed to an ontological reality. It is rather that because God is the agent who makes knowledge of God possible and actual, the description of God's nature enters into the account of how knowledge of God is possible. Since God is, on Barth's rather impressive accounting, Trinitarian, the Trinity figures in any justification of knowledge of God.

border between divine and human conceptuality is primarily that of finite and infinite. Conception has a univocity of meaning, but in God's case infinity dissolves the limits which finite conception requires. But this positive infinity has a negative consequent. God's perfections are held infinitely, so that any of our attempts to conceive of God end in incomprehensibility. *Incomprehensibility* is the hallmark of Descartes's view of our knowledge of God. This means, though, that for Descartes God *in himself* is knowable only negatively as what I am not.[160] In such a method the idea of God—from which *alone* we can infer the reality of God—is never commensurable with the reality it is supposed to represent. Human reason and God are bound together in such a way that our reasoning is an indication of the content of God's nature, the idea of whom furnishes our reasoning with the materials for its own representation of reality. We need only remind ourselves of the divine infinity to prevent the apotheosis of reason. The theological effect of Descartes's way of ideas is to redirect the causal mechanisms by which participation in the divine reality is explicated. Now, in Descartes, God will come *after* the methodological disclosure of the paradigmatic *ideas* of self and God in a method which, nonetheless, relies on both the idea of God and the practice of reason for its realization. It is as if I must invent God and self before these can be used to prove self and God.

Barth, on the other hand, argues that human beings, before and after their illumination by God the Spirit, lack any organ or native power to know God. They do know God, but always through the same power and dynamic. There is no method which, when applied to our cognitive capabilities, discloses a dormant concept of God sufficient to construct a perfect instance of indubitable knowledge. Barth's proof and method is intended to exhibit the logic of the idea of God as entailing necessary existence, but at the same time to be a foundational instance of the knowledge of God. The idea of God cannot operate in Barthian method as it does in the Cartesian

160. In a letter to Clerselier (from 23 April, 1649), Descartes writes: "*It is sufficient for me to understand this.* I mean, that it is sufficient for me to understand *the fact that God is not comprehended by me* in order to conceive God in very truth and as He is, provided that I judge also that there are in Him all perfections which I clearly conceive, and also many more which I cannot comprehend" (*Letters*, p. 255). God is what I cannot comprehend.

method. The God which comes to mind in Descartes's idea of God describes a natural aptitude of human reason, whereas for Barth the idea describing God is not properly an idea at all. Both rely on an unexpressed assumption concerning something *given* to the mind, something without which it could not think God. They disagree, however, as to the locus in which this donation primarily resides: for Barth it is the mind of the believer seeking understanding. For Descartes, though, it is the innate form of reasoning as such (its natural light) which thus exhibits a primal affinity between reason and nature such that the former instinctively represents the latter accurately. Barth regards this natural affinity as something which has to be created in and with the revealing act of God. It is "natural" only as appearing to be the only possible solution to problems which human reason can expose but cannot resolve.

The concept of *something than which a greater cannot be conceived* acts to affirm the reality of God and to frustrate every conceptuality in which God is said to be defined. It is an idea in virtue of being a "something," but it turns against any closure and thus lacks the property of definition requisite for an idea. For, the object it contemplates is always "greater" than anything conceivable. The end of knowing God is living in a relationship to God, it is not the production of ever more concepts. In Barth, concepts are themselves transparent, i.e. not obstructing the mind's access to objects which they represent. Barth recognizes no *idea* of God. The definition he borrows from Anselm seems intended to both stimulate reason to think God and undermine any final end to this act of reasoning about God. Every theological description is an insufficient attempt to name its object, and so there can be no idea or ideas which definitively describe God. That we know God for certain (it is a "fact") is the result of God's own action in us. We, indeed, do the thinking, and *are autonomous*, yet we are not isolated from God in such reasoning activity. However, Barth does not regard revelation as adding a faculty to our rational capacities which we can then use to show precisely *how* we know God. It is only in and with the *event* of divine self-giving that we have the certainty of faith, to which correspond, in an *a posteriori* reflection, the necessary subordination of thinking to thing thought. The comparison of the use of the idea of

God in Descartes and in Barth has limits of style and temperament which are readily apparent. It is instructive in that it shows how Barth's thought is thoroughly shaped by the modern philosophical problematic, even while he rails against that problematic as the source of theological distortion. The value of such a comparison is that it shows how both thinkers regard God as necessary for understanding the theoretical basis of knowledge, and how the role of the rational human subject is a problem in any such appeal to God. Both thinkers seek a *foundational certitude* which is able to ground knowledge by enabling us to distinguish true from false knowledge claims.

The difference between Barth and Descartes on the question of God is perhaps best seen in the way these thinkers use the concept of *infinity*. Descartes thinks of infinity as the quantitative modes of perfection which always and everywhere *differences* God from all other reality. Only the amount of knowledge, not its quality (truthfulness) or kind, separate God's knowing from ours. The qualitative likeness is what gives our knowledge—when clear and distinct (certain)—an identity with the divine knowing. Infinity is thus a *positive* attribute of our idea of the divine for it assures that our natural faculties of knowing deliver to us knowledge of God as knowledge of nature (God's work). In Descartes infinity has also a negative factor. Infinity prevents the confusion of our own reasoning activity (and our reflection on its perfection as the medium of knowledge) from the presumption that it could itself have created the idea of God. Incomprehension, as the sign of the divine infinity in out thought, is the sure sign that it is God whom we are contemplating.[161]

---

161. Jean-Luc Marion comes to a similar conclusion. He also sees Cartesian rationality as structuring a concept of God which is marked by incomprehensibility. "From the fact of the incomprehensibility of God it does not follow that we must renounce rational knowledge of God; on the contrary, it is a matter of permitting rationality to have knowledge beyond methodic objectivity, even of infinity as such, that is to say, as incomprehensible to the finite. Incomprehensibility will henceforth become the most certain indication that it is really God that is known by the *cogitatio*, in accordance with the rule that nothing divine can be known except as incomprehensible, and that nothing incomprehensible can be offered to the *cogitatio* that does not, in the end, concern God" See Jean-Luc Marion, "The Essential Incoherence of Descartes's Definition of Divinity," tr. F. P. Van de Pitte, in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, ed., *Essays on Descartes's* Meditations (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 310.

Beyssade notes, however, that Descartes's concept of incomprehensibility authorizes our cognition, but not our knowledge of God. "The truth of my idea is ensured *thanks to* this lack of comprehension, this intellectual understanding of the incomprehensibility, and not *in spite of* it" (ibid., p. 89). The idea of God is thus positively infinite and not merely a construct from the negation of finitude. God in himself is perfectly comprehensible, to God, but in our thought appears as infinite and incomprehensible.

Barth is more suspicious of the use of infinity (see above, chpt. 2, II, (b), n. 43). He sees it as the governing idea through which "the first being itself, as subject of this infinite predicate, is undoubtedly the [human] person at work" (CD II/1, p. 290). If Descartes is correct, and our cognition can be certain and infallible because mind is *in*formed by the divine image in an operational, as distinct from a relational, sense, then our subjective nature is the source and medium of our knowledge of God. Barth thinks that this *natural* affinity substitutes for, and occludes the possibility of, a non-natural and spiritual affinity.

But what, after all, is the difference between saying, as Barth does, that our knowledge of God is conceptually mediated but *not* conceptually originated, and saying, as Descartes does, that our knowledge is as such, when clear and distinct, identical with God's knowledge and thus necessarily true? The difference is that in Barth's model the character of conceptuality is altered by the object known, whereas in Descartes's model the object known is altered by the requirements of a model of conceptuality. The *control* which Descartes wants to exercise over knowledge Barth denies to human rationality, without denying rationality as such. Reason is thus *decentred* in Barth,[162] grounded in God, to whom it must always return if it is to have any knowledge of the metaphysical basis of its own knowing. This difference is theologically foundational, and is in fact the only difference which epistemically separates the two models. Barth's position is influenced by Descartes's model since, as a modern thinker, Barth has adopted the *representational* theory of knowledge. Knowing is having a mental image, picture, or symbolic stand-in for things themselves. Adopting this model makes it difficult for Barth to separate his theological knowledge from Descartes's philosophical theology, for no *difference within conceptuality* can emerge when one starts from within conceptuality and must adopt the implications of such a model. Nonetheless, Barth clearly wants to overcome the philosophical opponent on his own turf, and so tackle the problem of rationality at its root.

The difference between Descartes and Barth could be summarized as follows. For

Descartes, the *idea* of God somehow ensures that whatever I conceive clearly and distinctly must be true just because it is clearly and distinctly perceived. This idea comes in and with the natural light of the human mind, which means that Descartes's method begins in the domain of anthropology. For Barth, the only clear and distinct idea which we *can* have is the idea of God born out of the event of revelation. This idea is not an epistemological rule for judging the validity of all ideas. It produces the decisive distinction between God and creatures and the logical distinction between the necessary one and the contingent many. In Descartes the necessity and certainty proper only to a demonstration of the idea of God become a property of a specific *mode* of human cognition. The necessity which Barth confines to reasoning in Anselmic fashion to and about God, Descartes attributes to human thought as such (rationality). Descartes thereby inflates the necessity emergent in Anselm's philosophical theology, making it the proof of true, because *certain*, cognition.[163] Barth's conception of certainty narrows the scope of its valid application. The consequence of linking certainty of thought and necessity of being to a theological rationality is that other forms of reasoning are rendered merely epistemically probable. If clarity and distinctness are the criteria of the true, then on Barth's epistemology *only God is known for certain* (truly), for in knowing God we transcend the limitations of a our dialectically constituted reasoning.[164]

---

163. Anselm's metaphysics, especially Anselm's adaptation of classical (Aristotelian) first philosophy, is indeed preparatory for Descartes's own refounding of first philosophy, and consequent inauguration of modern metaphysics of subjectivity. See the persuasive argument to this effect in Gerald Galgan, *God and Subjectivity* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), esp. pp. 90-96.

164. The difference, explains Gareth B. Matthews, between the modern strategies for proving God and the (classical) Augustinian one is that in Augustine, "At most we have an argument for proving the existence of God from the fact of knowledge, not one for proving the fact of knowledge from the existence and nature of God." See *Thought's Ego in Augustine and Descartes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 173. This second category is Cartesian, and it also describes Barth's method; Barth begins with an assertion of the fact of existence of God expressed in the form of an idea (though the nature of God is bracketed off as unknown for the sake of the argument) and then seeks to argue that the God indicated in the idea is the basis of being, knowledge, and the true arbiter of their union. To be sure, Barth denies that this concept is an inchoate "doctrine of God," requiring only our analytic elaboration of it for a catalogue of attributes. The formal similarity is nonetheless there, and it distinguishes Barth's method from aspects of classical ways of developing rational method in theology.

