

# What Does Theology Have to Do With Evidence? Exploring Analytic Theology and Epistemology

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The purpose of this essay is to reflect upon one specific aspect of the complex relationship between theology and philosophy, namely, the relationship between theological epistemology and analytic philosophical epistemology.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, I want to think about the following question: why should analytic theologians be interested in analytic epistemology at all?

While my essay does not contain an argument in any strict sense, it nevertheless puts forward a claim, or perhaps a kind of dilemma. It is this. On the one hand, it seems reasonable to maintain that analytic theology should not commit too strongly to one single approach to knowledge and justification coming from analytic epistemology. In other words, it seems plausible that in order to do analytic theology, one does not first have to develop a comprehensive account of knowledge and justified belief. On the other hand, analytic epistemological theories may be useful in defending the rationality of the theological enterprise against secular attempts to undermine it. We should not hope analytic theologians to completely dismiss analytic epistemology. In addition, analytic epistemology can surely help theologians to better analyze basic religious concepts, like belief, faith, and experience.

I am interested in finding a middle way between grounding analytic theology on a secular epistemology and completely rejecting the project of defending the rationality of the theological project against the secular critic. I will begin by outlining the reasons for my interest in this issue and the positions that I want to avoid. I will then proceed to briefly examine one dominant trend in contemporary theology that eschews any kind of evidential considerations – a trend known as non-foundationalism or postfoundationalism. Subsequent sections deal with the motivations behind analytic religious epistemology and the project of analytic theology. Finally, the last section goes through some recent texts and ideas that might be of use in formulating a position that would avoid the pitfalls identified in the previous sections.

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<sup>1</sup> As the reader will soon see, this essay is somewhat more personal and less strict than a standard journal article. Indeed, this is the reason why I call it an essay rather than something else.

## Some Preliminary Claims

Before we go any further, let me briefly explain what I mean by the terms “foundation” and “grounding.” The question about the epistemic foundation of the theological enterprise is the question of whether religious and theological sources of knowledge can be given a secular or general justification. It is clear that Christian theology has multiple epistemic foundations, such as revelation, religious experience, religious practice, and the traditions that uphold these practices and beliefs. In this sense, all agree that theology indeed has a foundation or a ground. The disputed question is whether theology needs to vindicate these sources of knowledge in the eyes of non-Christians and non-religious people, in the eyes of all rational individuals. Another way to put the question is this: are there some general norms of rationality that Christians and non-Christians can agree upon and will these norms, if they exist, justify Christian sources of knowledge?

On this question, there are two extreme views I want to avoid. First of all, there are those who maintain that theological and religious knowledge requires no “outside” justification. In other words, the “non-foundationalist” or “postfoundationalist” will claim that there are no general or universal norms of rationality and justification at all, and that the norms we have are deeply tradition and culture specific. Thus, there is no rational requirement to offer a general justification for the ways in which theology gains knowledge. It follows from this that general or secular accounts of knowledge are of very little use to theology: theology has its own account of knowledge that does not necessarily connect with non-theological ones.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the view that in order for theology to be warranted as an enterprise, theology must have a general account of knowledge and justification that all can agree upon and then it must show that theological knowledge is indeed warranted on the basis of this account. Traditional natural theology was an attempt to provide such a foundation for theological knowledge by invoking a very high, evidentialist standard: central theological claims can be deduced from principles of reason that are indubitable to all rational individuals or from other, empirical premises that are highly probable and can be accessed by all. The epistemic standard here is sometimes dubbed as classical foundationalism. I will return to this later in detail.

