

CHAPTER THREE

Warranted Belief in God

. . . For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.

St. Paul

Not enough evidence, God! Not enough evidence!

Bertrand Russell

The *de jure* challenge to Christian (or theistic) belief, as we have seen, is the claim that such belief is irrational, or unreasonable, or unjustified, or in some other way properly subject to unfriendly epistemic criticism; it contrasts with the *de facto* challenge, according to which the belief in question is false. What we saw in the last chapter is that this *de jure* complaint is best understood as the claim that Christian and other theistic belief is *irrational* in the sense that it originates in cognitive malfunction (Marx) or in cognitive proper function that is aimed at something other than the truth (Freud) — comfort, perhaps, or the ability to soldier on in this appalling world in which we find ourselves. To put it another way, the claim is that such belief doesn't originate in cognitive faculties that are functioning properly in a suitable environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at producing true beliefs. To put it in still another way, the charge is that theistic and Christian belief *lacks warrant*.

By way of response, in this chapter I shall first offer a model — a model based on a claim made jointly by Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin — for a way in which theistic belief could have warrant. Once we see that and how theistic belief might have warrant, we can also see the futility of the F&M complaint and its contemporary successors. In the next chapter I'll extend the model to cover specifically Christian belief.

The A/C Model

To give a *model* of a proposition, as I'm thinking of it, is to exhibit a possible state of affairs in which that proposition is true, thus showing how it could be true. So I'll be trying to show how theistic belief, contrary to what Freud and Marx say, could have warrant. And here I'll be following both Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin; hence, the 'A/C model.' Aquinas and Calvin agree on the claim that there is a kind of natural knowledge of God (and who can reject anything on which Calvin and Aquinas are in accord?). My model is based on Calvin's version of the suggestion, not because I think Calvin is to be preferred to Aquinas, but because we can usefully see his suggestion as a kind of meditation on and development of a theme suggested by Aquinas.

According to Aquinas, "To know in a general and confused way that God exists is implanted in us by nature."¹ In the opening chapters of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*² Calvin concurs: there is a sort of natural knowledge of God. Calvin expands this theme into a suggestion as to how beliefs about God can have warrant and constitute knowledge. What he says can be seen as a development of that remark of Thomas Aquinas's; but it can also be seen as a development of what the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Rom. 1:18-20 RSV)³

For our purposes, Calvin's basic claim is that there is a sort of a natural instinctive human tendency, a disposition to form beliefs about God under a variety of conditions and in a variety of situations. In his commentary on the above passage:

By saying that God has made it manifest, he means that man was created to be a spectator of this formed world, and that eyes were given him, that he might, by looking on so beautiful a picture, be led up to the Author himself.⁴

In the *Institutes* he develops this thought:

There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. . . . Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will. . . . there is, as the eminent pagan [i.e., Cicero] says, no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a God. . . . Therefore, since from the beginning of the world there has been no region, no city, in short, no household, that could do without religion, there lies in this a tacit confession of a sense of deity inscribed in the hearts of all. (*Institutes* I.iii.1, pp. 43-44)

Calvin goes on to claim that many rejections of God, or attempts to do without him, are really further testimonies to this natural inclination:

Indeed, the perversity of the impious, who though they struggle furiously are unable to extricate themselves from the fear of God, is abundant testimony that this conviction, namely, that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow. . . . From this we conclude that it is not a doctrine that must first be learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget, although many strive with every nerve to this end. (I.iii.3, p. 46)

I'll take Calvin as suggesting that there is a kind of faculty (like sight or hearing) or a cognitive mechanism — what he calls a “*sensus divinitatis*” or sense of divinity — which in a wide variety of circumstances produces in us beliefs about God. These circumstances trigger the disposition to form the beliefs in question; they form the occasion on which those beliefs arise. Under these circumstances we develop or form theistic beliefs. More exactly, these beliefs are *formed in us* in those circumstances; in the typical case we don't consciously choose to have those beliefs. Instead, we find ourselves with them, just as we find ourselves with perceptual and memory beliefs. (You don't and can't simply *decide* to have this belief, thereby acquiring it.⁵) These passages suggest that awareness of God is natural, widespread, and not easy to forget, ignore, or destroy. Seventy years of determined but unsuccessful Marxist efforts to uproot Christianity in the former Soviet Union tend to confirm this claim.⁶

It sounds as if Calvin thinks knowledge of God is *innate*, and hence such that one has it from the time he is born, “from his mother's womb.” Still, perhaps Calvin doesn't really mean to endorse the idea that, say, a one-year-old has this knowledge. The *capacity* for such knowledge is indeed innate, but a bit of maturity is required before it actually shows up. The capacity for arithmetical knowledge is innate; still, it doesn't follow that we know elementary arithmetic from our mother's womb; it takes a little maturity. My guess is Calvin thinks the same with respect to this knowledge of God; what one has from his mother's womb is not this knowledge of God, but a capacity for it. Whatever Calvin thinks, however, it's my model; and according to the model the development of the *sensus divinitatis* requires a certain maturity (although it is indeed sometimes manifested by very young children).