Such comparison is instructive for how it illumines the differences between these thinkers. While the method is similar the conclusions differ radically. On the one hand, Barth is severe in his criticism of Descartes's epistemology as applied to theological method. Such an epistemology distorts the interpretive process by demanding that the tradition now be interpreted to correlate with foundations derived using a secular rationality, that is, a rationality developed without reference to tradition or revelation. Barth thinks that positive infinity conceals a qualitative difference, which permits the substitution of human for divine personality, that is, a priority of the human to the divine personality. He rejects Descartes's method since it fails to prove God's existence as it claims to. He remarks, in commenting on Descartes's *Meditations*, that

> In so far as he expressly sees in the fact of God's existence the appropriate means for carrying out his enterprise, he is not far from the possibility of keeping it. But the very way in which he proves the existence of God, the very existence of the God proved to exist in this way, can only serve to make apparent the complete failure of his whole undertaking. For since his demonstration of certitude is not adequate at this point, it cannot be adequate at all. (CD III/1, p. 359)

The problem of proof is that the only criteria Barth recognizes as valid for it are ones which demonstrate only a "human possibility," that is, a logical exercise demonstrating an art or act of thought, and not a relationship into which one can enter with a reality that is preveniently extralogical.[165] Proofs involve a rational act in which "man cannot help attributing objective existence to the object of one of his ideas." But so long as the proof depends upon this attributing action, it cannot escape the charges Barth brings against Descartes, namely, that his proof does nothing more than unfold an idea of God whose existence remains dubitable. For any such attribution is itself the construction of an idea which has its origin in the human mind and not the

---

165. "How can the objective existence of God be demonstrated so long as the supreme force of the proof consists in the necessity under the pressure of which man cannot help attributing objective existence to the object of one of his ideas, so that its force is only that of the one who proves and not of the self-demonstration of the One whose existence is to be proved? Anything less than the latter cannot be required in a proof of the existence of God. For by anything less the existence of *God*, the existence of the One who exists originally, necessarily and essentially, beyond all human constructs and conceptions, cannot be demonstrated. By anything less the divine character of this being is not respected. How, then, can it be *this* being whose existence is proved?" (CD III/1, p. 360)

object it seeks to establish.

Thus, Barth recognizes two virtues in Descartes's method. First, he affirms Descartes's claim that "Nature in itself and as such, the actual conjunction of our thinking with the other than ourselves which our senses suggest to us as similarly existent, is able to convey this truth to us only because it is created by God and because the God who is its Creator Himself bears witness to us that this is so" (CD III/1, p. 362).[166] Barth commends Descartes's realist reference, and recognizes that the validity of our cognitive power of representation is founded in the demonstration of God's existence, without which nothing could counter a sceptical erosion of knowledge. Second, Barth affirms the circularity of the logic of *this* foundational exercise.[167] I have discussed in the treatment of transcendental arguments above, the conceptual method in which this circularity is inevitable and fruitful.

What results from the argument thus developed is not an idea of God but an idea of the limit of reasoning with respect to God. Within reason *any* idea is equivocal and cannot be univocally predicated of God. Even in faith, arguing to God is arguing to a limit, a boundary we must establish if we are not to confuse our thinking of God with God's essence or self-knowledge.

---

166. On realism in Descartes see Brian O' Neal, *Epistemological Direct Realism in Descartes's Philosophy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974).

167. Barth also says that we cannot fault Descartes for starting from the idea of God or "the human thought picture of a supremely perfect being. For beings who are not themselves God there is in practice no other possible approach. Even a Christian who in his confession thinks he is able to demonstrate in faith and the summons to faith the existence of God refers to his idea of God conceived in faith and expressed in confession. But the *circular argument* and the human conception without which even Christian faith cannot prove God's existence are not to be regarded as powerful instruments in the hands of man. Descartes uses them as such. He needs only to produce the idea of God from the treasury or deficiency of his mind and at once it stands at his disposal with no less but no greater power than the idea of a triangle. And equally well, and interchangeably with the existence of God, he can demonstrate the validity of his criterion of truth, just as on the basis of the latter he can prove the existence of God. The very power which he wields in this matter also shows his powerlessness. The idea and existence of this God produced from his mind, and alternately demonstrated and demonstrating, used by him and serving him, clearly remain within the circle which Descartes' Meditations are intended to break. From within it is quite impossible to reach out either to the transcendence of God who confronts man in sovereign omnipotence, existing for Himself and therefore existing for man, to the transcendence of a subject of human thought which is not exhausted in the act of thinking, or to the transcendence of a real external world *attained by our thought but not included within it. The God of Descartes is hopelessly enchained within the mind of man.*" (CD III/1, p. 359-60; emphasis added)

The circular pattern of reasoning in arguments for God's existence is neither vicious or vacuous. The circular logic points only to a conceptual requirement for *thinking God's relation to the world.* It recognizes the methodological risks attaching to such arguments, and thus seeks to limit their application to specific sorts of objects. The concept of God is such an object, and is peculiar in that we cannot hope to advance toward its clarification unless we begin with a general (and vague) notion of it, and thus get our deduction started. That we conclude to the concept (object) we started with is the source of circularity. However, it is not an empty exercise. For, while we see an identity between our starting and our terminus, the concept with which we conclude has richer content than when we began. The salient difference from the original concept is a measure of rational certainty which the proof, by exhibiting God's necessary existence, transmits to the concept or name of God which generates it. The proof becomes a mode of thinking that unique object of thought which is God, even though it is not so much a concept or thing, as it is the *relation of transcending all things and our thinking of them.* We do not, thinks Barth, access God by some rationally discontinuous and ecstatic experience or event. To think *von Gott aus*, as Barth puts it, is not to escape the structures of reality, but through them to find a vantage point which God's own action indicates. "The 'standpoint of God' from which the theologian is supposed to think," explains Robert Jenson, "is not the point where *God* is, but the point *to* which *he directs* us—which is precisely down here in this world along with the rest of the people. And if all philosophy is alien to the Word, so is all theology."[168]

On the other hand, Barth criticizes Descartes with a call for the intensification of doubt and of certainty. Cartesian doubt is not extreme enough, and so neither is Cartesian certainty. Barth thinks that our "consciousness of ourselves and the world, i.e., our awareness and conception of our ego, and of people and things existing outside ourselves, might well be a matter of mere supposition, of pure appearance, a form of nothingness, and our step from consciousness to being

168. Robert W. Jenson, "Response," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 28 (1972), p. 32.

a hollow fiction." Moreover, it is "not true that we have an immediate awareness of our own or any other reality" (CD III/1, p. 345). We entertain this immediacy as a "supposition" (*Vermutung*), and not a demonstrated fact. It is just as difficult to demonstrate that nothing is real, as it is to demonstrate that our "consciousness actually implies existence" (CD III/1, p. 345). "Irrefutable" is the supposition that existence implies reality, but it is also not something which can take the form of a positive assertion, and thereby come into the orbit of proof. We are "certainly not in a position to verify our healthy idea" (CD III/1, p. 345) that existence implies reality. As soon as we seek to prove that our representation of reality is true, then we subject representation itself to a test which it cannot pass. For, every representation, however theoretically refined or objective, bears within it the artifacts of its objectification, which is the trace or residue of its construction by reason. Barth denies that we can escape the confinement of consciousness and think our way to being or existence. Descartes was insufficiently radical, for he reserved some capacity, idea or power of human thought as a starting point to reach what Barth thinks cannot be reached from within the subject. At this point we see how the formal similarity between Barth and Descartes comes to an end. In Barth we can describe the logical movement or form of our knowledge of God, but the material participation in God is what gives the reasoning its content. Descartes wants to have the knowledge of God without revelation. Barth denies that knowledge of God is possible without revelation. If revelation is lacking, no certainty can be enjoyed in the former modes of awareness. The revelation of creation immediately entails a confidence that our consciousness does imply existence. "We have to be told by our Creator that we and all that exists outside us are His creatures. Then in assured recognition we can and must and may and will also say that we are, that something is. This has to be said to us" (CD III/1, p. 347).[169]

There is no way to move from within subjectivity to existence (objectivity) which is not undermined by the fact that the existence or objectivity thus demonstrated is the creation of a

169. See III (a) of this chapter for a fuller treatment of how Barth understands revelation.

thinking *subject.*[170] This is why Barth rejects the premise of Descartes's version of the ontological proof. The fact that God speaks the word which overcomes the doubt about reality implies that we are not simply concerned with a mental content, it means that we are "not referring to the content of an immediate consciousness of God which is bound up with our consciousness of ourselves and the world and originally underlies it" (CD III/1, p. 347). Even if we grant that there is an idea of God which we can determine, it would be constructed from within the domain of consciousness, and would itself be analyzable into ideas which all belong to the subject and thus unable to prove that existence is real.[171] Even allowing that we could derive an idea of God as the substrate or matrix of our self-consciousness and consciousness of the world, we remain within consciousness and have not shown how it can be identified with being or reality. "All this does not materially help us to cross the bridge from *mere consciousness* to the *apprehension of the truth of being*, to the *recognition of existence*" (CD III/1, p. 347; emphasis added). We see here why Barth would insist that the idea of God which he employs in his outworking of an Anselmic rationality would have to originate outside of consciousness in a divine revelation. The only sort of an idea of God which can get us from consciousness to being is an idea which is more than simply a modification of mind but *at the same time* an effect of a being who is *known* to exist:

> If our consciousness of God has to guarantee for our ego and our consciousness of the world that we are concerned with being itself and not mere appearance, then obviously the idea of God has to be something more than a mere idea. God himself has to exist if the idea of God required to vouch to us for the real existence of what is otherwise known to us only in consciousness; if our sense of God is really to raise our self-consciousness and consciousness of the world into an apprehension of objective reality.

---

170. For illuminating remarks of the interlinking of general, theoretical and conditioned truths, see Karl Barth, *Ethics*, D. Braun, ed., (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), pp. 63-67.

171. Even if we suppose that there is an idea of God as an "immediate content of consciousness [...] that it is characteristic of the essence of the created spirit; that apart from its self-consciousness and consciousness of the world it possesses also the capacity (perhaps to be exercised *via negationis, eminentiae,* and *causalitatis)* to form the idea of a most perfect being; or more, that this is the most characteristic and all-comprehensive faculty of spirit; that in the formation of this idea it develops its own deepest essence; and finally that this idea deserves to be called the idea of God, and the peculiar consciousness from which it springs deserves to be called the consciousness of God," (CD III/1, p. 347) this does not help us out of the outsidelessness which is the condition of finite human beings.

(CD III/1, p. 347)

The answer to the question of how Cartesian metaphysics knows that God *exists* lies in the notion of infinity regarded as the illimitable possession of all perfections.[172] However, the appeal to perfection is simply another version of "the hypothesis that we are and that something is" and is thus too deeply involved in the "circle of consciousness and being," that is, it relies too heavily on our *presupposition* that consciousness implies existence to stand as a *proof* that God exists independently of our idea of God, an idea which must bridge thought and being to achieve the proof it is used to achieve. So Barth reduces the problem to a dilemma. Either we can remain bogged down in the vagaries of self- and world-consciousness in which all our ideas of God, world and self can have no more than the status of a "presupposition," or we can know the real existence of our self, other selves, and the world as an implication of the doctrine of creation. Creation doctrine does not simply tell us that our existence comes from God. In Barth's conception of it, it makes the more radically involving claim that *only* in hearing God communicate this to us can we know *that* we exist.[173]

Thus, the intensification of Cartesian doubt and certainty amounts to denying that we can know ourselves *directly*. Absent this knowledge, we cannot build from consciousness outward any certain knowledge of God or the world. Barth's alternative proof is one in which the concept of God is derived from revelation, and thus bypasses the complications of a method grounded in consciousness. The idea of God must enter into consciousness, but it *cannot originate there*. One difficulty facing this view is that *something than which a greater cannot be conceived* is not an idea. Or, if it is such, it is a paradoxical concept: the source of all rationality is not itself rationally

---

172. On the appropriation and adaptation by Christian philosophy of *perfection* from classical Greek metaphysics, see Martin Foss, *The Idea of Perfection in the Western World*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), pp, 25-57, especially pp. 30-33, where he criticizes Anselm of Canterbury for establishing divine perfection by means of negation.

