SOME REFLECTIONS ON REASON AND FAITH

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> ". . . And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock."
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> Matthew 7:24-26

Among the issues that have traditionally occupied a central place in Christian thought are those that surround the question concerning the nature and relations of "faith" and "reason." Harvey Potthoff's writings over the last quarter century make clear that he is no foreigner to this legacy of the tradition. Indeed, one might even say that what gives his theological thinking its direction and distinctive shape is, in large part, the view he defends concerning the character of faith and the place of reason in what he calls "the life of faith."[1] In what follows, I shall present some thoughts on a few of the many issues the theme of faith and reason raises. If as I suspect the conclusions I tentatively embrace are not too far removed from those Professor Potthoff would also accept, my remarks can be regarded as simply a series of footnotes to passages on similar points that can be found in his books and articles. If, on the other hand, my treatment of certain of the issues he has so often addressed leads me to terrain he would prefer to avoid, I shall take that as excellent reason for reconsideration.

1. *Reason's Ineluctable Authority*

It is hard to imagine a form of religious life capable of commanding the attention and respect of an even moderately cultured community that was inimical to theological reflection—that was in fact not shaped and guided in its development by such reflection. Theological work, however, that did not acknowledge the authority of reason would be hopeless, if not a contradiction in terms. If to regard reason as "the Devil's whore," in Luther's memorable phrase, were to hold that reason has no significant role to play in the discovery or articulation of "saving truth," then such an attitude is simply not an option for the theologian.

The explanation is not far to seek. A thoroughgoing theological misologist would not regard the fact that a religious doctrine or system of doc-

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[1]See, for example, "Bultmann, Ogden, and the Search for a 'Post-liberal' Theology—A Review Article," The Iliff Review, XIX (Fall, 1962), pp. 24 and 26; and *God and the Celebration of Life* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1969) p. 104 and *passim.*

trines is self-contradictory as a basis for rejecting it. For if he did, he could not avoid dedication to the task of exploring the logical implications of the doctrines he is inclined to endorse in order to be sure that they do not contain hidden contradictions—singly or in conjunction. Yet it is hard to see how a serious theologian could not regard inconsistency as a problem. What clearer paradigm of falsehood is there than an inconsistent proposition; what better basis could there be for rejecting a proposition than the fact that accepting it commits us to holding true every proposition we can formulate?[2]

In addition, such a misologist would not worry about whether the theological views he accepts and purveys carry implications which fail to cohere with others of his beliefs which he is loathe to relinquish.[3] Indifference on such a matter, however, is not a stance anyone could responsibly commend—at least so long as truth is viewed as the aim of theological reflection. Yet to rule out such indifference is to rule in commitment to the task of ensuring that our entire system of beliefs about reality, human destiny, and what we ought to do and be constitutes, so far as possible, a "seamless whole." It is, in short, to require the use of reason in exploring the interconnections of the ideas about man and the world which appear to us upon reflection as good prima facie candidates for belief.

I hope and suspect that these points will strike the reader as obvious—even painfully obvious. I believe they are nonetheless worth emphasizing because of several important implications they carry as regards the theological enterprise and its relation to the religious life. I shall defer mention of one of these until a later point.[4] The other is that sensible theologians possessed of minimal intellectual culture cannot fail to exhibit a large measure of humility, openness, and lack of dogmatism. For they will know something of mathematics and philosophy and so will be aware that not all logical difficulties are as obvious as those e.g. that infect conceptions of God that place him "outside of time" and yet also construe Him as capable of intervening in human history to achieve His divine purpose(s).[5] They will recall (i.a.) Luther's dismissal of Copernicus as a "fool" on the ground that "sacred Scripture tells us [Joshua 10:13] that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still,

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[2]The proof that a contradictory proposition entails the truth of every proposition is beautifully simple. It runs thus: 1. p and not-p. 2. Therefore p (from 1). 3. Therefore p or q (from 2). 4. Not-p (from 1). 5. Therefore q (from 3 and 4). This argument, incidentally, is the basis of the claim that the occurrence of a "super-miracle" would suffice to establish the truth of any—and every—religious claim, where event *e* constitutes a super-miracle just in case the occurrence of *e* would violate the laws of logic.