You see the blazing glory of the heavens from a mountainside at 13,000 feet; you think about those unimaginable distances; you find yourself filled with awe and wonder — and also with the belief that God must indeed be great to have created this magnificent heavenly host. But it isn't only the variety of the heavenly host that catches Calvin's eye here:

Lest anyone, then, be excluded from access to happiness, he not only sowed in men's minds that seed of religion of which we have spoken, but revealed himself and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe. As a consequence, men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him. . . . But upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory. . . . wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. (I.v.i, p. 52)⁷

Calvin's idea is that the workings of the *sensus divinitatis* are triggered or occasioned by a wide variety of circumstances, including in particular some of the glories of nature: the marvelous, impressive beauty of the night sky; the timeless crash and roar of the surf that resonates deep within us; the majestic grandeur of the mountains (the North Cascades, say, as viewed from Whatcom Pass); the ancient, brooding presence of the Australian outback; the thunder of a great waterfall. But it isn't only grandeur and majesty that counts; he would say the same for the subtle play of sunlight on a field in spring, or the dainty, articulate beauty of a tiny flower, or aspen leaves shimmering and

dancing in the breeze: “there is no spot in the universe,” he says, “wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory.”

Calvin could have added other sorts of circumstances: there is something like an awareness of divine disapproval upon having done what is wrong, or cheap, and something like a perception of divine forgiveness upon confession and repentance. People in grave danger instinctively turn to the Lord, asking for succor and support. (They say there are no atheists in foxholes.) On a beautiful spring morning (the birds singing, heaven and earth alight and alive with glory, the air fresh and cool, the treetops gleaming in the sun) a spontaneous hymn of thanks to the Lord — thanks for your circumstances and your very existence — may arise in your soul. According to the model, therefore, there are many circumstances, and circumstances of many different kinds, that call forth or occasion theistic belief.

Basicity

According to the A/C model, this natural knowledge of God is not arrived at by inference or argument (for example the famous theistic proofs of natural theology) but in a much more immediate way. The deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis* are not quick inferences from the circumstances that trigger its operation. It isn't that one beholds the night sky, notes that it is grand, and concludes that there must be such a person as God: as an argument, this would be pretty weak. It isn't that one notes some feature of the Australian outback — that it is ancient and brooding, for example — and draws the conclusion that God exists. It is rather that upon the perception of the night sky or the mountain vista or the tiny flower these beliefs just arise within us. They *arise* in these circumstances; they are not conclusions from them. The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands (Psalm 19): but not by way of serving as premises for an argument.

In this regard the *sensus divinitatis* resembles the faculties of perception, memory, and *a priori* knowledge. Consider the first. I look out into the backyard; I see that the coral tiger lilies are in bloom. I don't note that I am being appeared to in a certain complicated way (that my experience is of a certain complicated character) and then make an argument from my being appeared to in that way to the conclusion that in fact there are coral tiger lilies in bloom there. (The whole history of modern philosophy up to Hume and Reid shows how inconclusive such an argument would be.) It is rather that upon being appeared to in that way (and given my previous training), the belief that the coral tiger lilies are in bloom spontaneously arises in me. This belief will ordinarily be *basic*, in the sense that it is not accepted on the evidential basis of other propositions. The same goes for memory. You ask me what I had for breakfast; I think for a moment and then remember: pancakes with blueberries. I don't argue from the fact that it *seems* to me that I remember having pancakes for breakfast to the conclusion that in fact I did; rather, you ask me what I had for breakfast and the answer simply comes to mind.

