History of Philosophy and Christian Thought

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Lecture Outline

### Part One: Ancient and Medieval

1. Why Study Philosophy?
   1. To learn how to think with more clarity, cogency, and profundity.
   2. To understand better the intellectual background of Christian thought.
      1. Other disciplines also useful: history, the arts, science, etc.
      2. But philosophers have been most influential in the formulation of worldviews.
   3. To become acquainted with the most formidable adversaries of Christianity: non-Christian thought in its most cogent form.
   4. In this course we shall also study Christian thought, focusing on Christianity as a worldview.

# II. Philosophy: General Observations

A. Basic point: the philosophical quest is religious in character.

1. Historically, philosophers have addressed the religious issues of their day.

2. Typical questions of philosophers are religious:

a. Metaphysics ‑ the nature of reality

(1) Why is there something rather than nothing? (creation)

(2) Why are things the way they are? (providence)

(3) What are the most basic features of reality? (quest for what is ultimate)

b. Epistemology (cf. Doctrine of the Knowledge of God)

(1) What is knowledge?

(2) How is knowledge possible?

(3) How do we go about knowing?

(4) How do we distinguish truth from falsity? reality from appearance?

1. Ethics ‑ how ought we to live?
2. Perspectival relation of these.

B. Christian philosophy: an attempt to answer these questions humbly before God and obediently to his revelation.

C. Non‑Christian philosophy: an attempt to answer these questions autonomously, hindering the truth in unrighteousness.

D. Distinctives of a Biblical Worldview

1. The creator-creature distinction

1. Distinct
2. Not separable (Chalcedon)
3. Nothing between

2. Absolute personality

a. Some worldviews have absolute beings (Hinduism,

Buddhism, Gnosticism, Aristotelianism, Hegelianism),

but these are not personal.

b. Others acknowledge superhuman persons (polytheisms),

but these are not absolute.

1. Only in biblical religion is the supreme being personal, therefore capable of knowledge, love, judgment, speech.

3. Lordship: God’s relation to his creation.

a. Control

b. Authority

c. Presence

4. Transcendence and Immanence

a. Christian

1. Transcendence: control and authority (1, below).

2. Immanence: presence, clear revelation (2, below).

b. Non-Christian

1. Transcendence: Supreme being, if he exists, is so

far from us that we cannot know him, speak of

him (3, below).

2. Immanence: So the world is ultimate, divine (4,

below).

c.Relations of these (diagonal lines below)

1. Christian transcendence opposes non-Christian

immanence.

2. Christian immanence opposes non-Christian

transcendence.

Biblical Non-biblical

Transcendence: God’s control and authority Transcendence: God not present

(1) (3)

(2) (4)

Immanence: God’s covenant presence Immanence: something in the world has divine control and authority[[1]](#footnote-1)

5. Irrationalism and Rationalism

a. Christian

1. “Irrationalism:” our knowledge limited by God’s

ultimate authority (“incomprehensibility”)

2. “Rationalism:” we can know certain truth by God’s

revelation.

b. Non-Christian

1. Irrationalism: it is impossible to know absolute truth.

2. Rationalism (autonomy): human thought is the

ultimate standard of truth and right.

3. Tension

4. Mutual necessity

c.Relations of these (diagonal lines):

1. Christian “irrationalism” opposes non-Christian

Rationalism.

1. Christian “rationalism” opposes non-Christian

Irrationalism.

## Greek Philosophy

Attempting to find a rational substitute for the popular religions (Dooyeweerd, *Twilight of Western Thought*)

A. The Milesians (6th century B.C.)

1. Figures

a. Thales: "All is water"

b. Anaximander: "All is indefinite (*apeiron*)"

c. Aneximenes: "All is air"

2. Significance

a. Rationalism

(1) Mind is competent, apart from revelation, to determine the most basic principle in the universe, the ultimate explanation.

(2) "All is... " ‑ The creator/creature distinction is erased. All of reality is composed of the same stuff. Man is divine‑‑as divine as anything else.

b. Irrationalism

(1) Looked at from the opposite angle: not only is man divinized, but God is humanized. God is reduced to water, or air, or the indefinite. The most basic principle is mindless, purposeless.

(2) Human thought also, then, is reduced to chance developments of an impersonal cosmic process. Van Til: "The man made out of water trying to climb out of the water on a ladder of water."

B. The Eleatics (6th and 5th centuries B.C.)

1. Figures

a. Xenophanes: religious teacher advocating changeless pantheistic deity over against the anthropomorphism of popular religions.

b. Parmenides: main developer of the Eleatic system.

c. Zeno: Argued for Parmenides' position with paradoxes designed to show the absurdity of its opposite.

d. Melissus: Attempted positive, direct proofs of Parmenides' doctrine.

2. Parmenides' teaching: the goddess reveals that "being is."

a. Anything which can be spoken of or thought of must be. It is impossible to speak or think of anything which is not. Every thought is a thought of something.

b. Negation is a meaningless concept.

c. There is no change‑‑for every change is a change from what is to what is not. (e.g. a change in color‑‑from green to non‑green).

d. Being is therefore ungenerated, indestructible, changeless, homogeneous, indivisible, continuous (no parts), perfect, motionless, limited‑‑like Xenophanes' divinity.

e. Whence the illusion of change? Parmenides' "second philosophy."

3. Analysis

a. Arguments a and c overlook the ambiguities in the concept of "being" and in the concept "think of".

(1) Sometimes being includes non‑being; sometimes it doesn't. The fact that there are no unicorns is a fact that is the case‑‑part of reality, part of being. To think of a unicorn is in one sense to think of something that is not, but in another sense it is to consider a fact that is the case.

(2) There are many kinds of "being"‑‑real, present existence, existence in fiction, existence in the mind, existence in the past, existence in the future, possible existence, necessary existence, contingent existence. Change is, in one sense, change from what is to what is not; but it is also change from one sort of being to another (possible to actual, future to present, etc.)

(3) The idea that every meaningful thought must refer to some object is greatly to over‑simplify the functions of thought. Thought does many things other than referring, and thus bears many different relations to "being."

b. Note religious coloring: revelation from a goddess, divinization of the world.

c. Parmenides system attempts to be as consistently rationalistic as possible.

(1) "What can be and what can be thought are one." (Every thought is a thought of something, and what cannot be thought cannot be said to exist. So thought and being are coterminous. Historically typical or rationalism. Cf. Spinoza, "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" and Hegel, "The real is the rational and the rational is the real.")