[3]Here "coherence" may be construed as broader than logical consistency. A person's overall view of the way things are may lack coherence, for example, because even though some of the propositions that make it up are accepted because of their ostensible explanatory role these propositions in fact lack the kind of explanatory power necessary to justify their acceptance. See in this connection G. Harman, *Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), chap. 10.

[4]See section 2, fourth paragraph from the end.

[5]For numerous references to the "eternalistic" strand in Christian thought, see Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970).

and not the earth"[6]; not to mention the scores of divines who fought—and still fight—a losing battle against the theory of evolution.[7] And thoughts like these will keep them ever ready to make adjustments in their pictures of man and the world, their doctrines of first and last things, in the face of what they themselves will take to be irrefragable empirical or philosophical arguments.

2. *The Limits of Reason*

The difficult question, then, is not whether theology, and hence the religious life, is subject to the rule of reason, as it might be put; the difficult question is rather whether reason by itself is adequate for accomplishment of the theological task when it is conceived in the metaphysical way characteristic of classical Judeo-Christian thought. The short answer to this question is, I believe, "Not at present; and perhaps not ever." But what this answer amounts to—and hence what the question as I construe it really asks—can best be understood by reference to the arguments in its support. To these I now turn.

A view that is especially common among intellectual neophytes is that anything can be given a rational defense, that each side of any question can muster arguments that are just as good as those available to the other side. This conviction, of course, leads directly to the conclusion that no views are any better supported by reason than any others and hence that reason is too feeble a resource to provide any real guidance in matters of belief or action. Sophisticated adherents of views of this kind frequently conjoin them with theories—Nietzschean, Freudian, or Marxian, for example—which depict reason as ineluctably in the service of drives, passions, or interests that make it very unlikely that truth will be sought or served by its use.

It is certainly true that on some issues there are persuasive arguments on both sides and neither side clearly wins the day. This may be the situation as regards constructivism in mathematics. It is probably true at present as regards many claims made (or suggested) by sociobiologists. It is true, in my judgment, as regards the psysicalist thesis in the philosophy of mind, Platonism in the philosophy of mathematics, and scientific realism in the philosophy of science. It is also indisputable, I think, that more frequently than one might wish human beings are moved to argue as they do by (e.g.) class interest, unconscious need, or the will to dominate. But these facts hardly provide an adequate basis for accepting the view in question. In addition, the view is, on the face of it, highly implausible. There are, after all, any number of arguments in

[6]Martin Luther, "Table Talk," translated and quoted by Andrew D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science With Theology in Christendom* (New York: Appleton, 1896), I, p. 126. (Quoted in T. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution* [New York: Random House, 1957], p. 191.)

[7]Careful documentation of these matters is contained in John C. Greene, *The Death of Adam: Evolution and Its Impact on Western Thought* (Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1959).

mathematics, empirical science, and philosophy that are (virtually) universally accepted by those in a position to understand them. Consider, for example, the proof that quantification theory lacks a decision procedure, the argumentation in support of special relativity, and the standard reasons for rejecting James's argument for free will in "The Dilemma of Determinism," Hume's analysis (or better "analyses") of causality, and Ayer's early versions of the verificationist theory of meaning. James somewhere remarks that one of the aims of liberal education is to develop an understanding of the difference between good and bad arguments. One suspects that at bottom it is a want of education that makes the view in question attractive to those to whom it appeals.

Still, it cannot be denied, I think, that we are not in a position at present to settle decisively any number of controversies in virtually every intellectual domain. And worse from the perspective of the religious life, there is simply no general picture of the world and our situation as human beings in it which commands the assent of all those who are in a position to understand and appreciate the relevant arguments. There is agreement on a great many of the theories that make up current empirical science, to be sure—theories concerning (i.a.) electricity and magnetism, the constitution of atoms, the chemical bond, speciation and preadaptation, learning in mammals, human perceptual mechanisms, etc.—but (as noted above) even the matter of whether various of these theories should be construed "realistically" as opposed to "instrumentally" is far from settled, not to mention the matter of how the phenomena that make them "true" fit into "the larger picture." Even the question as to the nature of truth itself is one of which informed persons can at present reasonably disagree.