173. The "hearing" here includes a wide range of media, and is not to be taken as a direct audit from God to the individual. God "speaks" this word to creation, and Barth construes this communication as God's covenant with all people and things.

circumscribable in thought. It is precisely the fact that concepts are limited, that they cannot and do not purport to be about everything, that enables us to use them to discriminate what they do and do not include. Right at the beginning, therefore, Barth's argument uses a concept which signals the peculiarity of this mode of reasoning as corresponding to the singularity of the object it describes. As a liminal notion—a boundary *between* thought and being which regulates the discursive movement between these magnitudes—it is fundamentally a relational concept. It is a concept in that something intelligible comes to mind with its aid. It is beyond conception in that the thought in which we engage reality through it is always extending the limit of every concept. Anselmic rationality focuses more on relations than on the terms connected by them. It knows by faith that God exists. It constantly discovers by reason the extent to which the human being is and is not godlike.

Put in terms of Cartesian epistemology, Barth's claim against Descartes's use of the ontological argument is that it may achieve a logical *clarity* of concept, but at the expense of an ontological *distinctness* of the nature contemplated in the concept.[174] Of course Barth's alternative is burdened with the same difficulty. If the only conditions under which we can be certain that we and the world are real are ones which require that we accept on faith the doctrine of creation and the faithfulness of God which underwrite creation, then we have not so much bridged the problematic middle zone of existence and connected with ultimate reality as we have assumed a different reality. The problem with Barthian rationality is the problem of the *transition* from the totally relativistic dimension of our experience-based way of knowing, to a transcendent object which is beyond the possibility of such a human epistemology. The givenness of the Anselmic notion or concept would solve the problem of origin and transmission, but the question remains concerning how a human mind, for which such an entity is unknowable, *recognizes* that it is indeed an idea of God it is entertaining.

---

174. See on this *Anselm*, p. 171. Though, as I've argued above, incomprehension, not clarity, is the hallmark of Descartes's actual philosophical construction of God.

This discussion of Barth and Cartesian philosophical theology is intended to show the extent to which Barth's project is worked out *within* the epistemological problematic of modern philosophy's treatment of the idea of God. I think Barth's analysis of Descartes's failure to prove existence is correct and that it shows that Barth wants a way out of the aporetic end of Cartesian innatism. I think, in addition, that because Barth shares the belief that thought is divorced from being or reality that his own reasoning must indicate the same failure to reach reality as does Descartes. Perhaps, as Fergus Kerr suggests, Barth would have been better off abandoning the Cartesian framework altogether.

> But the question surely is whether by accepting the problem of the existence of the external world *in these terms*—presupposition, hypothesis, consciousness, the first person viewpoint, certainty and all the rest—without the slightest protest—Barth has not conceded everything to Descartes already. [...] Far from seeking to radicalize Cartesianism he should have abandoned it.[175]

III

(a) *The Language of Faith*. The concept of revelation is central to Barth's thought. He recognizes many possible meanings of the word revelation, based upon how it is commonly used. In his own thought, revelation "means the publication of something private, something hidden."[176] Revelation has its secular meaning against which Barth juxtaposes a Christian

---

175. See Fergus Kerr, "Cartesianism According to Karl Barth," *New Blackfriars* 77 (1996), pp. 367-8.

176. See Karl Barth, "The Christian Understanding of Revelation," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946-52* (London: SCM Press, 1954), pp. 205-40. Barth distinguishes ten points in the general, nonChristian connotations of the idea of revelation. He then places next to these ten points of a Christian conception of revelation. Christian revelation "accepts man absolutely," and "takes place for his salvation." It is a revelation which "man needs not relatively, but absolutely, for his very life and being as man." This revelation is always new, always complete, and always a "revelation which comes to all men with equal strangeness from outside, but which concerns all men with equal ultimacy." Revelation is the "unveiling of certain facts that are fundamentally hidden from man," and which remains free in its occurrence (p. 207). Revelation is self-involving, that is "not an object which man can observe from outside; it is rather one which takes possession of man, seizes hold of him and calls him to action. It is anything but merely speculative" (pp. 207-8). In sum, Christian revelation is a free exchange which is at once the possibility and actuality of *transcendence*, for it is the "self-revelation of the Creator of all that is, the self-revelation of the Lord of all Being. It is not an immanent, this-worldly revelation, but comes from outside man and the cosmos. It is a transcendent revelation" (p. 208). See on the "self-involving" aspect of revelation George Hunsinger, "Truth as Self-Involving: Barth and Lindbeck on the

understanding of it. Christian revelation is the revelation of God. It is the content or origin of revelation in God which gives to it its unique character. "For the Christian," Barth claims, "there is no need of a special enquiry and a special proof to know and to declare who and what God is. For the Christian the revelation is itself the proof, the proof furnished by God Himself. The Christian answer to the question of God's identity is a simple one: He is the subject who acts in His revelation. This act of revelation is a token of His Being and the expression of His nature."[177] Revelation is thus an act of God's being, which is intelligible to its participants, and which is controlled by God. Revelation, in the Christian sense, is God's self-revelation. Its background is creation as a whole, and its foreground is the (above-mentioned) paradoxical incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Its grounding in Christ gives all talk about revelation a paradoxical element which is ineluctable.[178]

For Barth, revelation is also closely associated, though not identical with, the Bible. Understanding revelation involves the hermeneutical task of bringing the horizon of its various historical, cultural, and linguistic contents into meaningful currency with every generation which undertakes to interpret it. But having the Bible is not possessing revelation. The Bible *becomes* the Word of God as and when God's illumining presence is added to its study, proclamation,

---

Cognitive and Performative Aspects of Truth in Theological Discourse," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61 (1993), pp. 41-56.

177. Karl Barth, "The Christian Understanding of Revelation," pp. 208-9.

178. Surely one of the enduring contributions of Soren Kierkegaard is his articulation of the fact that because it is grounded in incarnation, no foundationalist or systemic rationality is able to function as a precondition for understanding or making sense of revelation. The debate continues over whether some form of natural theology is nonetheless useful as an aid to belief, a strengthening of faith which is always sustained in faith. This debate, of course, does not apply to those parts of Christianity which take natural theology to be in some sense necessary to understanding revelation. See the recent criticism of Barth's view of natural theology in James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also the criticism of Barth's rejection of natural theology in Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in Alvin Plantinga and Nicolas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 68-73.

teaching and transmission.[179]

One of the aspects of Barth's radical conception of revelation is the way language is understood in it. I have argued that one of the reasons why reason is necessary to Barth's thought is that talk about God is like other forms of speech in that it operates with language, just as the philosopher does—indeed, with the *same* language as the philosopher. This should not be understood a claim that philosophical rationality determines, to the extent possible, what the meaning of words are and then the theologian must try to bend them to some alien purpose in talking about God. We are bound to a common language and Barth recognizes something like a conventionalist theory of how words and sentences acquire meaning. But he proposes something more. Barth argues that just because God is the source of all *rationes*, or rationality in the created universe, God is true arbiter of the meaning of our words when these are uses to describe natural objects. *In principle*, though not in methodological practice, there is therefore nothing theoretically wrong in claiming that *all* human speech is speech about God.

> Not all human talk is talk about God. It could be and should be. There is no reason in principle why it should not be. God is the Lord from whom and to whom we exist. Even the realities and truths distinct from Him and us which usually form the concrete occasion and subject of human speech exist from Him and to Him. Hence there is no genuinely profane speech. In the last resort, there is only talk about God. (CD I/1, p. 47).[180]

This claim ties the intelligibility of human speech indirectly to God. Since all that we know is created and established by God, knowing and describing it in words and sentences is describing something of about God: every thing stands in some relation to God. The same duality which applies to being applies also to the meaning of our language. On the one hand, humans use words

---

179. See CD I/2, pp. 457-740 for Barth's views on scripture. Three works are valuable points of entry into Barth's thought here. David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1981); "Barth's Interpretation of the Bible," in Stephen Sykes, ed., *Karl Barth: Studies in his Theological Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 55-87; and Francis Watson, "The Bible," in CC, pp. 57-71.

180. Serious reflection on the character of human talk about God, however, takes its start from the fact that this is "not at all the case."

in a conventionalist way, acquiring and inventing words to which they give meaning by their agreed upon definitions and customary usages. Barth's claim here is that we can and do form concepts without always knowing the word or sign with which to associate it. Thus when I look at the four-legged animal in front of me it could be represented by different signs ("horse," "equus," "Pferd") without being a different entity. Conceiving and speaking are distinct parts of the process of thinking, a distinction which makes possible the disparity between thought and meaning. Conception calls for words, and words for concepts, but they do not reduce to one another. In this domain we have a measure of control of the meaning of the words we use. On the other hand, the reality of God disclosed in revelation implies that God is the proper arbiter of the meaning of our words. "No idea that we can have of 'lord' or 'lordship' will ever lead us to this idea, even though we extend it infinitely. Outside the ideas that we can have, there is a lordship over our soul, a lordship even over our being in death, a genuinely effective lordship. *Only as we know God's lordship will our own ideas of lordship have content, and, within their limits, existence*" (CD II/1, pp. 75-6; emphasis added). It is not certain whether Barth restricts this claim to theological talk about God, or extends it to all construction of signs. Perhaps, "in principle," all words or names of created entities *can* be part of such a revolution, but only when this potentiality is actualized in revelation.

It is important to note that it is not the words themselves that change but only the *meaning*. Barth's claim is that "fallen" humanity no longer knows how to correlate perception and conception with the proper sign. We misunderstand the meaning of the world and ourselves because postlapsarian humanity no longer grasps the coherence of thought, word (sign) and object. Barth envisions revelation as sufficiently powerful to restore the proper working order between conception, perception and the judgment which joins them. There is a tension in Barth's conception of language between the "nomenclatural" model of its operation and a revelational model, which transforms the semantic aspect of that model in. As Graham Ward explains:

> The nomenclatural theory of language had always aspired to the ideal of a

> perfect correspondence between language and the world, to a universal and philosophical language. If there is a strict equation between concept and word, then what is thought, what is said and what is remain objectively stable. If this were the nature of ordinary human discourse then there could be no act of revelation as Barth conceives it, for revelation could not change the concept-word equation already established. But by insisting upon the disassociation of concept and word in ordinary human discourse, the act of revelation can change the 'content' without changing the word, thus restoring the word to its original meaning.[181]

By "nomenclatural theory" of language Ward means a "passive-copy theory of language," which applies only within the event of revelation, and not in the understanding of how language works outside of the context of revelation. If revelation is restorative of the primal coherence of thought, sign and object, then nomenclatural theory—proposing as it does a perfect adequation of thought and object in the sign—cannot be normative. Revelation restores, but does not entirely substitute, our normal linguistic operations. If revelation gave with its occurrence a language and grammar entirely discrete from the language and grammar of our natural language, there would be no way at all of relating natural and revealed experience of reality.

Barth is not saying that a different set of criteria apply to God's speech to human beings, than apply to our speech to each other as humans. To the extent that speaking involves more than rule-governed manipulation of linguistic signs and aims at a knowledge of and affinity with what is described, something is added to our comprehension in communion with God that no linguistic concept of itself can furnish. All speech is as such the communication of thoughts, which Barth regards as a rational process, not a mystical and entirely ineffable one.