As I said, I am critical of both extremes. On the one hand, I do think that there are some general principles and norms of rationality that are relatively panhuman or at least not completely culture specific. It seems that some practices of belief-formation are clearly non-truth-conducive while others are truth-conducive. In this sense, I think the non-foundationalist position is mistaken. On the other hand, I do not think we are obligated to produce a full-blown natural theology and an underlying epistemological theory in order to engage in the theological enterprise.<sup>2</sup> I think this for many reasons. One is that classical foundationalist standards are seldom applied to non-religious beliefs. Why should religious beliefs be subject to a standard that is

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that natural theology does not have value.

significantly higher than most beliefs in most non-religious domains of life? Some claim that scientific beliefs are held to the classical foundationalist standard as they can be publicly demonstrated as being highly probable given the evidence. I am not so sure about that. In any case, if we do not want to claim that people are only justified in having beliefs that science has produced, there is no deep worry here. Second, theology itself speaks against the view that faith is the outcome of argument and theoretical reflection alone. Responding to the Gospel in faith seems to be much more than simply adopting a set of propositions. It seems to involve a comprehensive set of volitional and emotional attitudes including changes in one's valuations and life projects.

I want to find a reasonable midway point between these two extremes. I think that Christian faith should be, if true, held as responsibly as any other belief. In other words, insofar as there are general standards of rationality, Christian faith should be held according to those standards. Furthermore, it should be such that epistemically responsible and virtuous individuals and communities can hold it. If Christianity were true, we should expect to know it in a way that is not vicious or such that it does violence to us. Of course, what "holding responsibly and virtuously" means depends on many things, including what humans are like and what the world is like. To these questions, there are no neutral and easy answers: theology has its own views about what we are and what the ultimate nature of the world is. I see no compelling reason why these claims should be abandoned or bracketed out when theologians talk epistemology.

Before we move forward, let me make a couple points about the theological context of epistemology. First of all, I will assume that there is no complete "Canonical epistemology," a comprehensive theory of Christian knowledge that the tradition and Scripture foist upon us. To my knowledge, Scripture is not too interested in the epistemological details of how we come to know the Gospel. The subsequent theological tradition is, thus, underdetermined by Biblical data.

However, I do think that Scripture and the tradition provide us with some general platitudes. Here are some of them: faith is much more than just belief in the truth of a proposition; faith is closely linked to one's life's projects and practices; in faith one encounters God/Christ and this is transformative; the subject of faith is the community of faith and not just the lone believer; faith is (in some sense) salvific and as such a gift from God; faith is obtained through a complex process involving concrete media, such as the Word of God and the sacraments, and it involves the indwelling of God himself in the believer. Despite these "peculiarities of Christian knowledge," Scripture has examples of Christians speaking to non-Christians and putting forward their views in an argumentative and inferential form. St. Paul and the Apostles seem occasionally to invoke something like publicly accessible evidence: they maintain that the tomb was empty; they invoke fulfilled prophecies, miracles, and so on. Moreover, they encourage Christians to explain their faith to others and give reasons and evidence for it. In such cases, they seem to be suggesting that basic Christian convictions do indeed have evidence that can be accessed by all individuals and that Christian sources of knowledge (e.g., revelation through prophesy and historical events) are at least possible sources of knowledge for non-Christians. So, even in the Scriptures, it seems, we have evidence for two strategies: on the one hand,

emphasize the “peculiar” nature of the knowledge that the Gospel provides; and on the other hand, produce more general (public, pan-human) reasons for taking the Gospel seriously.

## Theology and Evidence: The Spirit of Postmodernism

Let me briefly examine the “no foundations” position more carefully and the motivations for it. This view, as I understand it, claims that the sources of religious faith require no general warrant or justification and, therefore, religious faith requires no evidence accessible to non-Christians. It seems to me that contemporary systematic theology has, for the most part, adopted this stance. In particular, those calling themselves postliberal, postfoundationalist, or non-foundationalist theologians reject the need for “outside justification” or “universal epistemic foundation” for the theological project.