It is also true, I believe—though this is less certain—that even when the constraints of coherence (broadly construed) are fully accepted, nothing guarantees that such constraints will eliminate all but one system of beliefs even under ideal circumstances. Thus, reason might not yield a single answer to the basic questions concerning our natures and destinies that traditionally constitute part of the Western religious quest, even were we *per impossibile* fully apprised of all the pertinent empirical data and all the scientific and philosophical arguments that an indefinitely prolonged existence of a community of dedicated, rational inquirers would generate.

It may even be that what I have spoken of as "the constraints of coherence" are relative—relative to the "forms of life" or "conceptual systems" or "native constitutions" of different communities of rational agents. This is the disturbing vision that Wittgenstein articulated in his later work—especially in *On Certainty*[8]—and that Hilary Putnam has set forth in a slightly different form in *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*[9]. If correct, such a view would further limit the power of reason vis-a-vis the traditional theological task by allowing for the possibility that A and B should both fully satisfy the demands of reason in constructing their theological positions—the demands recognized within their respective communities, that is—even though

A counts as good arguments collections of propositions that B regards with equal right as worthless.

I confess to considerable skepticism as regards this last view, but since there are real problems in defending a viable alternative, I find myself less than fully confident of its unacceptability. But however this issue is finally resolved, I hope I have said enough to make clear—at least in part—why, and thus in what sense, it appears correct to hold that reason is not now a sufficient resource for the accomplishment of the theological task as classically conceived—and perhaps never will be.

3. *The Place of Faith in the Religious Life*

The obvious question suggested by the foregoing reflection is, "Must the religious life then be founded on faith?" The correct answer to this difficult question is, I believe, "Yes and No."

The answer is "No," I suggest, if "faith" is conceived as a quasi-perceptual capacity whose exercise by a creature possessing it results in knowledge—perhaps of trans-empirical realities, events, or processes; as a kind of inner eye ("the eye of faith") the opening of which puts its owner in epistemic contact with facts of which he would otherwise be necessarily ig-

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[8]G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright (eds.) (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). A couple of the more arresting passages are the following:

> Is it wrong for me to be guided in my actions by the propositions of physics? Am I to say I have no good ground for doing so? Isn't precisely this what we call a 'good ground'? (sec. 608).
>
> Supposing we met people who did not regard that as a telling reason. Now, how do we imagine this? Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (And for that we consider them primitive.) Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be guided by it?—If we call this 'wrong' aren't we using our language game as a base from which to *combat* theirs? (sec. 609; italics his).
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> I said I would 'combat' the other man,—but wouldn't I give him *reasons*? Certainly; but how far do they go? . . . (sec. 612; italics his).
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> . . . what men consider reasonable or unreasonable alters. At certain periods men find reasonable what at other periods they find unreasonable. And vice versa. But is there no objective character here? *Very* intelligent and well-educated people believe in the story of creation in the Bible, while others hold it as proven false, and the grounds of the latter are well known to the former (sec. 336; italics his).

See also, in this connection, N. Malcolm, "The Groundlessness of Belief" in *Thought and Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977).

[9](London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). See especially the final chapter. See also his paper "Philosophy of Mathematics: A Report" in P. Asquith and H. Hyburg (eds.), *Current Research in Philosophy of Science* (East Lansing, Michigan: Philosophy of Science Association, 1979), where Putnam summarizes the view to which he is currently inclined thus:

> . . . knowledge is necessarily a representation of the world, not a Doppelganger of the world, and . . . any representation must be the joint product of the world and human psychology (or Alpha Centaurian psychology, or Beteguesian psychology, or . . .) (0. 395).

norant. The reason is that the existence of certainty (firm and settled conviction) about "matters of fact and existence," which is all the observers of those with "faith," or even the possessors of such "faith," ever have reason to ascribe to those to whom it comes, is not tantamount to *justified belief*—and hence does not count as knowledge in the normal sense of this word. And this is the case whatever the etiology of the certainty in question—and, in particular, even if its presence is due to the actions of (e.g.) a trans-empirical divine being.[10]