(2) Like Parmenides, rationalists historically have had difficulty with the notions of change, motion, nonbeing, plurality, though not all have accepted Parmenides' arguments.

(a) A rational concept ("green," e.g.) denotes a quality common to many individual things. It is difficult through rational concepts to describe what is not common‑‑i.e., what is unique, what distinguishes one thing from everything else. One can attempt this by multiplying concepts ("Only this chair is red and green and purple"), but one never succeeds in describing exhaustively the uniqueness of something. Hence the tendency in rationalism to reduce all things to one, to eliminate uniqueness, plurality.

(b) It is similarly difficult for rational concepts to describe what uniquely pertains to one period of time; hence change and motion become suspect.

(c) "Non‑being" seems to be the very negation of rational being‑‑that to which no rational concept applies; yet "non‑being" itself seems to be a rational concept of some sort. The paradox is too great for a rationalist to swallow.

(d) Having no infallible assurance about the pluralities and changes in the world of experience, the rationalist claims some foothold of absolute knowledge in the bare idea of truth (being) itself. If nothing else is certain at least what's true is true! Thus all differentiation is rejected in the interest of an abstract blank.

(e) Christian alternative: God knows, because he has created, the uniqueness of each thing as well as its commonness with other things. He is himself both one and many and therefore finds no conflict between knowledge of unity and knowledge of diversity.

(3) Parmenides' doctrine of "illusion" illustrates the bankruptcy of rationalism. Even Parmenides, the most consistent or rationalists, must appeal to irrationalism at some point. Since his rationalism does not allow for the appearance of change, Parmenides must take refuge in myth.

C. Three Early Alternatives to Parmenides

1. Heraclitus (535‑475 B.C.)

a. The primacy of change: *panta rei*, all flows; "you cannot step in the same river twice."

b. Irrationalism?

(1) It would seem that if all things are changing all the time they cannot be captured in rational concepts (recall the rationalist's traditional difficulty with change).

(2) Yet the statement that "all changes" is itself a rational assertion.

(3) Heraclitus acknowledges a *logos*, a universal reason, governing the changing world according to a pattern.

(4) But then it would seem that the fact of such governance, at least, is an unchanging fact‑‑that not everything "flows".

(5) Heraclitus sees himself as more of a rationalist than an irrationalist, because of the logos doctrine. But the doctrine of change has had a strong influence upon philosophical irrationalism. Essentially we have here another unstable mixture.

2. Atomism: Leucippus, Democritus (460‑370), Epicurus (341‑270), Lucretius (94‑54); cf. "qualitative atomists" Empedocles (495-435) and Anaxagoras (500‑428).

a. The primacy of plurality: the world is composed of vast numbers of tiny "atoms".

(1) Each atom has the qualities of Parmenidean being‑‑it is one, ungenerated, indestructible, changeless (except in its relations to other atoms), indivisible, etc. It is however, in motion, a quality Parmenides denied in being.

(2) Solution to problem of change: the atoms change in their relations to each other, but not in their essential nature. (Cf. later statements about God.)

b. Determinism and chance:

(1) Democritus: all events are determined by the motions of atoms and their resultant relations with each other.

(2) Epicurus modifies the system: atoms occasionally "swerve" from the vertical direction, forcing collisions among them, leading to the formation of objects and accounting for free will.

c. Rationalism and Irrationalism

(1) Attempts to define the ultimate nature of the world‑not by relating all to the whole as Parmenides, but by breaking the world down into its smallest constituents.

(2) But the rationalism of the system is compromised

(a) since mind is reduced to matter and motion,

(b) since the Epicurean "swerve" is a totally irrational event,

(c) since all things happen by change.

3. Sophists: Protagoras (490‑?), Gorgias, Thrasymachus

a. Relativism is knowledge

(1) No universal truth at all. Only truth "for" the individual‑subjective opinion.

(2) Slogan. "Man is the measure of all things."

b. Rationalism

(1) Despite the irrationalistic thrust of sophistic relativism, this approach is highly rationalistic. To say that "man is the measure" is to assert man's reason as the ultimate standard, and as omnicompetent.

(2) Inconsistency: Protagoras did admit that though no opinion was truer than another, some were "better" than others. What criterion of "better" is implicit here?

(3) Like all irrationalism, Protagoras' position is inconsistent at a deeper level: for why should we believe what Protagoras says? Is sophistry only "true for him" while some other position may be "true for me"? Protagoras wants to eliminate all universal truth while claiming that his system has universal truth.

D. Plato, 427‑347: First great philosophical synthesis, trying to do justice to all sides of the issues. Convinced that there must be absolute truth, but seeking also to do justice to change, plurality, non‑being, the limits of understanding.

1. The two worlds

a. The world of our sense‑experience

(1) From sense experience, no certain knowledge. Senses deceive (a straight stick appears bent in the water, etc.)

(2) Yet somehow we‑do have the ability to correct the mistakes of sense‑ experience. By reason, we somehow know how things really are.

(3) We also know, e.g., what a perfect triangle is, although there are no perfect triangles in this world.

Hence:

b. The world of Forms, Ideas

(1) Our world of sense‑experience is a faint reproduction of another world in which are the perfect exemplars (forms, ideas), the patterns of which things on earth are copies. The perfect triangle, the perfect tree, perfect greenness, perfect goodness.

(2) Unlike the world of sense‑experience, the world of forms is perfectly knowable, through the faculty of reason.

(3) All of us before birth lived in the world of forms, beholding them.

(4) On earth we arrive at knowledge by recalling our experience of the forms before birth. "Knowledge is reminiscence.” In *Meno*, Plato shows how mathematical knowledge can be elicited from an uneducated slave simply by asking him the right questions, questions calculated to provoke his reminiscence. Thus certainty is possible, though error also exists.

(5) The forms have characteristics of Parmenidean being: self‑existent, ungenerated, indestructible, religious predicates (!)

2. The "receptacle" (*chora*, "place" ‑ similar to Aristotle's "matter")

a. If the forms are to be copied on earth, the "receptacle" is the canvas on which the copy is painted. The "receptacle" receives form, takes on the qualities of the forms.

b. Since it receives form, the receptacle is itself formless.

c. As such it has no predicates; it is non‑being.

d. Yet (and note here the contradiction in Plato's irrationalism) the receptacle must be described somehow, and thus must have some predicates. Plato describes it as having qualities opposite to the forms: perishability, imperfection.

e. The receptacle resists the forms so that the "copies" are inevitably imperfect. It is the source of all imperfection and evil.

