

Natural Theology

A Biblical and Historical Introduction and Defense

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS NATURAL THEOLOGY?

“NEIN!” WAS Karl Barth’s thundering response to Emil Brunner’s 1934 article *Nature and Grace*.¹ The flavour of their debate can be tasted by looking not only at the title of Barth’s paper itself, and the title of the introduction (“Angry Introduction”) but also at the way Barth describes, in the preface of his article, the fact that he thinks Brunner to be on the verge of heresy. He states that Brunner’s appeal to natural theology must be heartily confronted and rejected: “His [Brunner’s] essay is an alarm signal. I wish it had not been written. I wish that this new and greater danger were not approaching or that it had not been Emil Brunner who had crossed my path as an exponent of that danger, in a way which made me feel that for better or for worse I had been challenged.”² This debate between Barth and Brunner, and the heat it generated, contributed to the dissolution of their friendship.³ For Barth, there is almost no point in arguing against natural theology, as to do so would be to argue against a non-existent thing, “For ‘natural theology’ does not exist as an entity capable of becoming a separate subject within what I consider to be real theology—not even for the sake of being rejected... All one can do is

¹ Karl Barth, “NO!”, in *Natural Theology*, trans. Peter Fraenkel, ed. John Baillie, 65-128 (1946; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002). Cf. Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation*, trans. J. L. M. Haire and Ian Henderson (London: Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, 1938). The Gifford Lecture series is dedicated primarily to discussion surrounding Natural Theology. In this lecture series, not only did he not present any arguments against Natural Theology as it has been traditionally understood, rather, Barth simply stated that it is not possible, and moved on to provide an exposition of the Scottish Reformed Confession of Faith (one of the only early Reformed Confessions to not make any clear statements about what can be known about God from nature).

² Barth, “NO!”, 69.

³ James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1993), 6.

to turn one's back upon it as upon the great temptation and source of error, by having nothing to do with it and by making it clear to oneself and to others from time to time why one acts that way."⁴

At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, another 20th century Reformed theologian was also rejecting natural theology, albeit in a different way than Barth.⁵ For Van Til, the problem of natural theology is that, in sum, man (regenerate or unregenerate) cannot rightly understand it without special revelation: "to understand God's general revelation in the universe aright it was imperative for man that he see this revelation in relationship to a higher revelation with respect to the final destiny of man and the universe. If then even man in paradise could read nature aright only in connection with and in the light of supernatural positive revelation, how much the more is this true of man after the fall."⁶ This claim would be, as will become evident over the course of this book, the denial of what has been historically understood as natural theology, throughout church history.

This debate continues even today. Many contemporary theologians and philosophers think that the affirmation of natural theology is the rejection of Reformed Orthodoxy. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. writes, "By now, too, we should have learned that natural theology may have a place in Roman Catholic and Arminian theologies, with their semi-Pelagian anthropologies and qualified optimism about the unbeliever's capacity to know God, but not in a theology that would be Reformed."⁷ For K. Scott Oliphint, the notion that some truth "can be acquired and demonstrated without any need of revelation" and that "there are truths that can only be had by way of special revelation," "was

⁴ Barth, "NO!", 75.

⁵ It is worth noting the irony in the fact that Cornelius Van Til, ardent opponent of Karl Barth (cf. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1947).), agreed with Barth in the rejection of natural theology.

⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed., ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 128. Van Til does not deny the reality of natural revelation (that the cosmos cry out that God exists, or, Van Til's version of the innate sense of the divine by which he will suggest that all men may be said to know God), only man's ability to understand this revelation without supernatural intervention of some sort.

⁷ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Epistemological Reflections on 1 Corinthians 2:6-16", in K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton, eds., *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 40.

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rightly rejected during the time of the Reformation and in seventeenth-century Protestant theology.”⁸ Rather, if there is any natural theology at all, it is, Oliphint suggests (following Van Til in this), “a product, not of natural reason, but of natural revelation and of a regenerate mind.”⁹ The twentieth-century rejection of natural theology by some prominent Reformed theologians was so outspoken and virulent that it has even led some Catholic scholars to assume that to be Reformed is to reject natural theology.