Proper Basicity with Respect to Warrant

Say that Sam's belief that *p* is *properly basic with respect to warrant* if and only if Sam accepts *p* in the basic way, and furthermore *p* has *warrant* for Sam, accepted in that way. Perceptual beliefs are properly basic in this sense: such beliefs are typically accepted in the basic way, and they often have warrant when accepted in that way. (They are often produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth.) The same goes for memory beliefs. Of course, sometimes beliefs are accepted in the basic way but do not have warrant. As we saw earlier, this can be due to cognitive malfunction, or to a cognitive faculty's being impeded by such conditions as rage, lust, ambition, grief, and the like; it can also be because the bit of the design plan governing the production of the belief is aimed not at truth but something else (survival, for example, or self-esteem).

We saw earlier that belief in God in the basic way can be *justified*; one can believe in this basic way without flouting any epistemic duties or obligations. We could put it by saying that *theistic belief can be properly basic with respect to justification*. According to the A/C model I am presenting, theistic belief produced by the *sensus divinitatis* can also be properly basic with respect to *warrant*. It isn't just that the believer in God is within her epistemic rights in accepting theistic belief in the basic way. That is indeed so; more than this, however, this belief can have warrant for the person in question, warrant which is often sufficient for knowledge.

The *sensus divinitatis* is a belief-producing faculty (or power, or mechanism) that under the right conditions produces belief that isn't evidentially based on other beliefs. On this model, our cognitive faculties have been designed and created by God; the design plan, therefore, is a design plan in the literal and paradigmatic sense. It is a blueprint or plan for our ways of cognitive functioning, and it has been developed and instituted by a conscious,

intelligent agent. The purpose of the *sensus divinitatis* is to enable us to have true beliefs about God; and when it functions properly, it ordinarily *does* produce true beliefs about God. These beliefs therefore can meet the conditions for warrant; when they do, if they are strong enough, then they constitute knowledge.

Finally, according to the A/C model this natural knowledge of God has in many or most cases been compromised, weakened, reduced, smothered, overlaid, or impeded by sin and its consequences. Due to sin, the knowledge of God provided by the *sensus divinitatis*, prior to faith and regeneration, is both narrowed in scope and partially suppressed. The faculty itself may be *diseased* and thus partly or wholly disabled. There is such a thing as cognitive disease; there is blindness, deafness, inability to tell right from wrong, insanity; and there are analogues of these conditions with respect to the operation of the *sensus divinitatis*. According to Marx and Marxists, as we saw, it is belief in God that is a result of cognitive disease, of dysfunction. From their perspective, belief in God is irrational; there is a failure of rational faculties to work as they should. But here the A/C model stands Freud and Marx on their heads;⁸ according to the model, it is really the *unbeliever* who displays epistemic malfunction; failing to believe in God is a result of some kind of dysfunction of the *sensus divinitatis*.

Is Belief in God Warrant--Basic?

If False, Probably Not

As we saw above, Freud doesn't really *argue* that theistic belief has no warrant if taken in the basic way: he seems to assume that such belief is false, and then infers in rather quick and casual fashion that it is produced by wish--fulfillment and hence doesn't have warrant. Here (despite the appearance of carelessness) perhaps Freud's instincts are right: I shall argue that if theistic belief is false, and taken in the basic way, then it probably has no warrant. Why think so? First, note that a false belief can sometimes have a degree of warrant — ordinarily, in a case where the faculty in question is working at the limits of its capability. You see a mountain goat on a distant crag and mistakenly think you see that it has horns; as a matter of fact it is just too far away for you to see clearly, and the truth is it doesn't have horns. Your belief is false, but has a certain degree of warrant. You are a particle physicist and mistakenly believe that a certain subatomic model is close to the truth: working as you are at the outer limits of the cognitive domain for which our faculties are designed, again, your belief is false but not without warrant.

There is another and more important consideration; we can approach it indirectly as follows. A belief has warrant only if the cognitive process that produces it is *successfully* aimed at the truth — that is, only if there is a high probability that a belief produced by this process is true (given that the process is functioning properly in the sort of epistemic environment for which it is designed). Now a belief can be false, even if it is produced by a process or faculty successfully aimed at truth. It could be that on a given occasion an instrument issues a false reading even though there is a substantial probability that any reading it produces will be true. Consider that a reliable barometer may give a false reading, due to an unusual and improbable confluence of circumstances. (There is a large and sudden drop in the air pressure; the barometer, however, still registers 29.72, because there hasn't been enough time for it to react to the change.)

Similarly for a cognitive process: there might in fact be a high probability that a belief it produces is true (the cognitive process that produces it is *successfully aimed at the truth*), despite the fact that on a given occasion it issues a false belief. (It's reliable, but not infallible.) Couldn't something similar hold for the processes that produce belief in God? Might it not be that belief in God is produced by cognitive processes successfully aimed at the truth, even if that belief is as a matter of fact false? That is, could belief in God be a warranted false belief?