3. The demiurge (Plato's "god")

a. Subordinate to and limited by both form and receptacle‑‑a finite god.

b. Shapes the world by applying pre‑existent forms to preexistent receptable. Since the receptacle resists formation, he cannot make perfect copies.

4. Summary: Plato's system is both rationalistic (the forms) and irrationalistic (the receptacle). Review general criticisms of the rationalist/irrationalist dialectic.

a. The forms, Plato admits, do not account for all reality, all qualities in the world, even though they were postulated for precisely that purpose.

b. The forms are supposed to provide absolutely certain knowledge; but the receptacle is a brute, irrational force which produces deviations from "the expected," and thus imperils knowledge.

c. Plato's irrationalism, like other forms of irrationalism, claims knowledge of a purely irrational principle. The receptacle is supposed to be formless and thus indescribable. Yet Plato describes it ‑ either making it into a form or admitting that form is not the sole source of rational quality.

E. Aristotle, 384‑322

1. General

a. Aristotle demythologizes Plato: the forms are not in another world, but in our world.

b. Forms, except for the divine form, always exist together with matter.

2. Substance: "that which exists in itself"

a. The most common substances are individual things ‑ chairs, tables, trees, animals, persons.

b. Each is composed of both form and matter, except for the divine substance, which is pure form.

3. Form

a. Form gives to every substance its shape, size, its qualities.

b. Things, therefore, are knowable because of their form.

4. Matter

a. Matter is that which is formed, that on which the form operates.

b. As such it has no qualities; it constitutes an irrational principle.

c. Thus things resist formation and knowledge. Matter is the source of imperfection and evil.

5. Potentiality and actuality

a. The acorn grows into an oak as its form is actualized. It is always an oak potentially. But the form is actualized by process.

b. As things become more and more actualized, the form predominates over the matter.

c. The less actualized things are, the more potentiality ("potency") they nave, the more matter predominates over form.

6. The Prime Mover

a. Accounts for change, the constant movement from potentiality to actuality.

b. He is the ultimate cause of motion, but is not himself moved; else he would require a more ultimate cause.

c. He is not a creator in time, for in Aristotle's view the changing world is itself eternal. Rather he "underlies" the whole process. (This is the basis for the "cosmological argument for God's existence." See Thomas Aquinas.)

d. Aristotle refers to this being in personal terms, and describes him as "god" although it is not clear what in his argument justifies this language. His argument itself, if sound, demonstrates only an impersonal principle of change.

e. To this being are ascribed the attributes of Parmenidean being ‑ unchangeability, indestructibility, etc.

f. The prime mover is not personally concerned with the world, to know it or love it. His sole activity is "thought thinking thought": i.e., he thinks, and the sole object of his thought is his own activity of thinking.

(1) Thought of a lesser object would compromise his supremacy. If he thought of the world, he would be limited by the world; the world would govern his thought to some extent.

(2) Cf. comment earlier (I) about "more consistent rationalism". Aristotle doesn't deny the world as does the "more consistent rationalist;" but his god behaves as if there were no world. As such the divine thought becomes trivial‑‑a principle reflecting only itself and explaining nothing outside of itself.

(3) Unlike Aristotle's god, the God of the Bible is not so threatened by the world. He can get involved with the world, because he is a person, not a mere abstract principle. And as a person, he rules all things.

g. The prime mover is pure form ‑ no matter. Thus perfectly actualized, but also abstract.

7. Human Knowledge:

a. A process by which the mind abstracts forms from concrete things.

b. Strictly speaking, only the forms are knowable, intelligible. let somehow we gain a knowledge of matter.

8. Summary

a. Note rationalist (form, prime mover) /irrationalist (matter) dialectic.

b. The prime mover does not make the world process any more rational. Though Aristotle tries to remove him from all limitation, he is profoundly limited by the world ("non-Christian transcendence").

c. "The many swallowing up the one": matter relativizes all rational explanation.

d. "The one swallowing up the many": the ultimate principle, the divine thought, reflects only upon itself as if nothing else existed. The world disappears; there is nothing left to be explained.

F. Plotinus, 204‑269 A.D.: "Neoplatonism"

1. Rationalism

a. Plotinus tries to do what neither Plato nor Aristotle could do‑‑to find a single principle which accounts for everything, including change, plurality, non‑being.

b. "Intelligence is the first legislator, or rather, it is the very law of existence. Parmenides therefore was right in saying, `Thought is identical with existence.' The knowledge of immaterial things is therefore identical with those things themselves."

c. The most ultimate principle is the One. It has none of the properties of our experience, because it is the principle behind those properties. Not green, for it is the principle of green, etc. It is strictly wrong even to call it "One;" but that is the closest we can get to conceptualizing its nature. Main point: we are agnostic about it, for only thus can it be a truly rational principle.

2. Irrationalism

a. Rationalism which leads to utter agnosticism leads thereby to irrationalism. Concerning the One, we are wholly ignorant.

b. We can say only what it is not, nor what it is. All attributes are limitations.

c. The One is known, not through discursive reasoning, but through mystical experience. In mystical experience, we know through union with the One.

d. In the end, reason is like a ladder which we use to ascend the heights, then throw away. It is a tool in achieving a suprarational experience.

3. Participation

a. The facts of our world are unreal except as they participate in the One, the changeless reality.

1. "The chain of being": All things "emanate," flow inevitably, from the One, without any diminishing of the source ‑ like light from the sun.
2. Levels: the One, *Nous* (mind), *Psyche* (soul), *Hule* (Matter).

d. Some things are further from the source (matter), some things closer (souls). There are no sharp breaks in the scale.

e. The concept of participation intends to reconcile rationalism and irrationalism; yet in fact it combines the deficiencies of both.

(1) Insofar as the emanations are real, they are indistinguishable from the One; there is no reason why they should emanate into lower forms. "One swallowing the many."

1. Insofar as the emanations are less than the One, they are intelligible. They destroy the One as a principle of explanation: "The many swallowing the One."

G. Gnosticism

1.Beginnings in first century. NT writers may refer to proto-

gnosticisms.

2. The highest being: *buthos*.

1. Continuum of semi-divine beings (*aeons*), in pairs: *logos* and *zoe*, *pneuma* and *psyche*, etc.
2. An aeon near the bottom of the scale erroneously makes the material world.
3. The chief purpose of human beings is to get free from the material world, to be reabsorbed into the higher dimensions, eventually into buthos.
4. We can achieve this salvation by secret knowledge, available through Gnostic teachers.