> Speech, including God's speech, is the form in which reason communicates with reason and person with person. To be sure it is the divine reason communicating with human reason and the divine person with the human person. The utter inconceivability of this event is obvious. But reason with reason, person with person, is primarily analogous to what happens in the spiritual realm of creation, not the natural and physical realm. The Word of God—and at this point we should not evade a term so much tabooed to-

---

181. Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 27-8. Ward's interpretation of Barth is provocative and learned. For critique of Ward's interpretation of Barth on language see Bruce McCormack, "Graham Ward's *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 (1996): 97-109.

day—is a rational and not an irrational event. (CD I/2, p. 135)

It would be easy enough to get the impression that Barth is claiming that revelation is what happens in the far reaches of the mind where perception and ideation get transformed into meaning. To the extent that he holds that *all* of reality is subject to revelation that assumption would be correct. However, Barth is not saying that revelation is a mystical experience or an encounter with the ineffable. This notion of what happens to language in revelation is part of a more complex triadic structure to which all typology of revelation must conform. The key to understanding revelation is understanding that it depends for its actuality and intelligibility on what happens *within* it, and not what happens before or after it. This is the essence of Barth's alternative to the traditional doctrine of analogy, which holds that revelation must be interpreted in light of prior ontological conditions systematized and worked out independently of faith.

(b)*The Analogy of Faith* Nearly all of the central concerns of Barthian rationality come together in his conception of the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*). All conceptions of revelation which recognize that it is not a direct intuition of God in himself are obliged to give some account of how the normal use of words and concepts to apply to creaturely reality which they do not possess in themselves. The classical Christian doctrine of analogy is that offered by St. Thomas Aquinas,[182] whose logical of being is derived from Aristotle's metaphysics. This doctrine is

182. For the classical account, see *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, *Knowing and Naming God*, tr. and ed. Herbert McCabe (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). See also Pierre Aubenque, "The Origins of the Doctrine of the Analogy of Being: On the History of a Misunderstanding," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 11 (1985), pp. 35-46; George Lindbeck, "Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas," *Franciscan Studies* 17 (1957), 1-22 & 107-125; Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, tr. R. Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 273-4; and the discussion of Aquinas's view of participation in John Milbank, "'Between Purgation and Illumination': A Critique of the Theology of Right," in *Christ, Ethics, and Tragedy: Essays in Honour of Donald McKinnon*, in K. Surrin, ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 168-72; Eugene Rogers, "Thomas and Barth in Convergence on Romans 1?" *Modern Theology* 12 (1996), pp. 57-69; Marcia Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 212-13; David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Nortre Dame Press, 1979); and David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroads, 1981).

called the analogy of being (*analogia entis*), since it seeks to account for the indirectness of mediation by including it in a universal concept of Being. All that is, *including* God, exists, and as such is conceivable within the category of being, of which it is some mode. Analogy attempts to give rational structure the ways in which it may be said that God is both similar to, and dissimilar from, creatures. God is most unlike any creature in his infinity and excellence,[183] but quite like every creature in that God also partakes of being. In the logic of this doctrine our words and concepts are thought to have a primary or first order reference to things which exist in space and time (empirical entities). Whenever these words are applied to God it is argued that they are thereby extended beyond their normal usage, an extension which calls for an explanation of the meaning which these words could have in a theological description. The power of the analogy of being is that it gives a coherent unity to all knowing and being, even if it never admits any univocity of meaning, it comes close to doing so in the case of being, and it is this concept which gives a basic unity amidst a vast degree of difference. The momentum of this model of theological meaning moves from below to above, from a conception of the normativity of words in creaturely applications, to an exceptional use of them in extending them to God. Barth rejects the entire metaphysical underpinning of the analogy of being, and the natural theology built on it. He sees the necessity for analogy, but he replaces the notion of impersonal, all-inclusive being, with the reality of a God whose revelation is identical with his act. We know God only in God's act of being, not through the presumably divine structure of Being *into which* revelation is placed, and, Barth would argue, by which it is weakened and distorted.

In the analogy of Being which conceptually structures natural theology, revelation and creation are identical. God is always already revealed in nature which must bear a relationship to

---

183. On infinity in Aquinas, see Robert M. Burns, "Divine Infinity in Thomas Aquinas: I. Philosophico-Theological Background," *The Heythrop Journal* 39 (1998): 57-69, and "Divine Infinity in Thomas Aquinas: II. A Critical Analysis," *The Heythrop Journal* 39 (1998): 123-39.

God if God is the one who bears all power, all precedence to time and space and whatever comes to be in them. In a sense specifiable by its Aristotelian genealogy, natural theology posits a God so exalted that he cannot relate to the world. The world and God relate through a "desire" or tendency in all things to return to their origin. From the Godward side, there is only a relationless relation to things as these virtually obtain in God. God knows and fixates only upon God. *Analogia fidei* proposes a different account of how knowledge of God comes about (GD, 175; CD I/1, pp. 227-47). The recourse to analogy is necessary since the precise content of knowledge of God is not fully expressible in natural language and concepts. In knowing God three factors are at work. The agency of the human mind, the domain of nature which is its immediate object of activity—all knowing occurs in the interaction of the knowing subject and her environment. Barth relates this duality to a third term or point of reference. God's own action creates non-natural possibilities which are not latent in the subject-object duality of empirical knowing. Analogy of faith is the attempt to give logical structure to this triadic relationality. Within this structure the freedoms of God and human beings coincide, with the aid of natural media. It is difficult to express this analogy conceptually because it involves both an affirmation of normal subject-object relationality and an abrogation of it. For, the God who forms the third term of this model is not a datum of nature, but the invisible source of nature, known only from an initiative originating in God, not in human beings. God is a datum neither of nature as an extended domain, nor of nature as the metaphysical fundaments of the human mind, dormant within its undetected but essential structures.

Ultimately, the analogy of faith is grounded in God's freedom and love. The analogy of faith retains the analogical logic describing the distribution of similarity and dissimilarity of meaning of words and propositions as these are applied to God.[184] It assigns first order or

184. "Between our views, concepts and words, and God as their object, there exits, on the basis of the revelation of God, the relationship of analogy, of similarity, of partial correspondence and agreement. On the basis of this similarity there exists a true human knowledge of God and therefore the human knowledge of God reaches its goal." This viewing and conceiving is "our work," yet God enables it to be the vehicle of his self-communication, even

primary meaning to God's own conceiving and use of our human language, a primacy from which follow other consequences for how we interpret the basis of linguistic meaning and its power to signify what from our side of the divine and human relationship seems impossible: that we should truly speak of God.

> If creature is to be strictly understood as a reality willed and placed by God in distinction from God's own reality, that is to say, as the wonder of a reality which by the power of God's love has a place and persistence alongside God's own reality, then the continuity between God and it (the true *analogia entis*, by virtue of which he, the uncreated Spirit, can be revealed to the created spirit)—this continuity cannot belong to the creature itself but only to the Creator *in his relation* to the creature.[185]

For Barth faith precedes knowledge. Moreover, he clearly thinks that faith is not in contradiction to knowledge. Granted that faith and reason are deeply united, the question of which one is ordered to the other remains an ongoing problem. Only in faith can the proper analogical balance between similar and dissimilar, and affirmation and denial in the application of our concepts to God be rightly understood. Barth preserves the concept of analogy in his insistence that revelation is mediated by creation.[186] He manages to combine three ostensibly incompatible ideas to construct a concept of revelation which is uniquely his own. There is a positivist idea: the truth of knowledge of God is given in the object. There is a transcendentalist idea: we know the object given in and with the act of representing it to ourselves. There is, thirdly, an *apophatic* outcome: we never know God in himself or directly, but only indirectly, even when the language of objectivity is used. The analogy of faith thus originates in God's self-knowledge and is

---

though "in Himself He is quite different than He is in our work. Therefore the relationship between what he is in Himself and what He is in our work is only a relationship of similarity." See CD II/1, p. 227. The purpose of analogy is to enable us to truly say that God is in our concepts, while denying that we control God. The capacity of our words and propositions to describe God is based on God becoming for us the object of our thought.

185. See Karl Barth, *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life: The Theological Basis of Ethics*, tr. R. Birch Hoyle, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 5.

186. "But God gives Himself to be known—and this is the limitation that we have to bring out in the idea of impartation—in an objectivity different from His own. He unveils Himself as the one He is by veiling Himself in a form which He Himself is not. He uses this form distinct from Himself, He uses its work and sign, in order to be objective in it, with and under this form, and therefore to give Himself to us to be known. Revelation means the giving of signs" (CD II/1, p. 52).

represented in human concepts, known and so objective, but ultimately concealed in the very act in which this all happens. In fact, all of this *can* happen only in the event of revelation. It cannot, so Barth claims, happen through any human initiative. The event of revelation consists of three dialectically related moments which are mutually interpreting and form a *structural unity.*

(i) To speak of the "knowledge" of God is to speak the language of objectivity. We know God as an object like other objects to the extent that "general existence" is proper to God and to all that exists. God's objectivity, however, is grounded in itself, and not in its participation in a supposedly more basic category of substance. God's objectivity can depend on God alone since God can be, and is, an object to himself in perfect *perichoretic* unity. The way in which God becomes an object for us is related to but distinguishable from the way in which God is an object to himself. If Our participation in God through knowledge were simply identical with God's own self-knowledge, then we would be absorbed and lose our identity in the act of knowing God, just a surely as God would lose his identity. To prevent this confusion of identities in the act of knowing God Barth distinguishes a primary and a secondary objectivity in God:

> If we ascribe objectivity to God (as we inevitably do when we speak of the knowledge of God) a distinction becomes unavoidable. As He certainly knows himself first of all, God is first and foremost objective to Himself. [...] In His triune life as such, objectivity, and with it knowledge, is divine reality before creaturely objectivity and knowledge exist. We call this the primary objectivity of God, and distinguish from it the secondary, i.e., the objectivity which He has for us too in His revelation, in which He gives Himself to be known by us as He knows Himself. It is distinguished from primary objectivity not by a lesser degree of truth, but by its particular form which is suitable for us, the creature. (CD II/1, p. 16)

Barth's positivism consists in the fact that the object we know contains and determines the truth of *our* knowing.[187] In our knowledge of God, he makes himself the object of our "viewing

187. The fact that the object is God—and thus construed as the ultimate subject—deviates from the standard meaning of objectivity, which is precisely the quality of existing quite apart from how a subject perceives the object in question. If God's subjectivity is understood on the analogy of a transcendental subject, objectivity as a predicate of God becomes a negative predicate of the human knower, in that God's subjectivity exists apart from the existence of any other particular subject or object. On the other hand, that God is a subject makes the explanation of participation easier to understand: for our participation in God is *like* the participation of objects in our own thinking experience. Subjectivity becomes analogically structured to affirm and limit the reality of human knowledge of God.

and conceiving." The object of knowledge in revelation "becomes the object of our knowledge," when it finds a way of "becoming the content of our experience and our thought; it [when it] gives itself to be apprehended by our contemplation and our categories." We might expect of that such an object that we could include it as one among those concepts which make up our experience of the world, since it is within our power to conceptualize it. But this is not the case, for it becomes the object of our experience from "beyond the range of what we regard as possible for our contemplation and perception, beyond the confines of our experience and our thought." It is an object without connections to any other object we know, a "*Novum*," which "we cannot incorporate in the series of our other objects, cannot compare with them, cannot deduce from their context, cannot regard as analogous with them. It comes to us as a datum with no point of connexion with any other previous datum." We *can* achieve the act of knowing it, "but [...] we cannot understand, in the sense that we simply do not understand how we achieve it."[188]

(ii) In contrast to this positivist notion of the givenness of the *truth* of revelation, even though it is mediated by our concept, stands another aspect of Barth's concept of revelation which seems to be its contradictory. The activity of reasoning in the knowledge of God has a problematic

---

See on this last point CD I/1, p. 198: knowledge is "the confirmation of human acquaintance with an object whereby its truth becomes a determination of the existence of the man who has the knowledge." That objectivity, or the conditions for the possibility of knowledge of a thing given in time and space perception, is possible prior to experience of objects is a phenomenon of Kant's epistemology, and, according to Kant, one of its significant breakthroughs—that synthetic judgments *a priori* are possible. See on this peculiar phenomenon the insightful account in Donald Gotterbarn, "Objectivity Without Objects: A Non-Reductionist Interpretation of the Transcendental Object," in Gerhard Funke, ed., *Akten des 4 Internationalen Kant-Kongress* 3 volumes. New York: De Gruyter, 1974, 2: 196-203.