In his book *Theology in Search of Foundations* (2009), Randal Rauser describes the story like this. Before the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the advent of classical foundationalism, theology was not particularly concerned about justifying its sources of knowledge in any universal or general sense. After the Reformation, the emergence of modern science and post-Reformation political tumults in Europe, a new standard of justification emerged. This was classical foundationalism. Now, theology had two options: either take the route of John Locke or various other Enlightenment natural theologians by defending theological claims by invoking “general principles of reason” or abandon the epistemic project altogether and instead, justify theological claims through ethics, for instance (like Kant). As a side effect of the natural theological project, there were also attempts to ground theology on scriptural inerrancy.

The contemporary postliberal theologian will take the failure of classical foundationalism as a given and proceed to do theology without providing a general justification for theological sources of knowledge. Since there are no extra-linguistic or non-tradition-dependent criteria for rationality and justification, theological views are justified by tradition-specific criteria alone. In his book, Rauser discusses many theological proposals along these lines, including Nancey Murphy’s (1996), Stanley Grenz’s (Grenz & Franke 2001), and Bruce Marshall’s (1999). We could also add Robert Jenson (2001) to the list, I think.

However, postfoundationalism or nonfoundationalism need not completely drop the need for generally accessible evidence and argument. Let us take just one example, J. Wentzel van Huyssteen. Van Huyssteen (1997, 1999) describes his position as “postfoundationalism.” Very briefly, van Huyssteen sees rationality as a tradition-specific embodied practice. People learn the ways in which they justify and give reasons for their views in their respective communities and cultural traditions. Because of their differing locations in space and time, different traditions develop different epistemic practices. Since van Huyssteen denies the possibility of some kind of “meta-tradition” or God’s eye point of view, we are left with no tradition-universal criteria for rationality. However, van Huyssteen does think that traditions can and

should engage in dialogue with each other. In these “transversal spaces,” traditions can meet and share their reasons and ideas without the fear of being falsified or rejected wholesale. This is important for van Huyssteen, because he develops his proposal in the context of the religion/science dialogue. Instead of “subjugating theology to foreign forms of rationality” (science), he maintains that science is just one tradition among many. However, the kind of dialogue that happens in transversal spaces is indeed a kind of evidentialist and internalist enterprise: the participants seek to back their views with evidence, reason, and argument that are maximally publicly accessible. Indeed, traditions should, in van Huyssteen’s view, constantly assimilate new information and develop themselves by assessing the available new evidence.

This description does make van Huyssteen seem like a very strong non-foundationalist. For fairness sake, we must also mention that in his later work (2006) he develops a more robust notion of rationality based on what he calls “evolutionary epistemology.” The idea is, very briefly, that underlying various traditions there is a basic set of panhuman cognitive capacities. Basic human cognition makes convergence and transversality between traditions and epistemic practices possible.

Like Rauser (2009), I see many problems with the “no foundations” approach. Let us take just a few examples.<sup>3</sup> Consider the linguistic thesis that was presented against classical foundationalism. Classical foundationalism tended to suppose that there is something like “pure,” unconceptualized experience that all people share. The linguistic thesis is simply the insistence that all experience is conceptually mediated, which in turn means that we have no direct access to the world as it is outside our conceptualizations of it. The proponent of the thesis argues that since concepts are needed to talk about our experience of the world, the experiences themselves must be conceptually conditioned. But this does not follow. In the case of perceptual knowledge, I am being presented by numerous facts about my environment. For example, all the different shades of color on my computer display are presented to me at the same time. This does not mean, however, that we need to have corresponding color concepts to have such experiences. In other words, we can experience the properties of our environment without grasping the associated concept. Such a view would entail a *direct realist* view of perception and other sources of basic beliefs (reason, memory): our beliefs that are composed of our basic concepts can be grounded directly in our basic perceivings. As such, the theory entails that there are concepts that have a natural, intrinsic connection with the properties exemplified by the world in which we live in. Thus, language is not a world in which we live, a veil between the world and ourselves; it does not determine our experience of the world. Instead, language is a tool to conceptualize and talk about the world in which we take part.