## Early Christian Thought

I. Original Opponents of Christianity

1. Jewish
2. Objection: it is blasphemous to worship a man as God.
3. Response: apologists sought to prove from Scripture that Jesus was the Messiah and, indeed, God in the flesh.
4. Romans
5. Objection: Christians worshiped Jesus as King, so they were potential revolutionaries.
6. Response: apologists tried to show that Christians were good citizens, that Jesus’ kingdom was not of this world.
7. Also responses to misunderstandings: cannibalism in the Lord’s Supper, “atheism,” etc.
8. Greek Philosophy
9. A revolt against religious ways of explaining the world.
10. So intellectual autonomy is sacred, “reason” the new ultimate.
11. Rationalism and irrationalism
12. Heresies Within the Church
13. Gnosticism
14. Claim secret knowledge.
15. World view similar to neoplatonism.
16. Taught disciplines for reabsorption.
17. Docetism, Marcion, influenced by Gnosticism
18. The challenge: speaking the truth in love; winsomeness without compromise.

II. Second Century Apologetics: "Preaching of Peter," Quadratus, Aristides, "The

Letter to Diognetus," Justin Martyr, Tatian, Melito, Theophilus, Athenagoras.

1. Some compromise with Gnostic-type world views.
2. God without name.
3. Emphasize negative descriptions of him.
4. God as “being,” sometimes *to on* (neuter).
5. Emanationist/continuum thinking, confusing the Doctrine of the Trinity.
6. Justin: God makes the world from pre-existing substance, as in Plato. Justin thinks Plato got the idea from Moses.
7. Justin: human beings have *autexousion*, somewhat like libertarian free will.
8. The Greeks lived *meta logou*, according to reason, so according to Jesus.
9. Problem:
10. trying to make Christianity academically respectable.
11. Trying to make Christianity attractive by making it as much like the Greek views as possible.
12. Apologetic method
13. Try to persuade the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, *Dialogue with Trypho*.
14. Persuading Romans and others that Christians are good citizens.
15. Informing his readers, vs. common misunderstandings.
16. Christians agree with much in secular philosophy, but Christ is far superior to the philosophers.
17. Justin on the Resurrection
18. It is possible, because God, who created all, has the power to raise from the dead.
19. The promise of salvation requires this.
20. The Resurrection is physical: the body emphasized in the Resurrection appearances of Christ.
21. If the Resurrection is only spiritual, it is less impressive.
22. Summary
23. Investigates the logic of the Scripture accounts themselves, giving biblical evaluations.
24. Gives the benefit of the doubt to pagan thought. Not much sense of antithesis.
25. (a) anticipates presuppositionalism, (b) neutrality.

III. Irenaeus (d. around 200)

1. Bishop of Lyons (modern France), but probably born in Smyrna, Asia Minor. Heard Polycarp. He belongs, therefore, to the tradition of "Asian theology" (Polycarp, Papias, Ignatius) which may have begun with the ministry of "John" (the apostle? "the elder"?) at Ephesus. In general, this tradition displays more biblical insight than most other post‑apostolic theology of the first two centuries. Through this tradition, possibly, and possibly also through his confrontation with heretics, Irenaeus came to a keener appreciation for the distinctiveness of Christianity than did the apologists considered above.

2. Opponents

a. Gnostics, who taught a popularized "chain of being" philosophy (unknowable God, chain of mediators, evil matter). Cf. the more sophisticated system of Plotinus.

b. Marcion, who denied the canonicity of the O.T. and much of the New in the interest of a misinterpreted Paulinism.

3. Good emphases

a. Scripture

(1) Canonicity (cf. Gaffin's lectures on Irenaeus' influence)

(2) Authority

(3) Sufficiency ‑ vs. speculation

(4) Perspicuity ‑ opposed allegorical use of Scripture; developed a kind of "biblical theology."

(5) Necessity

(a) Emphasizes the ignorance of gnostics and others who derive their ideas apart from Scripture.

(b) Critique of Platonic doctrine of reminiscence

i) If all of us have forgotten the world of forms, how can we trust Plato's recollection of it?

ii) So knowledge of God is not through reminiscence but through revelation.

b. God: Irenaeus pictures him as concrete and living, as over against the abstract principles of the heretics. God is clearly known in revelation. Here a definite advance over the earlier apologists.

c. The History of Redemption: God is very much involved with creation ‑ actively working out his purposes. Irenaeus rejects explicitly the non‑Christian notion of transcendence, that God is incapable of direct interaction with his world.

d. Direct creation: Hence, God needs no semi‑divine mediator to create the world. He does it himself, by his Word and Wisdom, *ex nihilo*. Another advance.

e. No subordinationism in intertrinitarian relationships. (cf. Van Til on the apologetic importance of the equal ultimacy of the one and many).

f. Internal critique of gnosticism: Are the emanations of one substance with the supreme being or not?

(1) If they are, then how can they be ignorant of the supreme being? (Pushes the implications of rationalism.)

(2) If they are not, then how can any mediation convey true knowledge, identity of substance being required for understanding? (Pushes the implications of irrationalism.)

(3) Comment: some good features here, as in similar arguments by earlier thinkers. Weaknesses mitigated by Irenaeus' general emphasis on a distinctively Scriptural orientation.

4. Weaknesses

a. Weak doctrine of sin; tends to confuse it with finitude.

b. Universal salvation ‑ Christ in his incarnation united all flesh to God (cf. earlier notion of *logos spermatikos*).

c. Uses language of deification when speaking of salvation; but how far is that to be pressed, especially in virtue of II Pet. 1:4?

d. Free will (*autexousion*, ‑ cf. earlier apologists.

1. Apologetic method: challenge to unbelieving epistemology is implicit, but not prominent, and is compromised by unbiblical notions.

IV. Tertullian (Carthage, c. 160‑220).

1. Background: First significant theological works in Latin; opposed gnostics, Marcion, docetists. Became a Montanist (early "charismatic" group later declared heretical). Influenced by Stoic materialism.

2. Epistemology

a. On Prescription of Heretics: The heretics have no right even to enter debate with the church; for the church has the apostolic rule of faith in Scripture, the only criterion of Christian truth. Note presuppositional thrust. Hence, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"

b. On the Flesh of Christ: Our concepts of possibility do not apply to God. Thus even though the incarnation appears to be impossible (a change in an unchangeable being), we may believe it. The death, burial and resurrection of Christ are to be believed because absurd and impossible.