I think not. Say that a *possible world* is a way things could have been. For example, there is a possible world in which Cleveland is larger than New York, and another in which the earth doesn't exist. The *actual world*, of course, is one of the possible worlds: it is the one that actually holds. Some of the possible worlds are more similar to the actual world than others: for example a world in which the earth doesn't exist is less similar, so far forth, than one in which you are a couple of inches taller or shorter than you are in fact, and everything else is as it is in the actual world. We could think of the worlds more similar to the actual world than others as *closer to* the actual world than those others.⁹

Now a proposition is *probable*, with respect to some condition, only if that proposition is true in most of the nearby possible worlds (the worlds similar to the actual world) in which that condition holds. So consider the process that produces theistic belief: if it is successfully aimed at truth, then in most of the nearby possible worlds it produces a true belief. But then it follows that in most of the nearby possible worlds there is such a person as God.

However, that can't be, if the fact is there is no such person as God. For if in fact (in the actual world) there is no such person as God, then a world in which there *is* such a person — an omniscient, omnipotent, wholly good person

who has created the world — would be enormously, unimaginably different from the actual world, and enormously dissimilar from it. So if there is no such person as God, it is probably not the case that the process that produces theistic belief, produces a true belief in most of the nearby possible worlds. Therefore, if there is no such person as God, it is unlikely that belief in God is produced by a process that is functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at the production of true belief. So if theistic belief is false, it probably has no warrant.

If True, Probably So

On the other hand, if theistic belief is *true*, then it seems likely that it *does* have warrant. For if it is true, then there is indeed such a person as God, a person who has created us in his image (so that we resemble him, among other things, in having the capacity for knowledge), who loves us, who desires that we know and love him, and who is such that it is our end and good to know and love him. But if these things are so, then God would of course intend that we be able to be aware of his presence, and to know something about him. And if that is so, the natural thing to think is that he created us in such a way that we would come to hold such true beliefs as that he is our creator, that we owe him obedience and worship, that he is worthy of worship, that he loves us, and so on. And if *that* is so, then, further, the natural thing to think is that the cognitive processes that *do* produce belief in God are aimed by their designer (God) at producing that belief. But then the belief in question will be produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth: it will therefore have warrant.

This isn't certain; the argument is not deductively valid. It is abstractly possible, I suppose, that God has created us with a faculty for knowing him; for one reason or another, this faculty always malfunctions, and some other faculty created to produce some *other* beliefs often malfunctions in such a way that *it* produces belief in God. Then our belief in God wouldn't have warrant, despite the fact that it is true. This is an abstract possibility, but not much more; it certainly seems unlikely. The more probable thing, at least so far as I can see, is that if in fact theism is true, then theistic belief has warrant. The conclusion to draw, I think, is that the probability of theistic belief's being warranted, given that theism is true, is high.

The *De Jure* Question Is Not Independent of the *De Facto* Question

And here we see the metaphysical or ultimately religious roots of the question concerning the rationality or warrant or lack thereof for belief in God. What you properly take to be rational or warranted depends upon what sort of metaphysical and religious stance you adopt. It depends upon what kind of beings you think human beings are, what sorts of beliefs you think their faculties will produce when they are functioning properly, and which of their faculties or cognitive mechanisms are aimed at the truth. Your view as to what sort of creature a human being is will determine or at any rate heavily influence your views as to whether theistic belief is warranted or not warranted, rational or irrational for human beings. And so the dispute as to whether theistic belief is rational (warranted) can't be settled just by attending to epistemological considerations; it is at bottom not merely an epistemological dispute, but a metaphysical or theological dispute.

You may think humankind is created by God in the image of God — and created both with a natural tendency to see God's hand in the world about us, and with a natural tendency to recognize that we have indeed been created and are beholden to our creator, owing him worship and allegiance. Then, of course, you will not think of belief in God as a manifestation of any kind of intellectual defect. Nor will you think it is a manifestation of a belief-producing power or mechanism that is not aimed at the truth. It is instead a cognitive mechanism whereby we are put in touch with part of reality — indeed by far the most important part of reality. It is in this regard like a deliverance of sense perception, or memory, or reason.