188. See CD I/2, p. 172. This remarkable passage continues: "We can understand the possibility of it solely from the side of its object, i.e., we can regard it not as ours, but as one coming to us, imparted to us, gifted to us. In this bit of knowing we are not the masters but the mastered. It is when we are *in the act of knowing God's revelation,* amid the objective reality of it, in the act of knowing the person Jesus Christ, that this must be said. If we do not know this person, if we are unaware of the reality of 'very God and very Man', we will certainly not say this, but confidently ascribe to ourselves the possibility of knowing it. If we are aware of it, and declare that it is true, we will also be aware and will not hesitate to declare, that it can be manifest to us in its truth only by its own agency and not because of any capacity belonging to us [...] It is indeed the prime mystery, because strictly, logically and properly, it is *only* this object, of the person of Jesus Christ, that all this can be said. That is the outcome of our christological foundation and it remains for us now to make its content quite explicit and understandable" (emphasis added).

status. As the following text shows, Barth thinks that any *act* of thought is a projection which, as our product, is a concept we can comprehend. Yet, when we know God with our cognitive acts, it is a purely receptive gesture, which, nonetheless, knows—though it does not grasp—God:

> In the act of the knowledge of God, as in any other cognitive act, we are definitely active as the receivers of images and creators of counter-images. Yet while this is true, it must definitely be contested that our receiving and creating owes its truth to any capacity of our own to be truly recipients and creators in relation to God. It is our own viewing and conceiving. But we ourselves have no capacity for fellowship with God. [...] Our viewing as such is certainly capable of receiving images of the divine. And our conceiving as such is certainly capable of creating idolatrous pictures. Both are *projections* of our own glory. But our viewing and conceiving are *not at all capable* of grasping God. That is to say, what they grasp as such—as our own viewing and conceiving, as the work of our nature—is as such not God but a reality distinct from God. [...] For even when we are occupied with God's revelation, we are still not capable of ourselves of having fellowship with God, and therefore viewing and conceiving Him, and therefore realizing our knowledge of God. (CD II/1, p. 182)

In this model knowing is presented as occurring in and through a capacity for reasoning. Knowledge of God, "like any other cognitive act," involves two basic *activities* of the thinking subject. First is perceptual occurrence in which the thinker is *active as a recipient*, as a receiver of images [*Bilde*]. This initial moment is followed by another in which the mind fashions a "conceiving counter-image" [*Gegenbild*]. This intramental activity is presided over by a reflection [*Abbild*] of the ego which gives unity to the two moments of cognition. Elsewhere, Barth qualifies the emphasis on the objectivity of knowledge with the condition that "knowledge without *knowledge* of knowledge is *no* knowledge."[189] That background against which the activity of receiving images and constructing counter-images takes place is the transcendental subject, which comes to light only as a presupposition of reasoning and never as a direct perception. Reflection intimates the apperceiving self, noting the mind's spontaneous activity of perception and conception. Barth thus conceives of human reasoning as an analogy of God's own inner Trinitarian act of life.

---

189. See Karl Barth, *Ethics*, p. 42.

Within this framework it appears that there is nothing in the cognitive act itself which differs from the content of revelation. In the transcendental moment, knowledge and object are so closely related as to be almost inseparable. This is opposed to the positivist-realist moment, which claims a certainty of knowledge based on the pure receptivity of the mind in the act of noting, not constructing, the things it knows. However, two moments of cognition are internal to mind, though the initial image or perception is clearly understood as a sensibly mediated percept. In this aspect of the revelation event the only difference which revelation could make in the normal cognitive process is to substitute for the agency of the transcendental human subject the agency of the divine subjectivity. Our knowing is fulfilled in God and not in ourselves:

> Therefore our knowing reaches its goal only in God Himself and in faith. But this does not at all alter the fact that as our limited viewing and conceiving, it is on the way to this goal, as this limited viewing and conceiving it participates in its truth. Only in God and only in faith is it knowledge of God. *But only as the attempt of perceptible conceptual cognition is it our knowing.* And, on the basis of the revelation of God, it ought to be and can be, not merely the knowing of God, but also our knowing. (CD II/1, p. 201)

The positivity of the object of faith is mediated by a transcendental view of concept formation which ties the intelligibility of the object known to the subjective conditions of its constitution *as concept*. Barth purposely brings these two aspects into the idea of revelation. They work dialectically to produce a third idea, distinct from either.

(iii) In the concept of revelation, reason is confronted by an object which is mediated through its own (reasons's) cognitive activity. To the extent that this object can only be known as mediated through our conceptuality, it is properly *our* knowing. To the extent that the object known is really God it is beyond any knowing. Thus, knowing God is a knowing which is constantly on its way. There is an apophatic end to our reasoning about God which is the result of God's greatness and the insuperable limitations of our capacity to know. Because we lack a concept of analogy sufficiently complex and suited to the object God is, our language cannot describe God. "We possess no analogy on the basis of which the nature and being of God as the

Lord can be accessible to us" (CD II/1, p. 75). Our language cannot be extended by us to an adequate description of God. It is God who assumes our language, communicating himself through it. But *as* our language it cannot achieve a description of God. This state of affairs is not only one which obtains in the realm of secular thought, but applies to the theologian's employment of concepts also. For example, when Barth describes the relationship of his conceptual descriptions to the actual Logos, there is a chronic failure of speech to equal the reality described:

> Yet we must not disguise the fact that on our lips and in our concepts this way of speaking is also inappropriate. We do not know what we are saying when we call Jesus Christ the eternal Word of God. We know no word which, though distinct from a speaker, still contains and reproduces the whole essence of the speaker. We know of no *Logos* with an adequate *Nous*- content and no *Nous* which can be exhaustively expressed in a *Logos*. We know no thought or speech which can transcend *the antithesis of knowledge and being* in triumphant synthesis. In short, we know no true word. Neither do we know, then, the true word about the true Word, God's Word. (CD I/1, p. 436)

Even with the "concrete" touchstone of the incarnation, our words cannot encompass the full power and meaning of the Word of God incarnate. Barth's apophaticism is a tempered agnosticism. It is not intended to produce scepticism, and it claims to overcome scepticism by the fact that the sort of doubt or unknowing it produces is an unknowing which is only knowable within the event of revelation. Once we acknowledge the undefinability of God as an article of faith, we reject scepticism "with a mistrust of its ability and therefore of its standard of truth" (CD II/1, 202). The certainty of our knowledge of God does not, and cannot, come from any epistemic strategies we can employ to demonstrate publicly the truth of the methods by which our statements about God originate. These statements include much more than simply descriptive assertions, though Barth clearly thinks that some among them must have at least this objective quality about them. Mitigating the problem of the meaning of our language in revelation is the fact that Barth thinks that the true meaning of words or names resides with God primarily, and with us secondarily. Revelation thus acts as a cure for our faulty capacity to name things and understand our own selves in a postlapsarian world. Just as classical analogy doctrine claims that the forms

of things exist preeminently (as idea) in God, so Barth claims that our human language can accurately describe God:

> Our words are not our property [*Eigentum*], but His. And disposing of them as His property, He places them at our disposal [...] when He allows and commands us to make use of them in this relationship [of knowledge of God] too. The use to which they are put is not, then, an improper and merely pictorial one, but their proper use. We use our words improperly and pictorially—as we can now say *looking back from God's revelation*—when we apply them within the confines of what is appropriate to us as creatures. When we apply them to God they are not alienated from their original object and therefore from their truth, but, on the contrary, restored to it. (CD II/1, p. 229)[190]

This sketch of the concept of revelation in Barth brings us to a point were we can better understand what he means by the analogy of faith. It is only in and with the event of revelation that our knowledge can have this certainty. The core problem of Barth's position is in his *actualism*:

> Knowledge of God is thus not the relationship of an already existing subject to an object that enters into his sphere and is thus therefore obedient to the laws of this sphere. On the contrary, this knowledge first of all creates this subject of its knowledge by coming into the picture. There cannot be allowed here any precedence of man which can entitle his subsequence—in which God has become the aim of his direction, the object of his knowledge—to ascribe to itself a right of disposal over the object, to make use of a power of disposal over it—as man does continually and obviously in regard to all other objects, whatever the theory of knowledge that he may hold. (CD II/1, pp. 21-2)

The problem with this view of the nature of knowledge is that it evacuates the human subject from the position of transcendental control. If knowledge really is such only as my critically regulated knowledge of my knowing, then the negation of the subject in the act of knowing God raises the question of the identity of the agent of such knowing. Moreover, the insistence that the conditions for validating this act as a form of knowing are given in and with the

---

190. "Now, it certainly does not lie in our power to return our words to their proper use. There is a deep error here in the misused application of the concept of analogy is ordinarily and continually given in natural theology. In His revelation God controls His property, elevating our words to the proper use, giving Himself to be their proper object, and therefore *giving them truth. Analogy of truth between Him and us is present in His knowing, which comprehends ours, but not in ours, which does not comprehend His.*" (CD II/1, p. 230; emphasis added)

act itself, clearly sets limits into the inquiry of such an act. Barth's conception of the analogy of faith is not a critical, but a constructive model for describing what happens in our thinking when God becomes an object of thought for us. It seeks to ensure that human knowing is passive and receptive with respect to God, even as it uses a constructivist epistemological model to describe how this occurs. Barth wants to effect a *reversal* of the anthropocentric grounding of knowledge as such. Only by following *this* order, this method for grounding knowledge, can metaphysics be set aside. For, only in this theological event can the knowledge of what is most basic and original come to mind.

The problem of the place of the knowing agent is intensified, as well as mitigated, by the fact that the object we know in this act of cognition is forever beyond our grasp. This intensifies the problem, for if we say that our knowledge is perfected by participation in God and then claim that God is not knowable, we appear to be claiming that perfect knowledge is perfect ignorance. In answer to this problem Barth asserts the positivist moment of his concept of revelation: the object known compensates for our lack of capacity to know it by assuming a secondary objectivity, becoming what he is not, to be intelligible for us. This is why revelation must be understood as also a concealment.[191]

Does Barth eliminate natural theology altogether? He clearly eliminates the classical analogy of being with its underlying metaphysics. However, the dialectical shape of his thought works like an all-encompassing mechanism which internalizes opposition to faith and transforms them into problems *within* the intellectual tradition of Christian thought. Barth seeks to redescribe the world in thought based on his belief that there is no part of reality unillumined by revelation. Barth does not withdraw Christian beliefs from the world. Instead, he seeks to redescribe the meaning of the world in light of the fact of revelation. How does Barth meet the apologetic challenges to faith, or respond to the fact of secularity?