Francis J. Beckwith, by contrast, has suggested that though some Protestants defend natural theology, Reformed theologians either misunderstand what Aquinas is doing and end up defending something that Aquinas would have rejected, or misunderstand what Aquinas is doing and end up explicitly denying it.¹⁰ In both cases, of course, if Beckwith is right, a strawman has been raised and either defended or burnt to the ground. Interestingly enough, as we shall see, if one takes Beckwith’s general definition of what Aquinas says about natural theology and compares it with the writings of most of the Reformed theologians from the 1500s to the end of the 1800s, we will find that they are substantially in agreement. This raises the question, why did prominent Reformed theologians in the twentieth century, all of a sudden, distance themselves from their own tradition by rejecting natural theology? The question is so important that one scholar, Michael Sudduth, published a book seeking to answer it.¹¹ To say that, in the last hundred years or so, natural theology has become a hotly debated subject within Protestant circles could probably qualify as one of the understatements of the century.

⁸ K. Scott Oliphint, *Thomas Aquinas* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 78.

⁹ Oliphint, *TA*, 78. Cf. *Ibid.*, 79. Another contemporary Protestant theologian who adheres to a slightly nuanced version of this same approach to Natural Theology is Alister McGrath. Cf. Alister E. McGrath, *Re-Imagining Nature: The Promise of a Christian Natural Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).

¹⁰ Francis Beckwith, *Never Doubt Thomas: The Catholic Aquinas as Evangelical and Protestant* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 24-26, 32-33).

¹¹ The reader will notice that the historical research done in this book is in substantial agreement with Sudduth’s observations concerning (1) the general tendency of Reformed theologians and philosophers (from the Reformation to the end of the 19th century) to both accept and engage in natural theology, and (2) the overwhelming tendency of 20th century Reformed theologians and philosophers to reject natural theology in different ways. Cf. Michael Sudduth, *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology* (2009; repr., London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 2-4, 9-49.

With so much debate, it can often be difficult to see where the lines are, or should be, drawn. It is the purpose of this book to introduce the reader to the traditional historic Christian understanding of natural knowledge of God. To this purpose, we will begin by defining our terms: what do we mean by “natural theology,” “natural revelation,” and so on. This will be followed by a consideration of those passages of Scripture which are most often discussed in relation to natural theology. In this section we will consider how these passages have been traditionally and historically interpreted. We will then turn to a historical overview of, first of all, what the pagans thought about God, and secondly, what the church said about natural knowledge of God, and the ability of unregenerate humans to obtain this knowledge. We will, therefore, begin with the pre-Socratic philosophers, and sprint through the history of Western thought, explaining the thought of important thinkers along the way. We will finish this historical survey with the Reformed theologians of the 1500s to 1700s. This will lead us, finally, to engage with a number of critiques of natural theology that have been raised since the late 19th century. It is our hope that this short treatise will provide the reader with a firm foothold for understanding this subject, for navigating the treacherous waters of the contemporary debate, and for situating themselves within the historic Christian tradition.

WHAT IS NATURAL THEOLOGY?

The word *theology* comes from two Greek words, *Theos* and *Logos*. The word *theos* means “God.” When Westerners hear the word *God*, they tend to think of the God of the Abrahamic religions. Yet this word’s meaning varies by culture; it does not necessarily refer to any particular god. Since this is the case, we must always qualify the term *theology* by designating which “theology” we are talking about (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Greek, Hindu, or others).

Logos also has many meanings. Joseph Owens, in *The Doctrine of Being in Aristotelian Metaphysics*, explains that, “In the earliest Greek writers, *logos* means only ‘word’ in the singular and ‘speech’ in the plural. Its various meanings in Aristotle are listed by Bonitz (*Ind. Arist.*, 433a1-437b32) under the following heads: 1) Word, language, or speech. 2) Notion or thought. 3) The faculty of thinking or reasoning. 4) Mathematical proportion, relation.”¹² In the earliest

¹³ Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1963), 116fn35; 351fn18.