On the other hand, you may think we human beings are the product of blind evolutionary forces; you may think there is no God, and that we are part of a Godless universe. Then you will be inclined to accept the sort of view according to which belief in God is an illusion of some sort, properly traced to wishful thinking or some other cognitive mechanism not aimed at the truth (Freud) or to a sort of disease or dysfunction on the part of the individual or society (Marx).

This dependence of the question of warrant or rationality on the truth or falsehood of theism leads to a very interesting conclusion. If the *warrant* enjoyed by belief in God is related in this way to the *truth* of that belief, then the question whether theistic belief has *warrant* is not after all independent of the question whether theistic belief is

true. So the *de jure* question we have finally found is not, after all, really independent of the *de facto* question; to answer the former we must answer the latter.

This is important: what it shows is that a successful atheological objection (i.e., an objection to theistic belief) will have to be to the *truth* of theism, not merely to its rationality, or justification, or intellectual respectability, or rational justification, or whatever. The atheologist who wishes to attack theistic belief will have to restrict herself to objections like the argument from evil, or the claim that theism is incoherent, or the idea that in some other way there is strong evidence against theistic belief. She can't any longer adopt the following stance: "Well, I certainly don't know whether theistic belief is *true* — who could know a thing like that? — but I do know this: it is irrational, or unjustified, or not rationally justified, or contrary to reason or intellectually irresponsible or. . . ." There isn't a sensible *de jure* question or criticism that is independent of the *de facto* question.

This fact by itself invalidates an enormous amount of recent and contemporary atheology; for much of that atheology is devoted to *de jure* complaints that are allegedly independent of the *de facto* question. If my argument so far is right, though, there *aren't* any sensible complaints of that sort. (More modestly, none have been so far proposed; it is always possible, I suppose, that someone will come up with one.)

The F&M Complaint Revisited

As we saw in the last chapter, Marx's complaint about religion is that it is produced by cognitive faculties that are malfunctioning; this cognitive dysfunction is due to *social* dysfunction and dislocation. Besides that famous "Religion is the opium of the people" passage, however, Marx doesn't have a lot to say about religious belief — except, of course, for a number of semi-journalistic gibes and japes and other expressions of hostility.¹⁰ I shall therefore concentrate upon Freud, who holds (as we saw in the last chapter) not that theistic belief originates in cognitive malfunction, but that it is an *illusion*, in his technical sense. It finds its origin in *wish--fulfillment*, which, while it is a cognitive process with an important role to play in the total economy of our intellectual life, is nevertheless not aimed at the production of true beliefs. On Freud's view, then, theistic belief, given that it is produced by wish--fulfillment, does not have warrant; it fails to satisfy the condition of being produced by cognitive faculties whose purpose it is to produce true belief. He goes on to characterize religious belief as "neurosis," "illusion," "poison," "intoxicant," and "childishness to be overcome," all on one page of *The Future of an Illusion*.¹¹

It is important to see the following point, however. Freud's complaint is that religious belief lacks warrant because it is produced by wishful thinking, which is a cognitive process that is not aimed at the production of true belief; in Freud's words, it is not reality oriented. But even if it were established that wish--fulfillment is the source of theistic belief, however, that wouldn't be enough to establish that the latter has no warrant. It must also be established that wish--fulfillment *in this particular manifestation* is not aimed at true belief. The cognitive design plan of human beings is subtle and complex; a source of belief might be such that *in general* it isn't aimed at the formation of true belief, but in some special cases it is. So perhaps this is true of wish--fulfillment; in general its purpose is not that of producing true belief, but in this special case precisely that *is* its purpose. Perhaps human beings have been created by God with a deep need to believe in his presence and goodness and love. Perhaps God has designed us that way in order that we come to believe in him and be aware of his presence; perhaps this is how God has arranged for us to come to know him. If so, then the particular bit of the cognitive design plan governing the formation of theistic belief is indeed aimed at true belief, even if the belief in question arises from wish--fulfillment. Perhaps God has designed us to know that he is present and loves us by way of creating us with a strong desire for him, a desire that leads to the belief that in fact he is there. Nor is this a mere speculative possibility; something like it is embraced by both St. Augustine ("Our hearts are restless till they rest in thee, O God") and Jonathan Edwards.