The answer is also "No," it seems to me, even if faith is more realistically understood as simply firm, but ungrounded, belief in some system of metaphysico-theological propositions that reaches beyond the domain of the rationally adjudicable. Not that the religious life cannot be founded on faith so conceived, of course. No doubt it frequently is. The person who "sees his life as a gift of God, the world as the creation of God, his own purposes, insofar as they are noble, as the purposes of God, and history as exhibiting a divine plan . . .[and who] sees things this way, *just because they do seem so, and he cannot help it*"[11] is no rarity. And such a person's "religious life" is clearly rooted in and nourished by such unreasoned belief.[12]

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[10]The sort of view alluded to here is illustrated by the following passages:

> . . . We can apprehend invisible reality only in the light of a fact encountered in a concrete encounter in life . . . we cannot prove theoretically that this fact is Christ; we can only know it in faith. (Rudolf Bultmann, "A Reply to the Theses of J. Schniewind" in H.W. Bartsch (ed)., *Kerygma and Myth* [New York: Harper & Row, 1961], p. 133.)

> A miracle—i.e., an act of God—is not visible or ascertainable like worldly events. The only way to preserve the unworldly, transcendental character of the divine activity is to regard it not as an interference in worldly happenings, but something accomplished *in* them in such a way that the closed weft of history as it presents itself to objective observation is left undisturbed. To every other eye than the eye of faith the action of God is hidden. (Rudolf Bultmann, "Bultmann Replies to his Critics," *ibid.*, p. 191 [italics his].)

> . . . faith does not *become* knowledge, after a process of rational activity; it *is*, itself, knowledge. (Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, trans. O. Wyon [London: Student Christian Movement, Ltd., 1947], p. 197 [italics his].)

> The Holy Spirit, as He Who testifies to me the truth of the witness of the Scriptures, creates a 'knowledge' of a new kind; this is the knowledge which man has of himself through his own spirit. (*Ibid.*, p. 179.)

It is worth noting that even the "knowledge" that a "man has of himself through his own spirit" is, if I understand what Brunner is referring to, frequently not the genuine article. This is obvious in the case of claims about the presence or absence of dispositional properties. But it is also true, I believe, where such "knowledge" concerns the existence or nature of such paradigm mental entities as visual images. For the reasons behind this assertion, the reader is referred to Daniel Dennett, *Brainstorms* (Montgomery, N.H.: Bradford Books, 1978), chap. 10 ("Two Approaches to Mental Images") and *passim*.

[11]R. Raylor, "Faith" in S. Hook (ed.), *Religious Experience and Truth* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), p. 167 (my italics). Cf. also H. H. Price, "Faith and Belief" in John Hick (ed.), *Faith and the Philosophers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1964), p. 3.

[12]See A. Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Rational?" in C. F. Delaney (ed.), *Rationality and Religious Belief* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

Nonetheless such facts do not support an affirmative answer to the question whether the religious life must be so founded. Despite the sufficiency of such faith as a foundation for religious living, it is not, I suggest, necessary. The religious life appears to be quite possible in the absence of such idiosyncratic, ungrounded certainties.[13] The evidence for this can be seen in the deeply spiritual and religiously regulated lives of countless men and women whose epistemic attitudes as regards the larger questions which constitute the soul of traditional theology in the West are characterized by profound humility, openness, and lack of certainty. Also, it is a firm tenet of the major religious bodies broadly within the Judeo-Christian tradition that the religious life is an option for all of us. But it clearly would not be such an option if a necessary condition for living it were the possession of a set of convictions of the sort in question concerning matters that cannot be rationally adjudicated. We are simply not so constituted that we can bring ourselves to accept propositions at will.[14] And even if *per impossibile* we could generally bring about such doxastic alterations in ourselves *indirectly,* i.e. through the use of instrumentalities of one sort or another (turning our eyes from our lack of evidence, participating regularly in worship services, or—to be fanciful—taking "belief pills" or submitting ourselves to brain surgery), the fact that we knew how we had achieved our new belief-state would itself, it seems to me, destroy the stability of that state.[15] To see this consider the likely effect on the common belief that dreams are experiences we have while asleep of a discovery that the brain mechanism responsible for our memories of dreams is the one that gives rise to *deja vu* experiences, and not the one that lies behind our normal memory of past experiences.