Another problem with many non-foundationalist proposals is their reliance on coherence. The problem is that coherence seems to be only one possible mark of true beliefs, not the only one. Imagine that you are working at your office, when you are suddenly hit in the head. Due to some strange misfiring in your brain, you still keep having the sensation of being in your office and believing that you see a computer in

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<sup>3</sup> The following examples come from Rauser.

front of you. But in truth, you have been taken to the hospital and most of your beliefs are false. In this case your beliefs would be coherent, but we would be extremely hesitant to say that they would be justified. Instead, we would say that they are not justified, because after the lighting strike and neural misfiring they have been produced in a mistaken manner, that is, in a manner that is not reliable, conducive to truth. So, it seems that coherence might be one mark of truth-conduciveness, but it seems neither a necessary nor a sufficient mark all by itself. Instead, the most important mark for truth and guideline for justification would be the *de facto* reliability of the belief-forming mechanism.

Rauser also challenges the metaphysical anti-realism or non-realism undergirding nonfoundationalism. He claims that metaphysical realism is not one theory among many but a necessary precondition for talking about truth, language, and related concepts. Kantian forms of anti-realism are incoherent because they claim that we know nothing about the noumenal world but nevertheless postulate such a world as an explanation for the phenomenal world. But if we cannot know anything about the noumenal, how can we know that it explains the phenomenal – why not dispense with the noumenal altogether? In other words, Kantian anti-realism collapses into subjective idealism. Other forms of anti-realism do not fare any better. Constitutive anti-realism sees the “real world” as a kind of undetermined flux that only takes determinate shape when we carve it into categories with our concepts. Again, the problem is that incoherence looms: if the real world is constituted by our concepts, the claim that the world is constituted by our concepts is also constituted by our concepts and so on *ad infinitum*.

Finally, it seems that there is a form of rationality that is more or less universal. We human beings are not that different from one another, cognitively speaking. We have mostly the same cognitive capacities and mechanisms. The dizzying diversity of worldviews and beliefs is not the result of “different rationalities” or different psychologies, but simply a matter of having access to different information, different experiences and assessing the plausibility of that information differently. This is the basic idea behind dual-process models of cognition that have received significant support from empirical studies in cognitive science, neuroscience, and social psychology (e.g., Kahneman 2011, Gigerenzer 2009). Our higher cognition gives us the capacity to process and evaluate evidence and information in a number of different ways, but underlying our higher cognition, there is a set of basic mechanisms, a kind of core rationality.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the basic cognitive similarity of the human race, I am rather skeptical about our being able to produce a general epistemological theory of knowledge, justification, and other notions in the vicinity. I will return to this point later but let me just say this: if the cognitive scientists are correct, most of our belief-forming mechanisms are not consciously accessible to us. Some beliefs we adopt go through a conscious, reflective evaluation process but this is more an exception rather than a rule. For the rest, we simply do not know introspectively how they come about.

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<sup>4</sup> Kahneman and Gigerenzer disagree about the details: on Kahneman’s view, implicit biases and heuristics are often problematic, whereas Gigerenzer speaks about the usefulness of heuristics and biases, for instance.

Furthermore, the processes that produce our beliefs are extremely complex (if we believe the cognitive scientists) and as such resist one clean and neat theoretic description.

## Analytic Religious Epistemology as Apologetics

For the most part, analytic religious epistemologies have rejected strong forms of the linguistic thesis and the accompanying antirealism. Instead, people like Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne have offered epistemological theories in line with moderate foundationalism while rejecting classical foundationalism. Plantinga and Swinburne have different views on justification and how the sources of theological knowledge are warranted, but they do agree that some general criteria for rationality exist and that theological views should be held to this standard. Nevertheless, I think that analytic proposals along these lines suffer from some theological and philosophical deficiencies. In this section, I will focus on one such deficiency, namely, their very limited goal. Their goal, it seems, is to respond to the evidentialist objection against religious faith, namely, the claim that in order for faith to be rational, it must be supported by adequate evidence. This criterion of “adequate evidence” entails, it seems, that the sources of theological knowledge should have a non-religious warrant or justification.

