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I. Theology and Modernity

A. The story of modern theology goes back to that period of intellectual and socio-political ferment which not too humbly thought of itself as the Enlightenment. "The Enlightenment" is a term which can be used to describe much philosophical thought in the 18th century in Europe and even in America (B. Franklin and T. Jefferson). Despite differences among individual philosophers, there are significant enough similarities to warrant the general name, the Enlightenment. The philosophers involved definitely form a family of intellectuals united by a single style of thinking.

The organizing principle of the intellectual movement was a struggle for autonomy for man, for freedom from oppressive authorities and freedom for autonomous, critical, rational thought. These philosophers had inherited two parts - Christian and classical pagan. They pitted them against one another, in order to win their independence from each in a modern paganism, one emancipated from classical thought as much as from Christian dogma. Their means was criticism, their aim a new power for man. They used classical antiquity to criticize Christianity, but not for the sake of a revival of classical paganism, as in the Renaissance, but for the sake of the independent paganism of their own. They were united in their program for the freedom of moral man to make his own way in the world.

The history of the Enlightenment is twofold: intellectual and social. Through their intellectual prowess they won their freedom from Christianity. The social history would show what they did with their freedom.

The intellectual history of the Enlightenment is the history of a growing radicalism, as the criticism of the philosophes became deeper and wider, more far-

reaching, more uncompromising. The first half of the Enlightenment, to about 1750, is highlighted by a deistic position of the mind regarding God and by a natural law theory of ethics. The second half is marked by atheism and the rise of utilitarianism. In aesthetics, the 1st half is concerned with finding the objective laws of beauty, the 2nd with subjective taste. In politics, the 1st half is content to put forth timid and somewhat trivial political ideas, the second with the aggressive radicalism that culminated in the French and American revolutions.

Their view of history was that it had always been divided between priests and philosophers, mystifiers and men of reason. In each age, one or the other was predominant. They focused their attention on the rise and decline of the philosophic parties throughout the course of history. They divided history into four great epochs: the great river civilizations of the Near East; ancient Greece and Rome; the Christian millennium; and modern times, beginning with the revival of letters in the Renaissance. The 1st & 3rd of these periods were ages of myth, belief, and superstition, the 2nd and 4th ages of rationality, science, and enlightenment. Their history was clearly polemical, part of a comprehensive effort to secure rational control of the world and freedom from the pervasive domination of the myth. It represents perhaps the first steps toward the development of a scientific history of culture. They used classical antiquity as an alternative to Christianity, as a signpost to a secular spirit, & as a catalyst for the discovery of themselves. They experienced the torture, indeed the self-torture, of anyone who has to abandon the religion of the past in order to discover himself.

The achievement of the Enlightenment thinkers as historians is not to be underestimated. They seem to be the first to have clearly disengaged the significance of the

Greeks' discovery of the human mind, their long and laborious conquest of myth by reason. More generally, they seem to have been the first to locate the two ways in which men confront themselves, their experience, and their fate: the mythopoetic and the critical-scientific. The first way lacks the category of verification, an achievement that demands the organized habit of asking questions according to the standards of scientific criticism.

The heroes of the Enlightenment were Horace, Socrates, Lucretius, and Cicero. Horace represented the possibilities of pagan urbanity; Socrates in his death the war between philosophy and superstition; Lucretius in his campaign of science against myth an anticipation of the claim that the advance of philosophy entails the retreat of religion; and Cicero the ideal of the thinker in action.

The Enlightenment vision of philosophy can be seen quite clearly in Kant's insistence that philosophy be kept totally separate or independent from theology, and even more in his persuasion that the philosopher's freedom is the precondition of the freedom of all men. They defined philosophy as the organized habit of criticism. With Kant we see the obverse of this, too: destruction only in order to build, criticism only in order to make construction possible.

Their call for a disenchanted universe and an end to myth is not to be interpreted as rationalism, for they were also concerned with finding and establishing the limits of reason. They did not regard reason as the sole or even dominant spring of human action, nor were they convinced that all the mysteries of the world can be penetrated by inquiry. But they *did* presuppose that the world is orderly, subject to universal, irreversible laws. Not all of them were atheistic, either; they just insisted on religion

being treated as a fact, a cultural phenomenon, as subject to criticism as anything else.

The mode of thought for the Enlightenment philosophers was eclectic, for eclecticism gave them generous room in which to be independent. Eclecticism, of course, is intimately related to relativism and tolerance. The latter idea was very important in their indictment of Christianity, which was to them the worst of fanaticisms.

Their thought resulted in what might best be termed a moral realism. It was realism in that they took their material for their activity and thought from the concrete experiences of daily living and continually returned to that experience for refreshment and confirmation. It was moral in that its vital center was a moral vision of the world. They had an interest -- nondialectical as it was -- in the unity of theory and praxis. They wanted knowledge and action to be allies, and especially they began forming our insistence that science and philosophy be utilized for the sake of improving man's lot. This meant an insistence on philosophical modesty in the midst of a conviction that only rational, scientific inquiry brings happiness. Man is what he does, and he comes to know what he is by discovering himself in action. But part of what he discovers consists in the limits of action.