But not only is such faith an unnecessary foundation for the religious life, it is also, I submit, an undesirable one. In the first place, one possessed of such a faith, if he were not in addition the subject of an ostrich-like ignorance of history and current life, would know that large numbers of others have similar belief-systems which contradict his own and hence that at least some members of the class to which he himself belongs are simply dead wrong on matters that deeply affect the way they understand and shape their lives at a very fundamental level. Such knowledge cannot but be deeply disturbing and un-

[13]I speak here of "*idiosyncratic* ungrounded convictions" because of the plausibility of holding that some of the beliefs that (virtually) all of us share are similarly "ungrounded"—e.g. the belief that (most of) the other living human bodies we see around us are, in some sense, "centers of consciousness." It is possible that the common-sense metaphysical system that embodies the truisms we all pre-reflectively accept concerning space, time, causality, necessity, identity, freedom, truth, etc. is virtually encoded in the DNA, along with most of the monomorphemic concepts we are capable of acquiring. The latter claim was persuasively argued by Jerry Foder in his Walker Ames Lectures, "The Current Status of the Innateness Controversy," delivered at the University of Washington in Fall Quarter, 1979. The step from the latter claim to the former is neither large nor implausible, in my judgment.

[14]Under very special circumstances this may be possible to be sure. See Bernard Williams, "Deciding to Believe" in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

[15]Cf. *ibid.*

settling, it seems to me. Secondly, such a person's religious life would be forever at the mercy of intellectual developments, owing to what I have spoken of above as reason's ineluctable authority. Who can say when the demand for overall coherence in our beliefs—a demand we can hardly forswear—will not require abandonment or modification of a theological position accepted "on faith," owing e.g. to a better understanding of the etiology of this kind of conviction[16] or a deeper view of legitimate inductive inference.

On the other hand, the answer to the question whether the religious life must be founded on faith is "Yes," I submit, if we conceive of faith in a more "practical" as opposed to "theoretical" way. That is, if we leave off thinking of faith as a matter of accepting as true a set of propositions about ultimate reality and think instead of faith as the trait those persons have who are disposed (a) to participate in the life of aspiration and mutual aid of some particular, historically-rooted religious community, and (b) to live their lives in the light of those soteriologically relevant truths that are firmly based on the experience of humankind. Here I refer to such easily forgotten yet flagrantly obvious truths as the following:

> Too long a sacrifice makes a stone of the heart (Yeats).
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> What wound did ever heal but by degrees? (Shakespeare).
>
> . . . there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory . . . If a man carries many such memories with him into life, he is safe to the end of his days . . . (Dostoyevsky).

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[16]One thinks here of remarks like the following:

(1) An ability to learn is not enough for the acquisition of certain types of information. There has to be a definite desire or drive or readiness to store the appropriate information. This information is of a very special kind when it consists of ethical principles, myths, or religious dogmas, and codes of behavior is one of the many forms of imprinting. The greater the amount of parental care and education and the more highly developed the means of communication the more important becomes conceptual imprinting. (Ernst Mayr, *Populations, Species and Evolution* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963], p. 389.)

(2) Given the immense selective importance [certain] social structures perforce assumed over such vast stretches of time, it is difficult not to believe that they must have made themselves felt upon the genetic evolution of the innate categories of the human brain. This evolution must not only have facilitated acceptance of the tribal law, but created the need for the mythical explanation which gave it foundation and sovereignty. We are the descendents of such men. From there we have probably inherited our need for an explanation, the profound disquiet which goads us to search out the meaning of existence. That same disquiet has created all the myths, all the religions, all the philosophies, and science itself.