Greek writers, it simply means ‘word’ in the singular and ‘speech’ in the plural. In Aristotle, its use expands to include a notion or thought, the faculty of thinking, mathematical proportions or relations, as well as a definition, formula, explanation,¹³ or even “a plan conceived”.¹⁴ Martin Heidegger suggests that in the original sense of this word there is a notion of gathering together for organization.¹⁵ Taking the observations of Owens and Heidegger into account, we note that even if we translate *logos* as speech, word, or another meaning related to thought or dialogue, we must always remember that this word implies a gathering together and organizing of objects, in order to observe how they relate to one another.

Together, *Theos* and *logos* denote the dialogue about, or the observation and organisation of, truth statements concerning God. In a word, *theology*. A *theologian*, then, is a strange character, whose weekly occupation and lifelong vocation is to engage in dialogue about truth statements concerning God.

For Aristotle, theology was the knowledge of the first principle of all that exists—God.¹⁶ It was a knowledge that was attainable through human observation of the sensible universe. In Augustine’s *City of God*, we find Augustine referring to a certain Varro, who used the term “natural theology” to describe philosophical discourse about the gods.¹⁷ This may be the first time

¹³ Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1963), 116fn35; 351fn18.

¹⁴ cf. J. L. Stocks, “On the Aristotelian Use of λόγος: A Reply,” *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Jan., 1914), 11, 12.

¹⁵ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 131 [95]. In this text, Heidegger notes that the Greek word *logos* seems to correspond with the Latin *legere*, which “is the same word as our *lesen* (to collect): gleaning, collecting wood, harvesting grapes, making a selection; ‘reading *desem* a book’ is just a variant of ‘gathering’ in the authentic sense. This means laying one thing next to another, bringing them together as one—in short, gathering; but at the same time, the one is contrasted with the other.”

¹⁶ Cf. Giovanni Reale, *The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John R. Catan (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1980), 20–22. Referring to Aristotle’s claim that metaphysics is a theology or science of divine things, Reale notes that “Wisdom is the science of the first *causes* and *principles*; now deity, precisely, is *cause* and *principle*—supreme cause and principle. From this it follows that the doctrine of the primary causes and principles must necessarily have deity as its object, namely, it must be a theology. (Reale, *CFPUMA*, 21.)”

¹⁷ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. and ed. R. W. Dyson (1998; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 246–249. He explains that the philosophical discourse about the gods was called, by Varro, physical theology, though

that the terms “natural” and “theology” are found combined together, and used to designate what, for Aristotle, was simply “theology” or “wisdom”. As we will see, Augustine does not reject the possibility of a philosophical knowledge about God—a natural theology—but does point out that the pagan philosophers who had discovered some truths about God (especially the Platonists), allowed error to be mixed with the truths.

Many Christian theologians throughout history have distinguished between what man can know of God by reason alone and what man can know of God through the inspired word of God. Thomas Aquinas notes that metaphysics is the most excellent and certain science that man can attain through the human intellect, without any super-added divine grace needed in addition to common grace in order to comprehend it. But there is a science that is superior to metaphysics: *sacred theology*, which is based on the word of God.¹⁸ Sacred theology is superior to metaphysics because it is knowledge that comes directly from God. As such, it is more certain than human knowledge.

From the time of Augustine on, “natural theology” has become the popular term for talking about the study of what man can know about God by reason, and without recourse to special revelation. One would think, then, that providing a definition of natural theology would be easy. It is not. In the late medieval period, philosophers who studied metaphysics began to say that the main subjects of metaphysics were God, the soul, substance, and post-mortem life. According to Joseph Owens, Francis Bacon defined natural theology as that part of metaphysics in which we study what man can know of God by reason alone. Natural theology, broadly defined, is that part of *philosophy* which explores that which man can know about God (his existence, divine nature, etc.) from nature alone, via man’s divinely bestowed faculty of reason, unaided by special revelation from any religion, and without presupposing the truth of any religion.