* + 1. Non‑Christian irrationalism?
    2. Main emphasis of the context, however, is the offense which the gospel brings against the "wise" of this world.

(3) In context he argues that the cross and resurrection are possible because of the divine transcendence. He did not think that these were impossible.

c. Vs. Plato: Sense‑experience is not to be despised. Sense and intellect are mutually dependent.

d. Apology: Christians get their ethical principles from divine revelation, not mere human authority.

e. Summary: A real advance in epistemology. Stands firm on Scripture as Irenaeus, and more than Irenaeus sees this as the presupposition of all debate. the affirmation of something that will seem utterly absurd to those outside the faith. Nor does Tertullian exalt reason over sense, as if the final truth were to be found in the human reasoning faculty. Rather, all faculties work together under revelation (cf. *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*).

3. Theology

a. First to formulate the Latin terminology for the trinitarian and Christological distinctions (substance, person, nature), but tell into subordinationism due to influence of the *logos* speculation.

b. The Soul

(1) Critique of Plato:

(a) If the soul is essentially divine, whence ignorance?

(b) If union with the body eliminates knowledge, how can anything be known?

(c) Note here T. presses the implications of non-Christian rationalism and irrationalism.

(2) The soul is corporeal (note Stoic influence) but simple.

(3) It is not eternal, as in Plato, nor is there inherent irrationality in it. (Good).

(4) It has independence from God (*autexousion*) (Bad)

(5) It has very little being; its closeness to non‑being introduces the possibility of sin (Bad ‑ confuses sin with finitude).

(6) Though man is always free, nevertheless our union with Adam transmits an uncontrollable subjection to temptation. It is transmitted with the natural generation of the soul (traducianism).

5. Other Apologetic Elements

a. God is known through his works, by man's innate knowledge, and through Scripture (Apology).

b. Evils, ugliness of idolatry.

c. Christians are loyal, beneficial to the state.

d. Old Testament prophecy testifies to Christ (An Answer to the Jews)

6. Evaluation

a. Much more self‑consciously Christian in epistemology, yet not always consistent in that commitment.

1. Some remnants of "chain of being" thought deriving from *logos* speculation; some confusion of ethical and metaphysical.

V. Clement of Alexandria (155‑220)

1. Background: Genial, tolerant fellow, something of a philosophical dilettant. Wandered from place to place in search of truth, settled down in the catechetical school in Alexandria which he later came to head. Read Plato, various church fathers, but not Tertullian.

2. Christianity and Philosophy

a. While it doesn't produce faith, it does support it, clarify it, make it attractive.

b. Faith intuits the first principles of philosophy, so faith is the indispensable basis of philosophy. (This is general faith, however, not specifically Christian faith. Clement here is following Plato and Aristotle who said that first principles could not be demonstrated by reason.)

c. Philosophy is God's covenant with the Greeks and the law to the Jews (the river of truth has many streams).

d. Of course, not all philosophy is worthy of the name (e.g., sophists).

e. So, vs. *orthodoxastai* ‑ people who reject all philosophy in the interest of orthodox doctrine.

3. God and the World

a. Characteristically uses impersonal vocabulary.

b. God nameless; can't speak of him properly; He is "beyond being."

c. Still, certain predicates form a kind of scaffolding for the avoiding of error. Negative names are best.

d. Can know God, properly, only by mystical experience.

e. *Logos* ‑ intermediary, subordinate. Universal revelation

4. Man, Redemption

a. Free will (*autexousion*) emphasized.

b. Adam: not created perfect, but adapted to the reception of virtue.

c. Denies that all know God by nature; affirms only that we are equipped to learn by ourselves.

d. Moralistic account of man's need, the nature of salvation.

5. Evaluation

a. A regression to a view like that of Justin Martyr, though somewhat more sophisticated.

1. Unknown God connected to earth by mediators ‑ a gnostic or neo‑Platonic type of pattern which obscures the creator/ creature distinction, God's personal sovereignty over the world, and the nature of redemption.
2. Apologetics: accommodates. Tells Greeks that they can become Christians because Christians have always believed the same things as the Greeks.

VI. Origen (185‑254)

1. Background: Studied philosophy with Ammonius Saccas at Alexandria who also taught Plotinus. Sought to join the martyrs in the persecution of 203, but forbidden. Enormous capacity for work. Great achievements in biblical scholarship as well as theology. Major apologetic work: Against Celsus.

2. Significance: Origen, Thomas Aquinas and F. Schleiermacher are probably the most important synthesis‑thinkers in the history of Christian theology. These three are each responsible for developing a synthesis between Christianity and the prevailing secular philosophies. In each of these three cases, the synthesis carried the mainstream of church thought along with it. Only a significant theological reformation could dislodge such a synthesis. In Origen's case, the synthesis was between neo-Platonism and Christianity.

3. Epistemology

a. Scripture

(1) Strong view of verbal inspiration.

(2) This view negated by allegorical interpretation. In Origen's view, every text has three senses:

(a) Somatic (literal)

(b) Psychical (moral)

(c) Pneumatic (speculative): at this point, Origen can make any text teach something consistent with Greek philosophy.

(3) Apologetic purpose: to find in every text something worthy of God. If someone objects to the killing of the Canaanites, e.g., Origen can show him something philosophically profound in that very passage.

b. Methods of knowing God (how to determine what Scripture means)

(1) Synthesis ‑ finding causal origin for earthly realities.

(2) Analysis ‑ "way of negation" ‑ strip away all properties not appropriate to God. E.g.: God is a Spirit, but as Spirit he is not material, as the stoics would suggest.

(3) Analogy ‑ determining the proportion or extent to which an attribute applies to God. Though God is beyond all predication, some predicates are more true of him than others. It is more true, e.g., to say that God is just than to say he is unjust.

(4) Note that these are autonomous processes, which govern exegesis, rather than letting themselves be governed by exegesis.

4. God

a. He is Being, and beyond Being.

b. Beyond predication, but conceived as personality.

c. Trinity:

(1) Origen formulates the terminology used for Trinitarian distinctions in the Greek‑speaking churches as did Tertullian for the Latin‑speaking churches. One *ousia*, three *upostaseis*.

(2) Father and Son are one in being (*en* in John 10:30 = one thing). Cf. later term *homoousios*.

(3) Yet the Son derives his being from the Father, and is subordinate in various ways.

5. Creation (by *logos*)

a. Has been going on eternally; not a particular act as in the "literal" understanding of Genesis 1.

b. Since God could not create evil, he created all things ethically equal. Some creatures fell of their own free will.

c. People are born sick, poor, etc. because of sins in a previous life.