---

191. See CD II/1, p. 52, cited in note 72 above.

The challenge of the secular is met by Barth in neither of the two standard ways that Christians have done this in the modern period. Barth does not emulate the old-Protestant (seventeenth-century orthodox) solution of interpreting faith as the exclusive concern of the isolation of belief, restricting its field of relevance to the inward life of the individual believer, a solution which leaves culture, politics, and learning to the 'world' and claims no obligation to engage the world. Nor does Barth follow the neo-Protestant solution of correlation, inspired by F. Schleiermacher, which deals with the secular by accepting the uses of reason operative in it as normative for religious thought. One could describe Barth's method as an attempt to empower theology, grounding it in its own proper object, and, from that standpoint, absorbing the world into a framework whose inclusiveness is as broad as the conception of God it presupposes. Barthian rationality treats all of reality as subject to God, and this is translated into his thought as the dialectical inclusion of all things under the truth which gives them a meaning not discoverable outside of the revealing act of God. Barth achieves this new position, then, from a "two-fold *theological* approach," notes Ingolf Dalferth, and not from a two-fold theological and philosophical approach. Dalferth continues: "He [Barth] interiorizes the whole problem and thus reproduces the discontinuity between the external and internal perspectives as a categorial distinction *within* the structure of the internal perspective of Faith."[192]

IV

Concluding Remarks I have focused on those aspects of Barth's thought which are concerned with how he establishes the logic involved in thinking the nature of the God of Christian faith. This means that reasoning works at the limit of its competence. God is an exceptional, not a normal, object of rational contemplation. God is the source or ground of both objects and subjects of rational activity and therefore can come only into a transcendental sort of reasoning. This means that God is both the presupposition of the argument which seeks to demonstrate God's reality and

192. Ingolf Dalferth, *Philosophy and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 121.

the end to which such argumentation moves. It is thus a circular reasoning, but not a vicious circle. It is a circle which begins in faith in God and ends in the understanding that God so necessarily exists that we cannot even conceive God's nonexistence. A "god" conceivable as nonexistent is not the real God of Christian faith. Barth attempts to secure the knowledge of God by interpreting it as our knowledge of God's eternal self-knowing act, which as such includes us and all temporality within it. Epistemology as such becomes an analogy for carrying out this project—especially, though not exclusively, Kantian epistemology. However, the power to persuade, to win assent and consent to its truthfulness, lies in the Word of God itself, and not in reason. Reason can be elevated to a participation for which it is made ready and equipped by God's own action.[193]

Barth uses philosophical reasoning, including the philosophical criticism of religious belief, within the structure of the dialectic of revelation, which is a dialectic of revelation and concealment. This dialectic is positive and negative, now affirming the rationality of its propositions concerning God, and then denying their sufficiency—their completeness, totality and thus truth. Such a dialectic is bound to reason for it can only understand God as the one who excels, and this means excelling human thought of God. Since he regards theological reasoning as grounded in a body of knowledge and an associated event of illumination which are both originated by God, Barth is free to use philosophical concepts eclectically. This is eclecticism has unwanted consequences for the interpretation of Barth.

Whenever we try to follow through a line of interpretation in Barth's use of some concepts from Plato, Kant, Hegel, or the existentialists, we always find that Barth's thinking does not fit with the systems out of which he lifts these ideas. Structurally, one can see how Barthian rationality clearly uses Hegel's dialectical vision of the whole to solve the crisis into which Kantian epistemology thrusts theological realism. He tries to invert the Cartesian subject at the basis of all

193. Barth treats the question of the "knowability of God" as coming about in God's "readiness for man," and the corresponding "readiness of man" for God which is brought about by it. See CD II/1, pp. 63-178.

modern philosophical rationality, making the foundational insights which metaphysically underpin reason depend upon faith in a God who is *seen through the proof* to be beyond reason in and through the act of establishing its valid limits. Barth always seeks to subordinate philosophical ideas to his own metaphysical master concept, the Word of God. Barth resolutely refuses to recognize the independent validity of metaphysics, most notably in his refusal to recognize that Anselm truly is seeking to create an argument which both believer and unbeliever can understand. Here, I think, is where his argument is weakest. It is not because one is mandated to adopt a metaphysics that I claim this, but because Barth fails to adequately deal with the problem of metaphysics in theological reasoning.[194] This is the problem of the autonomy of human reason and the implied authority it has for *mediating*, between the believer and a qualitatatively other God, as well as the believer and a fellow human being who is not in the position of assent or faith to the existence of God, much less to the rich detail in which Barth describes this God. Critics have touched on problems that accompany Barth's use of reason, especially associated with its positivistic view of the givenness of revelation, and the attendant conceptual restrictions on how revelation is appropriated.

Rowan Williams describes Barth's logic as "frustratingly circular." His refusal of all apriorisms notwithstanding, Barth interprets the process of revelation as if he had a prior knowledge of precisely how it should occur and what its results should be.

> In spite of all Barth is, it seems, determining in advance what can and what cannot be admitted under the heading of 'revelatory events', finally refining the concept so as to make it clear that it really comprises only the witness of God to the speech of God. The revelatory event and experience is not only unitary but infallible, God guaranteeing the divinity of his Word, miraculously grasping man through the uncertain medium of worldly happening and bringing him into the single true event of the divine being. It

194. Barth's thought only "partially" overcomes the metaphysics within Christian theology. See the discussion of the whole problem of metaphysics and theology in Stephen J. O' Leary, *Questioning Back: The Overcoming of Metaphysics in Christian Tradition* (New York: Winston, 1985), where Barth is discussed on pp. 99-112.

is Calvin's irresistible grace rendered into epistemological terms.[195]

This restriction of the meaning of revelation is a weakness in Barth's thought, for it exhibits "a certain lack of concern with human growth, human diversity, and human freedom of response," which are integral aspects of the process of understanding a "God who is made known to us in a human life and death."[196] This clearly describes the negative aspect of Barth's necessitarian logic. God's freedom to act should support the conclusion that there are diverse ways in which the Christian religion can express its truth, and not the singular, noetic exercise laid out in Barth's method.

Nicholas Wolterstorff points to a similar problem in what he describes as Barth's "eventism." Eventism is an interpretive restriction in which the historical acts of revelation are interpreted exclusively by the biblical witness, which adds nothing to them. It means that God not only acts but that God alone is permitted to interpret the meaning of those acts. Wolterstorff focuses this into a criticism of Barth when he says that Barth resists admitting "that human beings sometimes speak in the name of God," or that "human speech is sometimes appropriated for divine speech." This is not, however, Barth's claim. Wolterstorff's analysis of Barth's eventism is correct, but he misses Barth's frequent claims that God *does* use human speech other than the speech of Jesus Christ.[197] Wolterstorff underestimates the power of Barth's dialectical concept of revelation to accommodate such criticisms.[198]

One gets the impression that Barth tries to translate the internal necessity of the divine

---

195. Rowan Williams, "Barth on the Triune God," in S. W. Sykes, ed., *Karl Barth: Studies in his Theological Methods* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 157-8.

196. Ibid., p. 192.

197. See, for example, CD II/1, p. 53: "When God gives Himself to us be known in the truth of His self-knowledge as the triune God, He permits some one of His creatures or a happening in the sphere and time of the world created by him *to speak for Him*" (emphasis added).

198. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 63-74.

being, knowable only *in* faith through reason, into an reasoning faith which cannot but think God in this one way if it is to think God at all. Barth needs to fill the gap between the demonstration of God's necessary existence, which can occur only to a mind which believes that God exists (though it may be ignorant of its mode of existence as necessary), and the actual differences in practice and means through which each person comes to understand the reality of God.[199] He does, I think, show some signs of what Merold Westphal calls "cognitive transubstantiation," which is the phenomenon in which "the intentional act, which remains to all appearances human, takes on the ontological perfections of its divine intentional object."[200]

Barth's thought unfolds within the assumptions of modern philosophical rationality. This explains the epistemological form in which he treats the problem of reasoning about God and the methodological solution he offers to this problem. While Barth's thought is best interpreted as an occurrence within the modern context, it is clearly at odds with the use of reason in certain aspects of modern thought. Reason is not autonomous in the sense that it can ground itself, from itself, and for itself. Reason has an autonomy, but it is an autonomy which is most fully realized in a theological context.[201] Realization of autonomy is recognition that true freedom of thought occurs as a participation in God, a participation not grounded in causal ontological mechanisms, but in a faith which complements, and so overcomes, the impossibility of finite creatures knowing God. Barth's use of reason is after all rendered questionable by his conception of theological knowledge in terms of an actualism which isolates the understanding which seeking faith finds, from other

---

199. This narrowing of method is a result of the Cartesianism discussed above, with its foundationalist search for an absolute truth which must then become absolutely self-evident if is to function in an epistemological exercise of proving.

200. See Merold Westphal, "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," *Modern Theology* 13 (1997), p. 216.

201. "The autonomy of dogmatic thinking does not mean that we can or should think the truth of God on our own. It means primarily the autonomy of the Holy Spirit. These two sentences mutually explain one another. *We* do the thinking. We have to do so. But when we think the truth, we think the thought that we can think the truth of God only in the Holy Spirit" (GD, p. 313). On autonomy in Barth's thought see John Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics: Karl Barth and His Critics* (New York: Cambridge University Press,1990), which develops the background of this problem in classical German philosophy.

forms human reasoning, closing off the possibility of serious and open criticism and dialogue from relevant nontheological sources. Whether this compromises his entire system is questionable, given the astounding power of his thought to dialectically include every challenge to belief as a problem *for* faith.

Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor W. *Negative Dialectics* Trans. E. B. Ashton. New York: Continuum, 1994.

Agacinski, Sylviane. "We are Not Sublime: Love and Sacrifice, Abraham and Ourselves." *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader* Eds. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. 129-50.

Anselm. *St. Anselm: Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix on Behalf of the Fool. by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo* Trans. Sidney Norton Deane. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1954.

Anton, Karl-Heinz. *Kritik der Identität: Barths Hegel Kritik und das theologisches Denken des Unterschieds.* Frankfurt-am-Main: HAAG + HERSCHEN Verlag, 1986.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae.* Volume. 3: *Knowing and Naming God.* ed. and trans. Herbert McCabe. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Life of the Mind.* Two Volumes. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971.

Ariew, Roger and Marjorie Grene. "Ideas, in and before Descartes," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 87-106.

Armour, Leslie. *Logic and Reality: An Investigation into the Idea of a Dialectical System.* Assen: Van Gorcum and Co, 1972.

Arsenault, Joseph and Tony Brinkley. "At the Limits of Formalization." *Dialectic and Narrative.* Ed. T. R. Flynn and Dalia Judovitz. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. 258-9.

Aubenque, Pierre. "The Origins of the Doctrine of the Analogy of Being: On the History of a Misunderstanding," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 11 (1985): 35-46.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *The Theology of Karl Barth.* trans. John Drury. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1971.