We must distinguish our definition of Natural theology from a number of other concepts. Natural theology, so defined, is not the same as what is commonly called *natural revelation*. Natural revelation is to natural theology what the Bible is to biblical theology – its raw material and source data. It is, as John Calvin says, what God does when He manifests “his perfections in the whole structure of the universe,” and, so manifests himself daily, “in our

“That the second kind should be called ‘natural’ the custom of speech now admits. (Ibid., 246-47.)”

¹⁸ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 1, *respondeo*; q. 1, a. 5, *respondeo*.

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view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him.”¹⁹ Natural revelation is made up of the traces or fingerprints of God as seen by all men, regenerate and unregenerate, in creation.²⁰ Throughout Christian history, theologians have seen natural revelation as one of the “two books” by which God reveals himself, the other being the Scriptures.

To illustrate the difference between these two books, consider how a work of art relates to a biography of the artist. It is commonly known that Leonardo da Vinci never signed any of his works, and yet his works are not only among the most well-known of the Renaissance but were also revolutionary. Now, let’s say that a young man, brought up in our contemporary education system has never heard of, or been introduced to, any of da Vinci’s painting (not an unreasonable thing to imagine). Upon walking into a used bookstore (clearly lost), he sees a particularly well-done reproduction of the Mona Lisa, or the Last Supper. The painting has the same effect on him as it has had on everyone ever since it was painted: it captures his attention. He gazes upon the painting for some time. However, after searching in vain to discover the signature of the painter, he infers that it must have been the product of blind chance, and leaves the bookstore amazed at how something so beautiful could be produced via some sort of elaborate accident.

Of course, this is not what the young man does. Knowing nothing about da Vinci, but recognizing that such a beautiful work of art could not come into existence by chance or of its own accord, the young man inquires as to the name of the artist. When he sees the painting, though he knows nothing about its creator, he is able to recognize that there was indeed an artist, and that the artist arranged the colours in just the way that he did in order to render the image in the painting. The artist is clearly intelligent, admires beauty, and is able to create beautiful things. By simply looking at the work

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (2007; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 16.

²⁰ See the French edition of the *Institutes* that was republished in 1888 (Jean Calvin, *Institutes de la religion chrétienne*, nouvelle édition, éd. Frank Baumgartner (Génève : E. Bérout & Cie, éditeurs, 1888)), t.1, c.5, s. 6. In French we read, « Je voulais seulement observer ici qu’il y a une voie commune aux païens et aux croyants de l’église de rechercher Dieu, en suivant ses traces, comme ils sont esquissée dans le firmament et sur la terre, comme les peintures de son image. » Calvin here says, my translation, “I just wanted to note here that there is a way to seek God that is common to pagans and to believers of the church, by following in his footsteps, as they are outlined in the heavens and on earth, as paintings of his image.”

of art, the young man is able to infer the existence of, and some basic truths about, the artist. Yet the works tell him nothing about *who* the painter was—da Vinci’s paintings were not signed. For that, he needs some other source, perhaps the painter himself, or someone who knows him well enough to be able to identify him. Indeed, even if the young man came to know the identity of the painter, we would still require some other source than the painting itself—such as a biography²¹—in order to learn more about what he is like.

All of this is analogous to the relation between natural revelation and special revelation in our knowledge of God. Christian theology has traditionally taught that by gazing upon the cosmos we come to recognize that God—its provident creator—exists. Natural revelation, however, is not sufficient for telling us more than that God exists, something of his nature, and that God is worthy of worship. According to Christian theology, to discover that Jesus is God incarnate, that God is triune, and other truths explicitly revealed in Christian scriptures, one must have recourse to special revelation. Neither natural revelation, nor its interpretation in natural theology, reveal these truths.