6. Redemption

a. Jesus overcomes the hostile powers, teaches righteousness, gives us an example (no clear penal substitution).

b. Hope of universal salvation, even of devils. (Note relation of rationalism to universalism; rationalism tends to eliminate particularities.)

c. Because of free will, there might, even after the completion of redemption, be another fall.

7. Evaluation

a. No appreciation at all for the antithesis between Christian and non‑Christian thought.

1. Freely uses the non‑Christian principles of rationalism and irrationalism in the construction of a Christian theology.

VII. Athanasius (290-373)

1. Background: Bishop of Alexandria from 328 until the end of his life. Fought valiantly to defend the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity even though persecuted by a church and imperial hierarchy which at times seemed wholly in the Arian camp.

2. Significance: Athanasius is the first great theological reformer, as Origen is the first great theological synthesizer. The Origenistic synthesis had borne bitter fruit in the Arian heresy, and Athanasius saw to the root of the problem, demolishing in effect not only Arianism, but to a great extent Origenism as well.

3. Arianism: Complicated issue. Essentially, an extreme form of subordinationism, virtually making the Son (*logos*) a creature of the Father. Slogan: "Once the Son was not."

4. Athanasius' Emphases

a. Radical unity or God ‑ no second‑class divinity.

b. Directness of God's relation to the world (Cf. Irenaeus, whose theology is very similar to that of Athanasius)

(1) Creation ‑ God has no need of mediators to accomplish his work. He can touch the earth without fear of contamination.

(2) Redemption: Only God can save. Grace.

c. Some weaknesses in anthropology, free will, the mechanism of redemption.

d. Basic arguments against Arians (basic religious points, not abstruse or philosophical)

(1) They encourage worship of a creature (idolatry)

(2) They make salvation dependent on a creature rather than wholly upon God.

VIII. Augustine (354-430 A. D.)

1. Background: Converted around 386 after involvement with Manichaeism and neo‑Platonism. Became priest (391) and Bishop of Hippo (396). For theological autobiography, see *Confessions*.
2. More aware than earlier Fathers of the philosophical differences between Christianity and other views.
3. More personalistic than Justin, Origen, et al.
4. Makes great contributions especially in the doctrines of the Trinity and Predestination, and in the philosophy of history (*The City of God*).
5. *Soliloquies* (dialogues with Reason)
6. “God and the soul, that is what I desire to know. Nothing more? Nothing whatever.”
7. But to know these, one must first learn Truth.
8. Truth is by nature imperishable, for even if it perishes, it is still true that truth has perished; therefore truth has not perished.
9. So truth is immutable and eternal, that is, divine.
10. So God and the soul exist, and the Truth exists in both. (Even if I am being deceived, it is true that I am being deceived, so I exist.)
11. Forms exist in the mind of God.
12. Human knowledge, then, is by divine illumination.
13. *On the Teacher*
14. Teaching (especially by signs) is impossible, unless the learner already knows what he is being taught. (Cf. Plato’s *Meno* and the “paradox of ignorance.”)
15. So we can learn only because the mind already possesses Truth (compare Plato’s theory of reminiscence).
16. Skepticism about much of sense-experience, particular occurrences. Knowledge mainly of universals in those occurrences, which we know innately. Historical events in Scripture.
17. *On the Immortality of the Soul*
18. But what about error? How can the mind, which is true, turn to “stupidity?”
19. Answer: error, like evil, is a privation of being, a defectiveness in the reality of the mind.
20. This defect cannot destroy the soul altogether, for truth cannot perish.
21. *On the Profit of Believing*
22. Defense of authority: If we had never heard of any religion, we should seek out those famous for their knowledge. Of course, that does not prove their truth.
23. Influential in apologetics for the authority of the Roman Catholic magisterium.
24. Comments
25. One of the first elaborate Christian-theistic epistemologies, though very much under the influence of Plato.
26. Augustine says much about Truth in a rather abstract sense, as if it were a Platonic form. He does, finally, locate Truth in God’s mind and identify it with God’s own personal nature.
27. As with Plato, the relation between the divine Truth and the human mind that “participates” in Truth is somewhat obscure. Better: God reveals truths to man, by his sovereign control, authority, presence in the world.
28. Difficulties increase when Augustine considers error; for how can error exist in Truth? The “privation” theory is not satisfactory. If God created all and governs all things, the privations as well as the actualities are within his plan.
29. Augustine’s skepticism about sense-experience, and about knowledge of particulars, is not biblical. Scripture puts much emphasis on historical narrative and upon testimony based on sense experience (1 John 1:1ff).
30. Nor are we like the ignorant person in *Profit of Believing*. For according to Rom. 1, nobody is religiously illiterate.
31. The combination of abstract Truth and skepticism about sense-experience suggests the rationalist-irrationalist dialectic of non-Christian philosophy.
32. But Augustine seeks to “believe that he may understand.”

## Medieval Philosophy

I. Christian Neoplatonism

1. Pseudo‑Dionysius (4th or 5th century)

a. Thought by many (including Thomas Aquinas) to be "Dionysius the Areopagite" converted through Paul's ministry (Acts 17:34).

b. Actually a Syrian writer, in all probability, who applies Christian terminology to neo‑Platonic concepts.

2. John Scotus Erigena (810-877)

a. Translated pseudo‑Dionysius, other Greek works.

b. Chief theologian of the Carolingian renaissance.

1. Ambiguous mix of biblical and neo‑Platonic motifs.

II. Anselm of Canterbury (1033‑1109)

1. Background: Much influenced by Plato and Augustine. Sometimes called "the second Augustine."

2. *Credo ut Intelligam*: Anselm adopts Augustine's slogan, "I believe in order that I might understand."

a. Suggests that faith precedes reasoning in divine matters. Anselm contrasts this with believing in order to understand. Good; but perhaps it would be getter to say that both faith and reason ought to be subject to God's Word.

b. Suggests also that reason is the goal of faith, that reason goes beyond faith or builds upon it in some way. This can be taken in good or bad senses.

3. *Cur Deus Homo*? ("Why the God‑man?")

a. Extremely influential treatise on why Jesus became incarnate and died: as satisfaction for sin.

b. Somewhat rationalistic in plan: "...leaving Christ out of view (as if nothing had ever been known of him), it (the book) proves, by absolute reasons, the impossibility that any man should be saved without him." The book does, however, smuggle in many biblical assumptions.