Barr, James. *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Barth, Karl. "Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1909), 317-321.

___. "Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte," *Schweizerische Theologische Zeitschrift* 29: (1912): 1-18 and 49-72.

___. "Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 24 (1914): 21-32 and 65-95.

___. *The Epistle to the Romans*. trans. E. C. Hoskyns. New York: Oxford University Press, 1933.

___. *The Word of God and the Word of Man.* Trans. Douglas Norton. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1935.

___. *Church Dogmatics*. I/1 - IV/4. Ed. and Trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, et. al. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1977.

___. "The Christian Understanding of Revelation," *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946-52.* London: SCM Press, 1954. 205-40.

___. *Dogmatics in Outline.* Trans. G. T. Thompson. New York: Harper & Row, 1959.

___. *Anselm, Fides Quaerens Intellectum, Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme.* Trans. Ian Robertson. London: S C M Press, 1960.

___. *The Humanity of God.* Trans. Thomas Weiser. Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960.

___. *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction.* Trans. Grover Foley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963.

___. *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History.* Trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden. London: S C M Press,1979.

___. *Ethics.* Ed. Dietrich Braun. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. New York: Seabury Press, 1981.

___. "Fate and Idea in Theology." *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth: Essays and*

Comments Ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt. Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1986.

___. *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion.* Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Ed. Hannelotte Reiffen. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

___. *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life: The Theological Basis of Ethics.* Trans. R. Birch Hoyle. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

Barth, Karl and Rudolph Bultmann. *Karl Barth—Rudolph Bultmann: Letters 1922-1966.* Ed. B. Jaspert. Trans. G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981.

Bavinck, Herman. *The Philosophy of Revelation* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.

Benavides, Gustavo. "Modernity." *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* Ed. Mark C. Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. 186-204.

Beintker, Michael. *Die Dialektik in der »dialektischen Theologie« Karl Barths.* München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1987.

Bettis, Joseph Dabney. "Theology in the Public Debate: Barth's Rejection of Natural Theology and the Hermeneutical Problem," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 21 (1969): 385-403.

Beyssade, Jean-Marie. "The Idea of God and the Proofs of His Nature," Trans. John Cottingham. *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* Ed. John Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 174-99.

Bhaskar, Roy. *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation.* New York: Verso, 1986.

___. *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom.* New York: Verso, 1993.

Biggar, Nigel. ed. *Reckoning with Karl Barth: Essays in Commemoration of Karl Barth's Birth* London: Mowbray, 1998.

___. *The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Blond, Phillip. ed. *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* New York: Routledge, 1998.

Bouillard, Henri. *The Logic of Faith* Trans. M. H. Gill. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967.

Brecher, Robert. "Karl Barth: Wittgensteinian Theologian Manqué," *Heythrop Journal* 24

(1983): 290-300.

Brinkman, B. R. "'Outsidelessness' and 'High Noon'," *Heythrop Journal* 35 (1994): 53-63.

Brown, James. *Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Buber, and Barth: A Study of Subjectivity and Objectivity in Existentialist Thought* New York: Collier, 1955.

Buber, Martin. *The Eclipse of God* New York: Harper and Row, 1952.

Burch, George Bosworth. "The Place of Revelation in Philosophical Thought," *Review of Metaphysics* 15 (1961): 396-408.

Burns, Robert M. "Divine Infinity in Thomas Aquinas: I. Philosophico-Theological Background," *The Heythrop Journal* 39 (1998): 57-69.

___. "Divine Infinity in Thomas Aquinas: II. A Critical Analysis," *The Heythrop Journal* 39 (1998): 123-39.

Burrell, David. *Aquinas: God and Action* Notre Dame: University of Nortre Dame Press, 1979.

Busch, Eberhard. *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, Trans. J. Bowden. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976.

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Two Volumes. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.

Carr, Karen. *The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth Century Responses to Meaninglessness* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Chapman, Mark D. "Apologetics and the Religious *A Priori* : The Use and Abuse of Kant in German Theology: 1900-20," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1992): 470-510.

Clayton, John Powell, ed. *Ernst Troeltsch and the Future of Theology.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Cochrane, Arthur C. *The Existentialists and God: Being and the Being of God in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Tillich, Etienne Gilson, Karl Barth* Dubuque, Iowa: University of Dubuque Press, 1956.

Colish, Marcia. *The Mirror of Language: A Study of the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

Côté, Antoine. "God and the Principle of Non-Contradiction," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (1998): 285-98.

Crites, Steven D. "Five Philosophical Points on the Non-Philosophical Truth of Theology: A Neo Averroist View," *Soundings* 53 (1970): 187-207.

Cunningham, Conor. "The Difference *of* Theology and Some Philosophies of Nothing," *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 289-312.

Dalferth, Ingolf U. "Fides quaerens intellectum: Theologie als Kunst der Argumentation in Anselms Proslogion," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 81 (1984): 54-105.

___. *Philosophy and Theology* Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.

___. "Karl Barth's Eschatological Realism." *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays* Ed. S. W. Sykes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* Trans. H. Thomlinson and G. Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Descartes, René. *Descartes: Philosophical Letters* Trans. and Ed. Anthony Kenny. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970.

___. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* Volumes 1 and 2. Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. New York: Cambridge, 1985.

Di Noia, J. A. "Religion and the Religions." *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* Ed. John Webster. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 243-57.

Ellos, William J. *Linguistic Ecumenism: A Barthian Road Back from Babel* New York: University Press of America, 1983.

Enslin, Horst. "Der ontologische Gottesbeweis bei Anselm von Canterbury und bei Karl Barth," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 11 (1969): 154-77.

Evans, Gillian. *Anselm and Talk About God* Oxford: Clarendon, 1978.

Fisher, Simon. *Revelatory Positivism? Barth's Earliest Theology and the Marburg School* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Ford, David. *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth* Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1981.

___. "Barth's Interpretation of the Bible." *Karl Barth: Studies in his Theological Method* Ed. Stephen Sykes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979. 55-87.

Förster, Eckart. "How Are Transcendental Arguments Possible?" *Reading Kant: New Perspectives on Transcendental Arguments and Critical Philosophy* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 3-20.

Foss, Martin. *The Idea of Perfection in the Western World* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1946.

Foster, Michael B. *Mystery and Philosophy* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1957.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* New York: Vintage, 1994.

Frei, Hans. *Types of Christian Theology* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Galgan, Gerald. *God and Subjectivity* New York: Peter Lang, 1990.

Gans, Eric. *Signs of Paradox: Irony, Resentment, and Other Mimetic Structures* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Gasché, Rodolphe. *The Tain in the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Geffré, Claude and Jean-Pierre Jossua. eds. *The Debate on Modernity* London: SCM Press, 1992.

Gersh, Stephen. "Anselm of Canterbury." *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy* Ed. P. Dronke. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 255-78.

Gorringe, Timothy. *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Gotterbarn, Donald. "Objectivity Without Objects: A Non-Reductionist Interpretation of the

Transcendental Object." *Akten des 4 Internationalen Kant-Kongress* Ed. Gerhard Funke. 3 Volumes. New York: De Gruyter, 1974, 2: 196-203.

Green, Garrett. "Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theory of Religion," *The Journal of Religion* 75 (1995): 473-86.

Grenholm, Cristina. *Romans Interpreted: A Comparative Analysis of the Cmmmentaries of Barth, Nygren, Cranfield and Wilckens on Paul's Epistle to the Romans* Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1990.

Griffith-Dickson, Gwen. "'Outsidelessness' and the 'Beyond' of Signification," *Heythrop Journal* 37 (1996): 258-72.

Grünfeld, Joseph. *Soft Logic: The Epistemic Role of Aesthetic Criteria* New York: University Press of America, 2000.

Gunton, Colin. *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

___. "Transcendence, Metaphor, and the Knowability of God," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1980): 501-16.

Guyer, Paul. "The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories." *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* Ed. Paul Guyer. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 123-160.

Hacking, Ian. "Is the End in Sight for Epistemology?" *The Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 57-81.

Härle, Wilfred. *Sein und Gnade: Die Ontologie Karl Barths Kirklischer Dogmatik* New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1975.

Hart, Kevin. *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Hartman, Robert S. "Prolegomena to a Meta-Anselmian Axiomatic," *Review of Metaphysics* 14 (1961): 637-75.

Hartt, Julian. *Being Known and Being Revealed* Stockton, California: College of the Pacific

Philosophy Institute Publications, 1957.

Hatfield, Gary. "Reason, Nature, and God in Descartes." *Essays on the Philosophy and Science of René Descartes* Ed. Stephen Voss. New York: Oxford Univesity Press, 1993. 259-287.

Helme, Mark. "Barth and Philosophy," *Heythrop Journal* 22 (1981): 285-89.

Hendry, George S. "The Freedom of God in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 31 (1978): 229-44.

___. "The Transcendental Method in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984): 213-27.

Henrich, Deiter. "The Proof-Structure of Kant's Transcendental Deduction," *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1969): 640-659.

Hunsinger, George. "Truth as Self-Involving Barth and Lindbeck on the Cognitive and Performative Aspects of Truth in Theological Discourse," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61 (1993): 41-56.

___. *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Ihde, Don. "Auditory Imagination." *Phenomenology in Perspective* Ed. F. J. Smith. The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1970. 202-215.

Jenson, Robert. *God after God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969.

___. "Response," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 28 (1972): 31-4.

Johnson, William Stacy. *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

Jones, Gareth. *Critical Theology: Questions of Truth and Method* New York: Paragon House, 1995.

Jüngel, Eberhard. *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming* Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 1976.

___. *Barth-Studien* Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1978.

___. *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* Trans. Darrell L. Guder. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.

___. *Karl Barth, A Theological Legacy* Trans. Garrett E. Paul. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986.

___. *Theological Studies*. Trans. J. B. Webster. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988.

Kainz, Howard. *Paradox, Dialectic, and System: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the Hegelian Problematic* University Park: Pennsylvania State university Press, 1988.

Kallenberg, Brad. "The Gospel Truth of Relativism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (2000): 177-211.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. Werner Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.

Kelsey, David H. *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

Kerr, Fergus. "Cartesianism According to Barth," *New Blackfriars* 77 (1996): 358-68.

___. "Idealism and Realism: An Old Controversy Dissolved." *Christ, Tragedy and Ethics: Essays in Honour of Donald McKinnon* Ed. Kenneth Surin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. 15-33.

___. *Immortal Longings* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to* Philosophical Fragments Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Kincade, James. "Karl Barth and Philosophy," *The Journal of Religion* 40 (1960): 161-69.

Kojéve, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* Trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969.

Korsch, Dietrich. "Intellectus Fidei: Ontologischer Gottesbeweis und theologische Methode in Karl Barths Anselmbuch," *Wahrheit und Versöhnung: Theologische und philosophische*

Beiträge zur Gotteslehre Ed. Dietrich Korsch und Hartmut Ruddies. Gütersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1989. 125-46.

___. *Dialektische Theologie nach Karl Barth* Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Seibeck), 1996.

Krings, Herman "Knowing and Thinking: On the Structure and History of the Transcendental Method in Philosophy." *Contemporary German Philosophy* Trans. H. Schmettau and D. E. Christensen. University Park, Pennsylvannia: State University Press, 1982, Vol. 4. 206-22.

Lauer, Quentin. *Phenomenology: Its Genesis and Prospect* New York: Harper and Row, 1958.