Natural theology, so defined, is also not co-extensive with what some have called *natural religion*.²² Natural religion is best defined as that historical

²¹ Such as, Jean-Pierre Isbouts and Christopher Heath Brown, *Young Leonardo: The Evolution of a Revolutionary Artist, 1472-1499* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books—St. Martin’s Press, 2017).

²² This is the case despite the fact that some theologians have unhelpfully equated these two concepts. During the modern period, natural religion became a common way of describing what was traditionally called natural theology. However, this description unhelpfully appears to oppose natural theology to Christian theology. Cf. John Macpherson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith with Introduction and Notes*, in *HandBooks for Bible Classes*, ed. Marcus Dods and Alexander Whyte (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1881), 29. Another writer who demonstrates some confusion concerning these terms is David Foster, “‘In Every Drop of Dew’: Imagination and the Rhetoric of Assent in English Natural Religion”, *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1994): 293-325. In his article “Concerning Natural Religion”, W. W. Fenn notes the difficulty of defining this term, in light of the fact that “since the term is variously understood by ‘divines and learned men.’ (W. W. Fenn, “Concerning Natural Religion”, *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 4, no. 4 (Oct., 1911), 460.)” The fact that this term is given so many different meanings may be partially due to those who, being card-carrying orthodox Christians, were also seeking to engage in Natural Theology. To be clear on what we mean by natural theology, however, we will need to clearly distinguish it from natural religion. Even John Henry

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attempt, by a number of Deistic philosophers, to make that which can be known of God *via* natural revelation into a religion in its own right.²³ The unhelpful conflation of natural theology and natural religion has caused many people to reject natural theology out of hand, thinking that they were rejecting (as they should) some form of natural religion which is opposed to Christian religion and revelation. For our purposes, we most strongly distinguish natural theology and natural religion. Natural theology is not a religion in and of itself. It is, rather, a part of philosophy whose observations are integrated into Christian systematic theology which, if separated from the special revelation of the Holy Scriptures, tends to turn into that monster which has become known as natural religion.

Natural theology is not the claim that all the truths of Christianity can be proved via human reasoning, without the aid of divinely inspired Scripture; in fact, traditional exponents of natural theology affirm that all specifically Christian truth claims can only be proven with the aid of the Scriptures. Indeed, natural does not venture to say anything about that which can be known only through divine revelation, such as that Jesus was born of a virgin, that Jesus is God, that God is triune, etc. Rather, natural theology is the philosophical study of that which can be naturally known about God, without

Blunt's article on natural religion seems to conflate it with natural theology ("Religion, Natural", in *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. John Henry Blunt (London: Rivingtons, 1872), 630.).

²³ Cf. "Deism", in *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. John Henry Blunt (London: Rivingtons, 1872), 194-196. Edmund Gurney, "Natural Religion", *Mind*, vol. 8, no. 30 (Apr., 1883), 198-221. Fenn, "Concerning Natural Religion", 461. William Warren Sweet, "Natural Religion and Religious Liberty in America", *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan., 1945): 45-55. A. Owen Aldridge, "Natural Religion and Deism in America before Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Oct., 1997): 835-848. Aldridge notes a confusion between natural theology and natural religion, but proposes a distinction which seems, to us, a distinction without a difference. He says, "Another confusion exists between the terms 'natural religion' and 'natural theology.' The first was used by Jean Bodin in the late sixteenth century and the second by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz early in the eighteenth. In the strictest sense, natural religion comprises mainly cosmic evidence to prove the existence and providence of God, whereas natural theology forms one of the branches of metaphysics dealing with the deity. (Ibid., 836.)" We propose that it is better to understand natural theology as that part of philosophy which "interprets" natural revelation (whose observations are integrated into a properly Christian systematic theology), and that natural religion should be understood as that attempt to worship the God of the philosophers which eventually turned into Deism.