If one looks at any current textbook of analytic philosophy of religion, the sections on faith and reason invariably begin with a description of Clifford’s evidentialist challenge (e.g., Murray & Rea 2008, Wood 2010). The subsequent discussions then examine Plantinga’s rejection of the challenge and Swinburne’s attempt to meet it. Consider also the life stories of Plantinga and Swinburne as outlined in *Philosophers Who Believe* (1994). To make a long story short, as a young man Swinburne became frustrated by Anglican theologians who were not interested in providing any reasons for their faith or who outright rejected natural theology. He then went on to develop a highly nuanced response to the evidentialist challenge: Bayesian internalism is the best account of justification and basic Christian claims (like the existence of God) can be justified according to this standard. Plantinga’s story is somewhat similar. He sees his Christian faith challenged by his fellow philosophers as, not simply false, but irrational. He then proceeds to develop an epistemological theory that both vindicates his Christian faith and is designed to be acceptable as an analytic epistemological theory. In both cases, the underlying motivation for the enterprise seems to be an apologetic one. In other words, the goal of analytic religious epistemology is to show that not only can Christian faith be (and in many cases is) justified given some general epistemic criteria, but the Christian also has full epistemic rights, as it were, to take the sources of theological knowledge seriously.

In his book *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (2006), William Abraham claims that oftentimes both nonfoundationalists and analytic epistemologists employ the same general strategy. It goes like this:

Develop a general account of rationality or justification and then apply it to theism to see how far belief in God is rational or justified. The obvious rationale for this strategy is that without something like this our approach to belief in God will appear insecure and question begging. We need a vision of rationality or justification that will stand independently of the beliefs it secures; otherwise the whole exercise looks like special pleading. (6)

This is pure epistemological methodism. In order to find out whether you have knowledge or not, you need to develop a rather neutral theory of what makes justified belief knowledge first and then apply it to the beliefs you want to examine. Plantinga and Swinburne offer general epistemological theories in terms acceptable in the context of analytic epistemology. For people like van Huyssteen and others, the context is postmodern or broadly speaking Continental philosophy, where the project of general epistemology has been largely abandoned. The strategy is the same regardless: first formulate a general philosophical epistemological theory (or reasons why such a theory is impossible) and then show how theology is in accord with this theory.

Now, let me pose a simple question: in what way do Plantinga's or Swinburne's epistemological accounts serve theology? Do they give us basic methods for doing good theology? I do not think so: they deal very little with the peculiarities of Christian knowledge. Do they give us tools to decide which theory of atonement is the best one? Do they somehow ground theological reasoning or even the reasoning of individual believers? I do not think so: theology was able to do most of its task without such epistemological theories. In a word—and this is the controversial bit—what these theories in fact do, if successful, is to show that the theological project cannot be dismissed as irrational or that individual believers cannot be accused of irrationality. To put it briefly: the main function of analytic religious epistemology is apologetic.

Now, I am not trying to say that being apologetic is bad. On the contrary, sometimes one needs to be apologetic. Indeed, it would certainly be a good thing, if the apologetic project of analytic religious epistemology were to succeed. If we could provide a reasonable, full-scale epistemological account that would satisfy the analytic desiderata as well as show that Christian faith and its sources were justified, I would be happy to take it aboard. However, I do not think that the rationality of the Christian theological enterprise depends upon such a theory and theology can proceed quite well without an analytic account of its sources and criteria for justified belief. As I will suggest in the next section, it seems that the theological project as a whole has many, more significant goals in mind: indeed, the attempt to demonstrate the rationality of the whole project in secular terms is a rather low priority in theology. Theology needs much more than apologetics.



## The Peculiarity of Christian Knowledge: Knowing God ≠ Knowing that God Exists

This section makes some general points about the project of analytic theology as a whole and gives some reasons to think that analytic religious epistemology has only a limited role in this project. I will suggest that the goals of analytic theology are much broader and the kind of epistemological reflection needed to reach these goals goes far beyond responding to the evidentialist challenge.