4. Monologium: rational arguments on the existence, unity and nature of God, similar to those of Aquinas (below). Note again the plan: "that nothing in Scripture should be urged upon the authority of Scripture itself, but that whatever the conclusion of independent investigation should declare to be true, should...be briefly enforced by the cogency of reason..."

5. Proslogium: "The Ontological Argument for God's Existence"

a. Roots in Parmenides, Plato, Augustine. Rejected by Aquinas and Rant; accepted in various revised forms by the continental rationalists, the idealists, some recent apologists, some language analysis philosophers (N. Malcolm, A. Plantinga), process philosophers and theologians.

b. Seems like a game with words, but very difficult to refute. Has captivated philosophers of every generation since.

c. Formulations

(1) God is "that than which no greater can be conceived."

(2) A God who exists outside the mind is greater than one who exists only in the mind.

(3) Thus, if God existed only in the mind, a greater than he could be conceived, namely one existing outside the mind. That cannot be.

(4) Therefore, God exists outside the mind.

(5) Simplified form: God is perfect; perfection entails existence; therefore God exists.

d. This argument can be interpreted in terms of the Platonism of the early Augustine (q.v.): That being which corresponds to imperishable truth must exist. So interpreted, Anselm's argument proves only a formal, contentless being, not the God of Scripture.

(1) It is true that the ontological argument can be used, and has been used, to prove almost any kind of ultimate. Compare the different "gods" proved by Spinoza, Descartes, Hegel, Malcolm, Hartshorne.

(2) One reason for this is that the argument depends on the concept of "perfection," a value‑judgment which differs greatly from thinker to thinker.

(3) Such an analysis ties in well with the Platonic‑rationalistic emphasis in Anselm's other writings.

e. But there are some indications that Anselm's formulation of this argument (as opposed to the formulations or Descartes, Spinoza, etc.) tends toward a distinctively Christian presuppositionalism.

(1) The document is written as a prayer, as reasoning in the presence of God. It is clear, then, that the author has no real doubts as to God's existence.

(2) He asks God to clarify his understanding, recognizing the weakness and sinfulness of his own nature.

(3) "...I long to understand in some degree thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, ‑ that unless I believed, I should not understand."

(4) The title "that than which no greater can be conceived" is taken as a *datum* given by revelation ‑ a presupposition.

(5) When Gaunilo replies "on behalf of the fool" (who says there is no God), Anselm refuses to reply to the fool; he replies only to the "Catholic;" and in replying, he appeals to Gaunilo's "faith and conscience".

(6) From these considerations, it is clear that Anselm has a particular "God" in mind, and a concept of "perfection" derived from the Scriptures. One could, then, accept this "proof" as a genuine presuppositional argument, setting forth the role of divine existence within the system of Christian faith.

(7) Even as such it could hardly be persuasive without more epistemological prolegomena.

f. All in all, the nature of the argument is difficult to ascertain. There are elements here both of Platonic rationalism and of genuine Christian insight.

g. Reconstruction

1. The proof may be seen as an appeal to one's "presupposition," his "basic commitment," his paradigm of perfection.
2. For Christians: the God of Scripture, our paradigm of perfection, must exist; else, all evaluations, predications are meaningless.

III. Thomas Aquinas (1225‑1274)

1. Significance: Aquinas is the most important of the medieval thinkers, and until Vatican II his philosophy dominated the thought of the Roman Catholic Church. In response to the challenge of newly discovered writings of Aristotle which were being used against Christianity, Aquinas produced a massive, ingenious synthesis (cf. Origen) between Christianity and Aristotle. Aquinas is also deeply influenced by neo‑Platonism, particularly by way of Pseudo‑Dionysius.

2. Faith and Reason

a. "Natural reason," operating apart from revelation, is able to discover many things, not only about the natural world, but even about God (his existence and major attributes).

b. Other things are known only by revelation and are received only by faith (the trinity, creation *ex nihilo*, etc.)

c. Some things provable by natural reason are also revealed, so that those unable to prove them may nevertheless know them.

d. Comment: This distinction makes reason autonomous within its own sphere, although faith has a "veto power" when reason contradicts something revealed. Thus, Thomas develops his basic metaphysical scheme out of Aristotle and fits the data of Scripture into that scheme as best he can.

3. Epistemology

a. Thomas holds, with Aristotle and against Plato, that in general forms are found in things, together with matter, not in some separate world.

b. Knowledge, then, is a matter of abstracting the forms from the things in which those forms are found.

c. All knowledge, then, begins in sense experience; but it is not genuine knowledge until the "active intellect" determines the essential or universal properties (forms) of the things it investigates.

d. Since we have no sense experience of God (or angels), we can know of them only by revelation or through their effects. Cf. the "three ways" of Origen.

(1) "Way of causality" ‑ attributing to God the ability to cause all things known in experience.

(2) "Way of remotion" (*via negativa*) ‑ since God far surpasses our intellect, we cannot say what God is (his essence); but we can learn what he is not, by distinguishing him from all that is merely finite, creature.

(3) "Way of eminence" ‑ ascribing to God in utmost degree every perfection known in our experience.

(4) Comment: At no point in these discussions of method does Thomas demand that the process be subject to God's revelation of himself. There is thus nothing to prevent these reasonings from being caught up in the rationalist/irrationalist dialectic. God will become a larger version of creaturely properties, or an indefinite opposite (remotion) to those properties.

e. Language about God

(1) No language applies to God and to creatures univocally (in the same sense), as "man" to Socrates and Plato, for univocal predication would place God and creatures on the same level.

(2) Nor does this language apply to God and to creatures in essentially different ways (equivocally), as "man" to Socrates and to a chess‑piece. For between God and creation there are some likenesses and some relations (especially causal).

(3) Language about God is best characterized as analogical neither purely univocal nor purely equivocal. Cf. "healthy," applied to medicine as cause of health, to urine as sign of health. So the same properties apply to God as to creatures, but in different degrees and different ways.

(4) Comment:

(a) Scholars nave debated long over the nature of analogical predication in Thomas. E.g., when we say that God is "holy," are we saying merely that God is the cause or holiness in. creatures, or are we saying more? Thomas is highly agnostic about "what God is" ("in himself"). On the other hand, he claims to know, even to demonstrate, definite information about God. And even to say that God is cause of holiness is to say something definite.

(b) In any case, the distinctions here show the rationalism and irrationalism in Thomas' approach. Building the whole structure on Aristotle's "natural reason," Thomas must either be wholly agnostic about God (equivocism), reduce him to the creaturely level (univocism), or adopt some unstable compromise between these (analogism).