> That this imperious need developed spontaneously, that it is inborn, inscribed somewhere in the genetic code, strikes me as beyond doubt.
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> (Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity,* trans. A. Wainhouse [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971], p. 167 [italics his].)

> Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind (Thoreau).
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> . . . the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. . . . Confronted by the pit into which we are about to toss those who have done us harm, we halt, stricken dumb; it is after all only because of the way things worked out that they were the executioners and we weren't (Solzhenitsyn).
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> Does there not pass over a man a space of time when his life is a blank? (The Koran, sura 76).
>
> He who would do good in anything must do it in minute particulars (Blake).
>
> Nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defense (Shakespeare).
>
> Pride grows in the human heart like lard on a pig (Solzhenitsyn).
>
> It is clear . . . why self-respect is a primary good. Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them. All desire and activity becomes empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism (Rawls).
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> . . . where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:21).

(Needless to say, the list could be extended almost indefinitely as every student of homiletics, imaginative literature, and life knows.)

At bottom, such faith is more a matter of character than conviction; more a matter of sharing concerns with those who shaped the tradition within which one lives than with sharing their metaphysical beliefs; more a matter of the heart, if you will, than the mind. (I do not mean to imply, of course, that reason has no role to play in the evaluation of systems of values: it clearly does!) That faith, so conceived, is necessary for the religious life becomes evident as soon as one tries to imagine such a life in the absence of a complex disposition of the kind in question—at any rate, it does if my paradigms of "the religious life" are the best ones in terms of which to understand what is most central in this kind of life.

(Hereafter I shall refer to faith so conceived as "faith_p" and the faith of those with ungrounded metaphysico-theological convictions "faith_t"—the subscripts serving as a reminder of the "practical" character of the former and the "theoretical" character of the latter.)

4. *Is Faith_p Enough?*

Unfortunately, there is an obvious difficulty to which the view just adumbrated is subject. It might be expressed thus. "You have said that the religious

life must be founded on faith, where faith is conceived as a disposition to live one's life in a certain way. But surely," it might well be urged, "surely faith so conceived could at best serve as the basis for a severely truncated form of the religious life. Human beings, insofar as they possess any religious sensibility or inclinations at all, yearn for some understanding of the larger framework in which their lives are set. They hunger for a vision that will make clear the place and import of their struggles and achievements in the larger picture—and in particular a vision which does not depict 'the human race' as passing 'through the world as the ship goes through the sea, like the wind in the desert, a thoughtless and fruitless activity' and each life as destined for 'eternal oblivion'.[17] Without a vision of this kind life loses its sense and direction, the point of struggle is gone and we sink into shallowness, cynicism, apathy, or despair."[18]

There are a number of possible responses to this kind of objection to a religious life characterized by $faith_p$ but devoid of $faith_t$. I shall bring this essay to a close by considering briefly four of these responses.

It might be suggested, first, that the religious need to which our imaginary objector points can be met without $faith_t$ since the weight of reason, all things considered, does in fact support a view of the universe which is at least consonant with those aspects of traditional Western theological views that give them their power to satisfy the yearnings of the human spirit in question. This is the kind of response to which a variety of empirically and naturalistically oriented theologians incline, as well as many theologians working within the Catholic tradition—perhaps *inter alia.*

Unfortunately, this response betrays a lack of understanding of the current philosophical situation. As I have already noted above, the fact is that there is no systematic, metaphysical theory which commands assent from the vast majority of thinkers who are conversant with the current metaphysical literature in the sense in which quantum mechanics, special relativity, and evolutionary theory in its current form command the assent of those members of the scientific community who understand the argumentation which lies behind these theories. What we have in the field of metaphysics at present is a large amount of detailed, highly sophisticated, imaginative, and often brilliant work on a variety of problems that can reasonably be seen as falling within the problem-areas that define the subject-matter of the greatest metaphysical treatises of the tradition—areas suggested by such rubics as *causality, space and time, substance, identity and individuation, universals, mind and body, matter, personal identity, possibility and necessity, fact,* and *truth.* In addition, there is a good deal of agreement on which work is (relatively) good and important and which (relatively) superficial, shoddy, or trivial. But that's it.