I return yet again to Abraham's *Crossing the Threshold*. One of Abraham's points is that by focusing on analytic epistemology (or some other kind of secular epistemology) theologians miss or downplay distinctly Christian ways of knowing. Abraham agrees with some of the critiques made against early modern philosophy and theology operating under classical foundationalism: by attempting to justify central theological claims by "general, universal reason," Christian theology was emptied from its traditional content and its distinctive historical claims were lost. This is, I think, the point where the postliberal or non-foundationalist theologian has her heart in the right place: we have to be careful not to force the richness of the Christian tradition and experience of faith into a simplified epistemological schema. In this sense, the non-foundationalist has a point: there are many sources of Christian knowledge that classical foundationalism is not able to account for.

The most peculiar aspect of Christian knowledge is the claim that it derives, at least partly, from revelation. Revelation comes in many different forms: historical occurrences, written texts, tradition and testimony, for instance. Revelation is not just a set of propositions but something much more: for many theologians, revelation is the presence of God himself. Thus, the carriers of revelation (the Word and sacraments) also contain God himself. Faith, in turn, is a response to revelation, God himself. So, in adopting the Christian faith the believer adopts God himself. In a recent paper, Alan Torrance (2013) emphasizes this aspect of faith strongly. To have faith is to be united with Christ and this requires not just propositional knowledge but a moral and spiritual conversion, *metanoia*. This involves a radical change in one's personal goals, valuations, and practices. Also, Christian faith is not, generally speaking, something that is produced in an inferential, reflective way. Thus, the believer usually has no idea of the mechanisms through which God's presence in Christ appears to her. In addition, the faith of the individual believer has the Church and the Christian tradition as its context. Indeed, both Abraham and Torrance emphasize the communal nature of Christian faith: the main sources of knowledge are testimony and tradition rather than inference and argument.

Such "peculiarities" of Christian faith highlight the fact that theology has much broader aims than defending the process through which Christian faith comes about in secular terms. Theology's main task is to serve the Church by reflecting upon the faith, practices, mission, and moral life of the Church as it travels through this world towards the next one. The goal of the Church is to get home to God's reality, to the reality it already partially represents and makes present in our current world. Finally, theology also seeks to relate the Gospel to the ways of thinking surrounding it—sometimes approvingly, sometimes critically.

Here we see a clear difference between the theological and the philosophical epistemic enterprises. Eleonore Stump (2013) puts it like this: the goal of philosophy is something abstract and impersonal, wisdom, whereas theology is concerned with a personal being. She writes:

In virtue of being characterized by mind and will, God is more nearly a person (in our sense of the word “person”) than he is an abstract universal. The wisdom philosophy seeks is impersonal. A philosopher can seek wisdom but wisdom can’t seek him. A philosopher can love wisdom but wisdom can’t love him back. The God of the major monotheisms, however, can seek a theologian and love her as she seeks or loves him. (50)

Stump goes on to point out, like Abraham and Torrance, that analytic epistemologists have had a strong tendency to reduce all knowledge to propositional knowledge. This is precisely the reason why they are ill suited to deal with a number of aspects of Christian faith that theologians have held in high regard. She continues:

The distinction between knowledge that and knowledge of persons will highlight for us one of the important differences between the two disciplines, doctrinally considered. It is one thing to focus on gaining insight into a concrete particular who is a person and another thing to concentrate in seeking a body of knowledge characterized in terms of an abstract universal, such as wisdom. The difference in what is being sought carries with it a great difference in the modes of knowing, the means to that knowing, and the criteria for excellence in knowing. (53)

According to Stump, we must be careful when adopting analytic epistemology for theological usage because it often knows nothing of the subtleties and depth of the traditional theological reflection on the origin of faith and its relationship to reason. This is because analytic epistemology has difficulties in acknowledging first-person and second-person knowledge that are not easily reduced to or expressed as propositional knowledge.