recourse to special revelation. It is worth noting, here, that it therefore follows that natural theology is also not co-extensive with *Christian apologetics*. Christian apologetics is the defense of the truth claims of the Christian religion, some of which overlap with the subjects discussed in natural theology. Technically, natural theology only discusses the existence and attributes of the divine, not whether the deity discussed has revealed itself, or is worshipped in any one religion. However, traditionally, Christian theologians have noted that not only do natural theology's discoveries about God support Christian claims about God, but, in fact, that the God which is discovered through the study of natural revelation just *is* the God of Christianity.²⁴

It is worth noting, when we use the term “naturally known” or “natural knowledge of X”, we are referring to those true judgments that humans possess, not through superhuman intervention or revelation, nor through human

²⁴ This statement will be shown to be the case in the historical section of this book, however, we could already whet the reader's appetite by supporting this claim with the following quote from Heinrich Bullinger. Though Bullinger frequently bemoans the errors of the pagan philosophers, he states quite clearly that they did arrive at knowledge of some truths about the one true God, as when he makes the following statement in commenting on Romans 1:19-20, “So then, the Gentiles knew God; yea, they knew whatsoever might be known of God. But what teacher had they, or what master? They had God to their master. In what order taught he them, or out of what book? Not out of the written books of Moses, or the prophets; but out of that great and large book of nature. For the things that are not seen of God (in which sort are his everlasting eternity, his virtue, power, majesty, goodness, and Godhead), those he would have to be esteemed of according to the visible things, that is, the things which he hath created. For God's eternal Godhead is known by man's creation, by the continual moving of heaven, and the perpetual course of rivers: for it must needs be, that he is most mighty which sustaineth all these things, which moveth, strengtheneth, and keepeth all things from decay, and which with his beck shakes the whole world. Finally, who doth not see the goodness of him which suffereth the sun to rise upon the good and the evil? But to what intent revealeth he these things to the Gentiles? To the intent, forsooth, that they may acknowledge him to be God, that they may glorify and worship him as God, and be thankful to such a benefactor. When therefore they do not this, they are inexcusable, and perish deservedly for their unbelief and unthankfulness sake. So then it is manifest, that the law of nature doth expressly teach, that there is a God which is to be acknowledged and reverently worshipped. (Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger: the first and second decades*, trans. H. I., ed. Thomas Harding (Cambridge: The University Press, 1850), 196-97.)” Also of special interest is Bullinger's articulation, in his fourth decades, of how we can come to know God through our contemplation of nature (Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger: the fourth decades*, trans. H. I., ed. Thomas Harding (Cambridge: The University Press, 1850), 150-52).

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fabrication or imagination, but through reasoned observations about the sensible universe. For example, humans are a part of the sensible universe, and so true judgments *about* humans, which are obtained through reasoned observations *of* humans, would count as natural knowledge. In fact, introspection—an individual human making reasoned observations about their own interior state of being—would also be considered natural knowledge. The content of this natural knowledge may be quite varied and includes not only those truths that are observed (Socrates is a man, this shape is a triangle, this animal is a cat, this animal is a sheep), but also those truths that are inferred (Socrates will die, this shape has three interior corners, this animal has narcissistic tendencies, this animal is stupid). Thus, the notion of natural knowledge cannot exclude, by definition, inferred knowledge of supernatural beings or realities (i.e. beings or realities that are *not* a part of the sensible universe), though the nature (or essence) of supernatural beings might limit *how* humans acquire knowledge about them, and how *much* knowledge humans can acquire about them. Natural knowledge is gained through natural human powers of cognition, and is arrived at through human observations of the universe of sensible beings and human reasoning about these observations.²⁵

Having defined our terms, we turn to an examination of the biblical texts which have been traditionally understood as teaching that the cosmos proclaims the existence and nature of God, to humans, in a way that they can in fact understand.

²⁵ Such claims are not new, but summarize the traditional view of the historic Christian church, including the important theologians of the Protestant Reformation to the present time (as we will show in the historical section of this book).