[17]S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* trans. W. Lowrie (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1941), p. 30.

[18]Cf. Leo Tolstoy's *Confession* in *A Confession, The Gospel in Brief and What I Believe,* trans. A. Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1940).

A somewhat different response to the objection in question might be based on the Jamesian conception of a "forced option." James, it will be recalled, suggested that sometimes we are faced with a decision between two "hypotheses" where the propositions in question constitute "a complete logical disjunction, with no possibility of not choosing."[19] His thought is that in these situations, there is simply no alternative but to accept one or the other of the propositions in question—hence the label "forced option." Now, with this idea in mind, it might be suggested that the objection under consideration rests on an error, namely, the error of thinking that it is possible for human beings to be without a view concerning the larger setting of human life, without a vision which articulates the import of human strivings and the ultimate destiny of human beings. But once one sees, this response might run, that as regards any proposed metaphysico-theological view, we always confront a forced option—the option of accepting the view or accepting its falsity, since any such view and its negation constitute a complete logical disjunction—the idea that there might be a person whose religious life was "truncated" for want of beliefs about the ultimate setting of human life is simply absurd.

But the inadequacy of this response becomes obvious as soon as it is set forth in a moderately clear way. It rests on the claim that there are such things as "forced options," in James's sense. But obviously there are no such beasts. For (virtually) any pair of contradictory "hypotheses" A and not-A[20] there are always three possibilities, not just two. We can accept A as true, we can accept not-A as true, or we can remain agnostic. Apparently James overlooked this fact because of a tendency to confuse (a) situations in which we are faced with a dicision as to whether or not to accept one or the other of two "hypotheses," and (b) situations in which we are faced with a decision as to whether or not to engage in a certain action or not to engage in it. In the latter situations, there is no alternative but to do the action or not do it, unlike the former in which—as I have said—there is always a third possible move.

A considerably more interesting and also, I think, more viable response to the objection in question might be developed in two parts thus. First, it might be denied that metaphysico-theological beliefs have the importance our imaginary objector ascribes to them. In support of this denial, evidence might be cited about the lives of people who have lacked such beliefs, but which could not be characterized as directionless, which were not undercut by a sense of the pointlessness of struggle, and which were not pervaded by shallowness, cynicism, apathy, or despair. Then, secondly, it might be pointed out that the yearning or need for a metaphysico-theological picture is, after all, a contingent fact about human beings, i.e., a fact that we can easily imagine not to have obtained. And the possibility might even be suggested that this contingent

[19]W. James, "The Will to Believe" in *Essays in Pragmatism,* ed. A. Castell, (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1948), p. 89.

[20]I say "virtually" because (i.a.) some propositions are such that it is not possible to understand them without assenting to them—e.g., the proposition that 5 is a prime number.

fact holds of us, to the extent that it does, largely owing to genetic factors and hence, ultimately, to the ways certain genes or gene clusters contributed to the differential reproductive success of various sub-groups of our hominid ancestors.[21] It could then be noted that this point about the "arbitrariness" of the need, together with the possibility of its being grounded in its contribution to the biological "fitness" of our remote ancestors, cannot but make us view its existence with a certain irony,[22] and might even mitigate our sense of the importance of satisfying it. Indeed, this line of thought might continue, it may even provide us with a perspective in terms of which to understand why deep and lasting satisfaction of this metaphysical yearning is so difficult to achieve, which perspective in turn may give us more spiritual peace than any metaphysical beliefs we might coax ourselves into.

There is much to be said for a response of this sort. One can, after all, hardly deny that many people avoid spiritual disaster despite agnosticism or blindness to the entire metaphysical-theological enterprise as classically pursued. Still, to concede this is not to show the absence of a broadly based disposition to despair (etc.) in the absence of a religiously satisfying set of metaphysical beliefs. Nor is it to deny that some may find a fulfilling life without such belief impossible. Also, it seems plausible that the hunger for a metaphysical theology is something we can imagine human beings—or creatures we would readily count as human beings—to be without. And it is certainly possible that this hunger finds its roots in the genome. But again these considerations hardly suffice to show that a religious life devoid of metaphysico-theological belief does not lack an important dimension—at any rate a dimension whose absence many would feel to be a serious loss. This is especially true when we reflect that the points about irony etc. with which the response under consideration concludes themselves rest on the absence of a larger theological framework of a certain kind, since in the light of such a framework these points would evidently lose their force.