Again, I am not saying that focusing on propositions and justified beliefs is a bad thing to do. Indeed, I think it is a pretty good idea, since Christian faith definitely includes propositional knowledge that aims to be factual. However, the point I am trying to make is that this focus is rather narrow and the theological enterprise as a whole should not be taken over by this focus.

Let me conclude this section by making a final point about the theological context of epistemology. Many forms of analytic epistemology, as far as I see them, have a tendency to make epistemology a rather abstract enterprise, especially some strong internalists who try to bypass actual knowers and situations and focus on procedures and “algorithms.” Perhaps this is a symptom of the methodism they often assume; I do not really know. From a theological point of view, this is rather problematic, because of the implicit assumptions involved. When we are engaged in epistemology, we are also making large-scale anthropological assumptions: we make

claims about what humans are like, what kinds of capacities they have and how they de facto know things. There is no “neutral” source for such assumptions. For theology, epistemology is a part of theological anthropology and moral theology. Various doctrines about sin, freedom, and moral virtue and vice, if true, have a significant influence on how theologians understand the ways in which humans know things. Many theologians have held, for instance, that some types of knowledge are only accessible to people of a certain character: some aspects of moral and religious knowledge are only possible for individuals that are virtuous and have specific kinds of volitions, emotions, and life goals. If we take theological knowledge to be something like this, it is difficult to process it through the schema of some disembodied, calculator type knowledge.

## Putting Analytic Epistemology in its Place

The point I made in the previous section was that theology has much broader goals in mind than analytic epistemology. Whereas analytic religious epistemology is mostly interested in the apologetic question, that is to say, demonstrating that theological sources of knowledge can be warranted or justified, the goal of the theological enterprise is not simply justified belief, but rational, holistic commitment to Christian faith. Theology would be served well, if we could come up with a good analytic epistemological theory, but theology can, and will, keep going even without such a theory. In addition to the peculiarities of the Christian way of knowing that I already alluded to, we can mention other reasons for this conclusion as well. Abraham (2006, 17-18) makes the general anti-methodist point that one does not need to have a worked out theory of knowledge and justification in order to make perfectly reasonable claims about the world. That is to say that one is not required to have a theory of how one knows in order to have knowledge. I already mentioned how some theories in the cognitive sciences suggest a similar conclusion. Another problem is the perpetual disagreement between analytic epistemologists about central terms, like knowledge, justification, and warrant. One can observe this disagreement by simply opening the recent *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (2013), for instance. Of course, disagreement in and of itself is not a good enough reason to abandon the whole epistemological project. It might, however, suggest that the theologian might want to avoid making too strong a commitment to one single theory.

I want to emphasize that I am not trying to reject the whole program of analytic religious or theological epistemology. Despite their limitations, plausible theories of analytic religious epistemology do have their uses: they could be employed apologetically to defend the rationality of communities and believers and the rationality of the whole theological enterprise in the eyes of non-Christians. Here analytic epistemology could function like natural theology: we do not need it to justify the theological enterprise but it would make theology more plausible and publicly accessible, if we had a plausible natural theology available.

Furthermore, we must acknowledge that most theological accounts of faith, reason and belief are already, implicitly or explicitly, shaped by various philosophical

assumptions. I pointed out earlier that there is no complete Scriptural epistemology. One consequence of this is that theologians have simply helped themselves to the epistemological thinking of their respective times. Along the way, theology has picked up many epistemological influences. The points made by all theologians, including Torrance, Stump, and Abraham as well as non-foundationalists and postliberals mentioned earlier, draw from philosophy in general and epistemology in particular. It seems that epistemology is unavoidable in theology. So, one useful task for epistemologists would be to work out the kinds of epistemological assumptions that different theologians make.