Lehmann, Paul. "Karl Barth, Theologian of Permanent Revolution," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 28 (1972): 67-81.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *The Emmanuel Levinas Reader* Ed. Seán Hand. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

Leyden, John. "The Influence of Herman Cohen on Karl Barth's Dialectical Theology," *Modern Judaism* 12 (1992): 167-83.

Lindbeck, George. "Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas," *Franciscan Studies* 17 (1957): 1-22 and 107-125.

Loder, James E. and W. Jim Neidhardt. "Barth, Bohr, and Dialectic." *Religion and Science: History, Method, Dialogue* Ed. W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman. New York: Routledge, 1996. 271-90.

Lohmann, Johan Friedrich. *Karl Barth und die Nuekantianismus: Die Rezeption des Neukantianismus im »Römerbrief« und ihre Bedeutung für die weitere Ausarbeitung der Theologie Karl Barths* New York: De Gruyter, 1995.

Lowe, W. "Barth as a Critic of Dualism: Re-Reading the *Römerbrief*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1990): 377-95.

Machen, John. *The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics: Karl Barth and His Critics* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Malcolm, Norman. "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," *Philosophical Review* 69 (1960): 41-62.

Malpas, Jeff. "The Transcendental Circle," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1997): 1-20.

Marion, Jean-Luc. "The Essential Incoherence of Descartes's Definition of Divinity." Trans. F. P. Van de Pitte. *Essays on Descartes's* Meditations Ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

___. "Is the Ontological Argument Ontological? The Argument According to Anselm and Its Metaphysical Interpretatation According to Kant," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30 (1992): 201-18.

___. "Descartes and Onto-Theology." *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* Ed. Phillip Blonde. New York: Routledge, 1998. 67-106.

Marshall, Bruce. *Christology in Conflict: The Identity of a Saviour in Rhaner and Barth* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

___. "Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths." *Theology and Dialogue* Ed. Bruce D. Marshall. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990. 69-102.

Mathews, Garreth B. *Thought's Ego in Augustine and Descartes* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

Maurer, Ernstpeter. *Sprachphilosophische Aspekte in Karl Barths* »Prolegomena zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik« New York: Peter Lang, 1989.

Mawby, Ronald. "When Inconsistencies Threaten: Paraconsistent Strategies in Science and Religion." *Science, Technology, and Religious Ideas* Eds. Mark S. Shale and George W. Sheilds. Washington: University Press of America, 1999. 61-73.

McIntosh, Mark A. *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

Michalson, Gordon E. "Cartesianism." *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian*

Thought Eds. Alister E. McGrath, et. al. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993. 67-71.

Milbank, John. *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

McCormack, Bruce L. *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.

___. "Graham Ward's *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 (1996): 97-109.

___. "Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective: Karl Barth's Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition," *Journal of Religion* 78 (1998): 18-37.

McKinnon, Alastair. "Barth's Relationship to Kierkegaard: Some Further Light," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 13 (1967): 31-41.

McLean, Stuart D. *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth* Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981.

McLelland, Joseph C. "Philosophy and Theology—A Family Affair (Karl and Heinrich Barth)." *Footnotes to a Theology: The Karl Barth Colloqium of 1972.* Ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1974.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* Ed. James M. Edie. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

Merton, Louis. "Reflections on Some Recent Studies of Anselm," *Monastic Studies* 3 (1965): 221-63.

Milbank, John et. al., eds. *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* New York: Routledge, 1999.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* Trans. James W. Leitch. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

___. *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* Trans. Margaret Kohl. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.

Morris, Thomas V. "Perfect Being Theololgy," *Nous* 21 (1987): 19-30.

Murphy, Francesca. "The Sound of *Analogia Entis*," *New Blackfriars* 74 (1993): 508-21 and 557-65.

Nebelsick, Harold. "Karl Barth's Understanding of Science." *Theology Beyond Christendom: Essays on the Centenary of the Birth of Karl Barth, May 10, 1886* Ed. John Thompson. Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 1986. 165-214.

Nelson, Alan. "Descartes's Ontology of Thought," *Topoi* 16 (1997): 163-78.

Novak, David. "Before Revelation: The Rabbis, Paul, and Karl Barth," *Journal of Religion* 71 (1981): 50-66.

O'Leary, Stephen J. *Questioning Back: The Overcoming of Metaphysics in Christian Tradition* New York: Winston, 1985.

O'Neal, Brian. *Epistemological Direct Realism in Descartes's Philosophy* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974.

Plantinga, Alvin, ed. *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers* Garden City: Anchor Books, 1965.

___. "Kant's Objection to the Ontological Argument," *The Journal of Philosophy* 63 (1966): 537-46.

___. "Reason and Belief in God." *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* Eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicolas Wolterstorff. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983. 68-73.

Potter, Vincent G. "Karl Barth and the Ontological Argument," *The Journal of Religion* 45 (1965): 309-25.

Reisner, Erwin. *Kennen, Erkennen, Anerkennen: Eine Untersuchung über die Bedeutung von Intuition und Symbol in der dialektischen Theologie* München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1932.

Rendtorf, Trutz. ed. *Die Realisierung der Freiheit* Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1975.

Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* Trans. Robert Czerny, et. al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977.

___. *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* Ed. L. S. Mudge. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.

Ritschl, Dietrich. *The Logic of Theology: A Brief Account of the Relationship between Basic Concepts in Theology* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Roberts, R. H. "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time: Its Nature and Implications." *Karl Barth: Studies in His Theological Methods* Ed. S. W. Sykes. Oxford: Clarendon, 1979. 88-146.

___. *A Theology on Its Way? Essays on Karl Barth* Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991.

Robinson, James M. ed. *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology* Trans. Keith Crim and Luis De Grazia. Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1969.

Rogers, Eugene. "Thomas and Barth in Convergence on Romans 1?" *Modern Theology* 12 (1996): 57-69.

Rogers, Katherine. "Can Christianity be Proven?: St. Anselm of Canterbury on Faith and Reason." *Anselm Studies: An Occasional Journal II* Ed. Joseph C. Schnaubelt et. al. White Plains, New York: Kraus International Publication, 1988. 459-79.

Sainsbury, R. M. *Paradoxes* Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Schaper, Eva. "Arguing Transcendentally," *Kant-Studien* 63 (1972): 101-116.

Scharlemann, Robert. *The Being of God: Theology and the Experience of Truth* New York: The Seabury Press, 1981.

___. "God as Not-Other: Nicholas of Cusa's *De li Non Aliud*." *Naming God* Ed. Robert S. Scharlemann. New York: Paragon House, 1985. 116-32.

___. *The Reason of Following: Christology and the Ecstatic I* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Schufreider, Gregory. *Confessions of a Rational Mystic: Anselm's Early Writings* West Lafeyette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1994.

Schwöbel, Christoph. "Exploring the Logic of Perfection." *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology: Essays in Honour of Vincent Brümmer* Ed. G. Van den Brinck, et. al. Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1992. 197-217.

___ . "Theology." *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* Ed. John Webster. New York: Cambride University Press, 2000. 17-36.

Seban, Jean-Loup. "Barth, Karl (1886-1968)." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 10 Volumes. New York: Routledge, 1998. 1: 651-56.

Sinnett, M. W. "Another Mathematician's Apology: Theological Reflections upon the Role of Proof in Mathematics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993): 345-70.

Smith, John E. "The Significance of Karl Barth's Thought for the Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 28 (1972): 15-30.

Smith, Stephen G. *The Argument to the Other: Reason Beyond Reason in the Thought of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas* Chico: California: Scholars Press, 1983.

___. "Greatness in Theism and Atheism: The Anselm-Feuerbach Conversation," *Modern Theology* 12 (1996): 385-403.

Smolík, Josef. "Philosophy of History (K. Barth and J. L. Hromádka)," *Communio Viatorum* 12 (1969): 113-20.

Southern, R. W. *Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Spiekermann, Ingrid. *Gotteserkenntnis: Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths* München: Christain Kaiser Verlag, 1985.

Steck, Karl Gerhard and Trutz Rendtorf. *Karl Barth und die Neuzeit* München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1973.

Sykes, Stephen. "Barth on the Centre of Theology," *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method* Ed. Stephen Sykes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.

___. *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from*

Schleiermacher to Barth Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

Tanner, Kathryn. *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.

Taubes, Jacob. "Theodicy and Theology: A Philosophical Analysis of Karl Barth's Dialectical Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 34 (1954): 231-43.

Taylor, Charles. "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments," *Philosophical Arguments* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. 20-34.

Thaidigsmann, Edgar. "Aufhebung. Eine theologische Kategorie des frühen Barth," *Evangelische Theologie* 43 (1983): 328-49.

Theimann, Ronald F. *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.

___. *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991.

Thomas, J. C. "The Epistemology of Karl Barth," *Heythrop Journal* 18 (1977): 383-98.

Thomas, Owen C. "Barth on Non-Christian Knowledge of God," *Anglican Theological Review* 46 (1964): 261-85.

Tillich, Paul. *A History of Christian Thought: From its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* Ed. Carl E. Braaten. New York: Touchstone, 1967.

Torrance, Alan J. *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996.

Torrance, T. F. "The Problem of Natural Theology in the Thought of Karl Barth," *Religious Studies* 6 (1970): 121-35.

___. "Theological Realism." *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology* Ed. Brian Hebblethwaite and S. Sutherland. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 169-196.

___. *Theological Science* New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* New York: Crossroads, 1981.

Trigg, Roger. *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?* Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

Troeltsch, Ernst. *Religion in History* Trans. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

Turner, Denys. "De-Centring Theology," *Modern Theology* 2 (1986): 125-43.

___. "The Art of Unknowing: Negative Theology in Late Medieval Mysticism," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 473-88.

Veitch, J. A. "Revelation and Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (1971): 1-22.

Ward, Graham. *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Watson, Francis. "The Bible." *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* Ed. John Webster. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 57-71.

Watson, Gordon. "Karl Barth and St. Anselm's Theological Program," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 (1977): 31-45.

Waxman, Wayne. "Kant and the Imposition of Time and Space," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 19 (1996): 43-66.

Webster, John. *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Welker, Michael. "Barth und Hegel: Zur Erkenntnis eines methodischen Verfahrens bei Barth," *Evangelische Theologie* 43 (1983): 307-28.

Westphal, Merold. "Taking St. Paul Seriously: Sin as an Epistemological Category." *Christian Philosophy* Ed. Thomas P. Flint. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990. 200-226.

___. "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," *Modern Theology* 13 (1997): 213-26.

White, Graham. "Karl Barth's Theological Realism," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische*

Theologie 26 (1984): 54-70.

Williams, Daniel Day. "Brunner and Barth on Philosophy," *The Journal of Religion* 27 (1947): 241-54.

___. "The Concept of Truth in Karl Barth's Theology," *Religious Studies* 6 (1970): 137-45.

Williams, Rowan. "Barth on the Triune God," *Karl Barth: Studies in His Theological Method* Ed. S. W. Sykes. Oxford: Clarendon, 1979. 147-93.

___. "The Incarnation as the Basis of Dogma," *The Religion of the Incarnation* Ed. Robert Morgan. Bristol: Bristol Classics Press, 1989. 85-98.

___. "The Unity of Christian Truth," *New Blackfriars* 70 (1989): 85-95.

Williamson, Timothy. *Vagueness* New York: Routledge, 1994.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.