(c) Biblical alternative: God tells us in Scripture how to speak of him. He gives us a language which refers naturally to him while distinguishing him from creatures. Thomas' problem comes in trying to develop the knowledge of God purely out of extrapolation from "natural knowledge," not developing his basic structure from God's self‑ revelation.

(5) "The analogy or being": Corresponding to this analogous language is an analogous reality. Not only does "holy" apply both to God and to creatures, but there is a property of holiness which is found in God and in creatures in different ways. Hence the "scale of being."

4. Proofs of God's Existence

a. Cosmological (God as adequate cause)

(1) From motion

(a) Every moving thing must be moved by something else.

(b) No infinite regress of movers, for without a first mover there would be no second or third mover.

(c) Thus there is a first mover, itself unmoved and unmoving.

(2) From efficient cause (steps same as above: Every effect must be caused by something else, etc.)

(3) From the contingency of the world

(a) If the whole world is contingent (i.e., if it is possible for everything in the world not to be), then at one time the world did not exist.

(b) If at one time it did not exist, then it would not exist now, for there would at that time have been nothing to cause its existence.

(c) Therefore everything in the world is not contingent. There must be something which exists necessarily, God.

b. Criteriological (Sometimes this one is called cosmological, sometimes teleological, sometimes a Platonic reversion to something like the ontological which Thomas had rejected earlier. It doesn't much matter what you call it.)

(1) Things are more or less good, true, noble etc. as they approximate a standard which is the maximum in these qualities.

(2) This maximum is the cause of all lesser manifestations of the quality.

(3) Thus (by causal argument) the maximum must actually exist.

c. Teleological (Actually a certain kind of cosmological argument which asks a sufficient cause for the phenomenon of purposefulness.)

(1) Unintelligent beings including natural objects act for an end, a purpose.

(2) This cannot be unless they are directed by an intelligent being, i.e., God.

d. Comment

(1) The proofs presuppose univocal knowledge of God, particularly in the predicates "mover," "cause," "necessity," and "intelligence." The criteriological argument suggests that God has creaturely properties in maximum degree. This univocism conflicts with Thomas' emphasis on analogy.

(2) For Aristotle, God is "cause" of the world, not as its creator *ex nihilo*, but merely as its underlying principle. The world s eternal, for Aristotle. Thomas does not adequately distinguish his concept of cause from that of Aristotle, and thus proves only a god correlative with the world. (Later, he affirms creation *ex nihilo* on the basis of revelation.)

(3) Hume and Kant: on an empirical basis, one cannot generalize from observed causal and teleological relations within the world to a cause or purpose for the world. None of us has any experience of the world as a totality sufficient to justify such inference.

(4) Kant: The cosmological and teleological prods reduce to the ontological, because both proceed from a mere idea of which no experience is possible ("cause of all") to the reality corresponding to the idea.

(5) The proofs nevertheless have some usefulness:

(a) Taken as they are, they are useful *ad hominem* devices. If people act on certain assumptions (cause, criterion, purpose) in everyday life, why should they not make the same assumptions at the ultimate level? The only unbelieving response to this consideration is reversion to an irrationalism (as in Hume and Kant), and that is also vulnerable. "Opposing non‑Christian irrationalism by non‑Christian rationalism."

(b) Revised, they set forth a Christian basis for belief in God.

i) Insist vs. Aristotle that a cause is required not only for the motion of the world, but even for its very existence, even for its matter.

ii) Insist vs. Aristotle, Hume and Kant that an empiricist epistemology is inadequate; that all argument must presuppose God's self‑ revelation.

iii) Within a Christian framework, then, we can point out that the concepts of cause, motion, contingency, criterion and purpose presuppose God for their intelligibility. Unless God exists, it makes no sense to speak of anything as cause of anything else, etc. Without God all is an empty blank (rationalism) or unrelated chance happenings (irrationalism).

iv) So understood, the proofs are remarkably biblical! For they set forth areas in which Scripture stresses the clear revelation of

God's presence:

a) Cosmological: creation (situational perspective)

b) Criteriological: God as standard, criterion, law (normative perspective)

c) Teleological: God as constantly involved with creation, directing it in providence (situational, existential).

5. Other Teachings

a. Trinity. Some Sabellian leanings, though subtle. Thomas' doctrine here is not strong enough, I would think, to make the "one and many equally ultimate" in epistemology. God is "being", and there is some tendency toward subpersonal characterizations of him and hence toward "chain of being" conceptions.

b. Predestination: Thomas is a strong predestinarian, but his view of divine sovereignty is weakened by his Aristotelianism and by his somewhat mechanistic concept of the divine operations, particularly in saving grace.

c. Evil: Thomas shares some of the problems of Augustine in this area: evil as privation of being. Confusion of ethical and metaphysical.

IV. Later Medieval Developments

1. Mysticism (Eckhardt) ‑ Neo‑Platonic influence.

2. Irrationalist tendencies:

a. John Duns Scotus (1274‑1308)

(1) More voluntarist emphasis

(a) Will is not determined by knowledge of the good; it chooses to do good or evil in the face of its knowledge.

(b) The will is free of all determination.

(c) God's decisions, similarly, are not determined by divine reason. God could revoke any of his own laws (except the first four commandments).

(2) So less confidence in natural theology, less role for rational demonstration in theology.

b. William of Occam (1280‑1367)

(1) "Occam's razor": Always choose the simplest possible explanation, the one which makes the fewest suppositions, which assumes the fewest entities.

(2) "Nominalism": Only particulars exist. There are no universals (redness, truth, goodness) existing independently of particular things and situations.

(3) The existence of God cannot be demonstrated, though it can be shown probable by reason. Articles of faith (trinity, etc.) cannot even be rendered intelligible to reason. There is no particular experience of God, or the soul.

(4) The authority of the church is no help.

(a) The church is nothing more than a collection of believers.

(b) Papal claims groundless.

(5) Thus we believe on Scripture authority alone. (What is implicit or explicit in Scripture.)

1. Comment: Occam's rejection of papal and conciliar authority, his espousal of Scriptural sufficiency and his rejection of speculation had great influence on the reformers. (Luther: "I am from Occam's school.") Yet the irrationalism of Occam's epistemology is not warranted by Scripture. The free‑will notion correlative with this irrationalism wrought havoc with the doctrine of sin and salvation. Cf. tendencies in Lutheran anthropology and epistemology ‑ Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 197‑209.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)