A final response to the objection I have sketched might concede the importance in the religious life of the metaphysico-theological element and even its necessity for some if their lives are not to be crippled and contracted by a gnawing sense of meaninglessness, but then suggest that this need be met not (a) by the development or adoption of some religiously satisfying metaphysical story, but rather (b) by the assiduous cultivation of a highly articulated system of hopes that is richly embroidered with imaginative detail. Such a complex frame of mind might involve, for example, the idea of post-mortem existence with loved ones, a conception of a divine memory that preserves everything of value that is achieved in the course of human history, and/or the picture of the world as governed by a Providence which ensures that "no matter how much it [the world] might zig-zag he could surely bring it home at last."[23] The central

[21]Cf. the passage from Monod quoted in footnote 16 above.

[22]Cf. T. Nagel, "The Absurd," *The Journal of Philosophy,* LXVIII (Oct. 21, 1971).

[23]W. James, "The Dilemma of Determinism," *op. cit.,* p. 64.

thought behind this response is, of course, that a state of home-cum-imaginative picturing of the type indicated might well function in the religious life in a way that is closely similar to the function that is served by ungrounded metaphysico-theological conviction—$faith_t$—and at the same time be free of the problems that surround this variety of religious faith. The reason for thinking such a state might play an analogous role in the religious life to that played by $faith_t$ lies—at least in part—in the rapidly accumulating evidence about the significance for feeling and behavior of the mental pictures and habits or ways of imagining situations and processes which characterize our inner lives.[24] Yet obviously hoping-cum-imagining that reality is a certain way does not suffer the liability that besets faith of simply not being an option for vast numbers of people in the modern world. Nor will it share the kind of instability that seems to be an inevitable feature of $faith_t$. Reason cannot so easily undermine a state that does not have belief as an ingredient, even if such a state is in many ways similar to belief. Nor does the fact that others may hope-cum-imagine differently tend to undercut the state: for it is not true that if A and B differ as regards these states, one of them has to be wrong. Finally, cultivation of a state of the sort in question has no tendency, so far as I can see, to violate one's intellectual integrity and thereby to threaten either one's self-respect or the religious life through which one finds nurture and strength—at any rate, so long as the states of affairs one hopes to obtain are not known with certainty not to hold.[25]

5. *Concluding Remarks*

In my judgment this last response is the best one, all things considered. Moreover, it may be that the "faith" of many modern Christians is closer in nature to such a state of hoping-cum-imagining than a state of subjective certainty that a certain metaphysico-theological story is straightforwardly (or even crookedbackwardly) true.[26] If so, then a possible way to state in summary form the view that seems to me the most viable in answer to the question with which I began section 3—viz., whether the religious life must be founded on faith—is this: "Yes it must. But $faith_t$ is not the only possible foundation; $faith_p$ in conjunction with $faith_{h\text{-}i}$ will also do it. Moreover, it is only those whose religious lives are founded on the latter complex faith state whose religious lives are 'founded upon a rock'."

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[24]See eg. Jerome Singer, *Imagery and Daydream Methods in Psychotherapy and Behavior Modification* (New York: Academic Press, 1974) and Jerome Singer and Kenneth Pope (eds.), *The Power of Human Imagination: New Methods in Psychotherapy* (New York: Plenum Press, 1978).

[25]Cf. James L. Muyskens, *The Sufficiency of Hope* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), especially chapter 6.

[26]R. Braithwaite argued that religious belief is always a matter of intending to live (and feel) in certain ways and periodically having in mind (or entertaining) certain "pictures" (or empirical propositions). (See his paper, "An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief" in J. Hick (ed.), *The Existence of God* [New York: The Macmillan Co., 1964].) This seems to me wrong, but no doubt the "beliefs" of many modern Christians come quite close to Braithwaitean belief.