And how would Freud or a follower establish that in fact the mechanism whereby human beings come to believe in God (come to believe that there is such a person as God) is *not* in fact aimed at the truth? This is really the crux of the matter. Freud offers no arguments or reasons here at all. As far as I can see, he simply takes it for granted that there is no God and theistic belief is false; he then casts about for some kind of explanation of this widespread phenomenon of mistaken belief. He hits on wish--fulfillment and apparently assumes it is obvious that this mechanism is not "reality oriented," i.e., is not aimed at the production of true belief, and hence lacks warrant. As we have seen, this is a safe assumption if in fact theism *is* false. But then Freud's version of the *de jure* criticism really depends upon his atheism: it isn't an independent criticism at all, and it won't (or shouldn't) have any force for anyone who doesn't share that atheism.

One who believes in God, naturally enough, Christian or Jew or Muslim, is unlikely to acquiesce in the F&M claim that belief in God has no warrant. (It is only a certain variety of 'liberal' theologian, crazed by thirst for novelty

and the desire to accommodate current secularity, who might agree with F&M here.) Indeed, she will see the shoe as on the other foot. According to St. Paul, it is *unbelief* that is a result of dysfunction, or brokenness, failure to function properly, or impedance of rational faculties. Unbelief, he says, is a result of sin; it originates in an effort, as Romans 1 puts it, to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”¹² Indeed, unbelief can also be seen as resulting from wish-fulfillment — a result of the desire to live in a world without God, a world in which there is no one to whom I owe worship and obedience.

What we have seen so far, therefore, is that, despite the complaints of Marx and Freud and their allies, belief in God can perfectly well be justified and have warrant. In the next chapter I’ll extend the A/C model to cover belief in the whole panoply of Christian belief.

1. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2 a. 1, ad 1. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* Aquinas adds that “There is a certain general and confused knowledge of God, which is in almost all men” (Bk. III, ch. 38).

2. Ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960 [1559]). Page references to the *Institutes* are to this edition.

3. As Etienne Gilson says, very many medieval and later thinkers have found in this passage a charter for natural theology, construed as the effort to present proofs or arguments for the existence of God. But is Paul really talking here about proofs or arguments? Natural theology, as Aquinas says, is pretty difficult for most of us; most of us have neither the leisure, ability, inclination nor education to follow those theistic proofs. But here Paul seems to be speaking of *all* of us human beings; what can be known about God is *plain*, he says. It is true that this knowledge comes by way of what God has made, but it doesn’t follow that it comes by way of *argument*, the arguments of natural theology, for example.

4. *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, Volume 19 of *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1979; originally printed for the Calvin Translation Society of Edinburgh, Scotland), p. 70.

5. See my “Reason and Belief in God,” in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. A. Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 34ff.

6. It is no part of the model, however, to hold that the *sensus divinitatis* is never subject to malfunction; perhaps it is sometimes diseased or even inoperative. It can also be impeded in the usual ways, and its deliverances can perhaps sometimes be extinguished by the wrong kind of nurture.

7. Compare Charles Sanders Peirce: “A man looks upon nature, sees its sublimity and beauty, and his spirit gradually rises to the idea of God. He does not see the Divinity, nor does nature prove to him the existence of that Being, but it does excite his mind and imagination until the idea becomes rooted in his heart.” Quoted by Edward T. Oakes, “Discovering the American Aristotle,” *First Things* (Dec. 1993): 27.

8. More accurately, what we see here is part of Freud and Marx’s extensive borrowing from Christian and Jewish ways of thinking.

9. For a much fuller account of possible worlds see my *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), chap. 4.

10. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion*, ed. Reinhold Niebuhr (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1964). (This is a collection of bits of various writings on religion by Marx and Engels.)

11. *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York and London: Norton, 1961), p. 88. Not to be outdone, a substantial number of subsequent psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have followed his lead. Sometimes these suggestions take uncommonly bizarre forms, worthy, almost, to be compared with Freud’s own highly imaginative stories about the origin of religion (see above, pp. 21-24). According to Michael P. Carroll, for example, praying the rosary is “a disguised gratification of repressed anal-erotic desires” — a substitute for “playing with one’s feces” (“Praying the Rosary: The Anal-erotic Origins of a Popular Catholic Devotion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26, no. 4 [Dec. 1987]: 491).

12. Of course it isn’t Paul’s idea that those who don’t believe are by that very fact seen to be more sinful than those who do. On the contrary: just a couple of chapters later he says we are *all* involved in sin, including, of course, *himself* (“Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”). Furthermore, the malfunction that lies at the root of unbelief is not necessarily that of the unbeliever herself. Some kinds of unbelief (see below, p. 49) are like blindness; upon seeing a blind man, the disciples asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2) — to which Jesus replied that this blindness was due neither to the man’s own sin nor that of his parents.