Let me also mention briefly some approaches that I find promising. In his highly interesting book *Rationality and Religious Commitment* (2011), Robert Audi seeks to develop a religious epistemology that takes into account the distinctive aspects of Christian faith. First of all, the book defends a specific kind of commitment, not simply justified belief. Here Audi agrees with the points I made in previous sections: most analytic religious epistemology is too focused on justified belief and this shifts focus away from other aspects of faith. These include volitions, emotions, and experiences that cannot be so easily expressed propositionally, commitments to a certain lifestyle and so on. Audi's most central and promising point, however, is the move away from justification to rationality. Rationality is a much more permissive notion and a notion that can be applied better to commitments, actions, and even individuals than justification. Also, Audi maintains that we have much broader agreement on what rationality consists in than on justification. Rationality, in his view, includes capacity rationality that pertains to persons and focal rationality that beliefs, commitments, or attitudes can have. Capacity rationality includes that the person in question is in full possession of her cognitive capacities. Focal rationality consists in being responsive to reason and experience both directly and indirectly. If the individual is in possession of her capacities and her beliefs and commitments take into account her experience and reasoning, then the minimal criteria for rationality have been satisfied. Such a notion is very permissive, of course.

Another interesting and promising proposal is that of Paul Moser (2009), who sharply criticizes both Swinburne and Plantinga. For Moser, the analysis begins from a reflection on the nature of God. If God were good and loving and wants to bring people to himself, what kind of evidence would He be likely to provide us? Moser then argues that a perfectly loving God would reveal his intentions and existence to us in a rather personal way: not by giving us the best metaphysical theory but instead changing and transforming us in accordance with his goals for our lives. Our having access to knowledge of God depends upon our willingness to open up to God's goals and work in ourselves. Thus, the evidence for a perfectly loving God comes in the form of individuals and communities shaped by God's salvific work. Similar emphases can also be found in John Cottingham's (2005, 2014) work on philosophy of religion and religious epistemology.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, I cannot discuss Kevin Diller's new *Theology's Epistemological Dilemma: How Karl Barth and Alvin Plantinga Provide a Unified Response* (2014) because I got my hands on it after I had finished writing this essay. Diller seems to be moving into the right direction from where I am standing. He seeks to do genuinely theological epistemology and to take into account a deeply theological notion

Let me conclude by way of analogy. I am no epistemologist. Instead, I have worked on the interface of science, theology, and philosophy. I want to draw an analogy between the way in which I think about the science/theology relationship and the relationship of theology and analytic epistemology. Historian John Hedley Brooke (2014) has, among many others, argued that we need to get rid of simplified accounts of the relationship of science and religion. The conflict narrative perpetuated by many atheists and popular press has now been demonstrated as being clearly false. From a historical standpoint, the relationship between religion, theology, and science is extremely complicated and it defies simplified descriptions like “conflict” or “independence.”<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that science and theology overlap, at least partly. Such a view would include some basic platitudes like this: theologians have used the scientific ideas of their time; science has had an impact on theology and vice versa; theology needs to adopt good and generally accepted scientific results but not commit too strongly to one single scientific theory; theological claims need no scientific foundation but are made more plausible if they can find scientific support; some scientific results are more compatible with theology than others and sometimes conflicts arise and we do not know how to solve them. Finally, it is clear that theology does provide some constraints as to what kinds of scientific theories are compatible with it but there is a wide window of possibilities.

Now, I think similar things could be said about the relationship between analytic theology and analytic epistemology. First, theology needs to adopt good and broadly accepted epistemological results, but it should not commit itself too strongly to one single theory. Nevertheless, theology has always had to and will have to explicate Christian faith using the epistemological tools of its time. It is also clear that some epistemological views could be more compatible with theology than others. One, single epistemology that would be plausible for secular critics and pass the analytic canons of rationality is a worthy goal but the theological enterprise can go forward without it. Finally, the two cases (science/theology, theology/epistemology) are also analogous in the sense that there is a deep theological assumption at play: *scientia* and *fides* cannot ultimately be in contradiction.

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of faith.

<sup>6</sup> See (Stenmark 2004).

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