The Enlightenment philosophers deliberately sought out what would discredit Christianity and deliberately slighted anything that would exalt it. Three major criticisms seem to predominate: the adulteration of antiquity; the betrayal of the critical spirit; and the rehabilitation of myths. The philosophers were very scornful of the Christian treatment of classical literature. Religion was as barbarizing an influence as the

barbarians themselves. They regarded the Christian treatment of the classics as a concentrated assault on a great part. The Christian compromise with classical literature, itself invested with great love, was regarded solely as tampering. What the Christians particularly surrendered in classical antiquity was the autonomy of critical thought.

These Christians, according to this view, had despised the resources of the mind or, in scholasticism, had abused them. Philosophy for Christians was either fruitless wrangling as opposed to the Christians' saving truth, or in the middle ages nothing but a handmaid of theology, embedded within a religious atmosphere, whereas for the Enlightenment, philosophy had to be autonomous and omnipotent, or it was nothing at all.

The philosophers, finally, were unwilling to admit that Christian thought at its best was the enemy of superstition, that it incorporated secular work with its enterprise in a respectful manner, recognizing that God's creatures are real in themselves, fleshy historical, individual, tangible beings. What the philosopher could not comprehend and were sorely outraged at was the Christian insistence that these beings were also part of a divine plan for the universe, symbols participating in a myth. Christians did not and seemingly would not analyze the psychological and anthropological origins of their own faith. The Christians' thinking was teleological, not causal in the sense of modern science. Modern science could progress only by means of a liberation from teleological thinking.

The centuries from 1300-1700 were regarded by the philosophers as the time when the critical mind resumed a conversation with classical antiquity and moved toward independence. There

centuries were still religious, but they were the time when secular forces first expanded and then exploded a unified Christian world view. Man remained God's creature for the Renaissance, but he also could create himself. The enlightenment philosophers saw the Renaissance as the first act of a great drama in which the Enlightenment was the last act -- the drama of the disenchantment and demystification of the European mind. The single passion that bound together all the philosophers of the Enlightenment was the passion to cure the spiritual malady that is religion; the germs of ignorance, barbarity, hypocrisy, filth, and the basest self-hatred. The only religion any of them would allow was a "natural religion," one without miracles, priestly hierarchies, ritual, divine saviors, original sin, "chosen people," and providential history. The principle was to adopt the most naturalistic explanation compatible with the evidence. Treat religion as a social phenomenon like any other, strip it of the privileged status on which its prestige depends. Religion has lost all specificity and all authority, and is no more than a dim, meaningless, and unwelcome shadow on the face of reason. One must be willing to live with uncertainty, with no supernatural justifications, no complete explanations, no promise of permanent stability, with merely probable guides, and without complaining. Since God is silent, man is his own master. He must live in a disenchanted world, submit everything to criticism, and make his own way. Irony is the fitting style of such a philosophical attitude.

Any study of the Enlightenment must focus major attention, not only on the intellectual positions covered up to now, but equally on the program for humanity proposed by the Enlightenment philosophers: their views of progress, science, art, society, and politics, their pursuit of modernity.

These men were convinced that in the struggle of man against nature, the balance of power was shifting in favor of man. They celebrated a rational reliance on the efficacy of energetic actions. They undertook to devise a social, ethical, political, and aesthetic programs for the sake of freedom. The 18th century was a century of decline in mysticisms, of growing hope for life and trust in effort, of commitment to inquiry and criticisms, of interest in social reforms, of increasing secularisms, and of a growing willingness to take risks.

a n. th. as a curb on anarchy.

The break from fatalism had occurred even earlier, however. Descartes had called for a practical science that would men masters and possessors of nature. Bacon had proclaimed that "man is the architect of his fortune." The Enlightenment consolidated these proposals under the conviction that knowledge is power. Thus Kant insisted that intelligence is an active force in the world, that reason acts like a judge who compels the witnesses to answer questions which he himself has formulated.

Thus modernity may still have been struggling to be born in the 18th century, but men saw life getting better, safer, easier, healthier, more predictable, and more rational. This vision was the product of many forces: the spectacular career of the natural sciences, advances in medicine, the

improvement of manners and the growth of humanitarian sentiment, the slow crumbling of traditional social hierarchies, and revolutionary changes in the production of food, the organization of industry, etc. New sciences were being developed, all in the service of man's power over his environment: sociology, psychology, political economy, modern education. Diffusion of information became more rapid, organized, and self-aware. Intelligence devoted itself to practical results: mechanical innovations, new institutions, etc. (Continue with Gay, Vol. II)

~~Which~~ Of the most powerful agent in the recovery of nerve was the scientific revolution, the most tangible cause of confidence lay in medicine. Despite what we would regard as chilling statistics on disease and brevity of life, there were real signs of solid achievement and a genuine hope of advance: especially a dramatic growth in population. The 18th c. was one of major innovations in medical theory, astonishing advances in anatomy, proper midwifery, brilliant experimentation, sensible classification of diseases, the professionalization of surgery, an improved understanding of the role of fresh air & sound food in health, and attacks on superstition.

The century also saw the birth of a secular social conscience or humanitarianism and of a concern with decent manners and civility. Moreover, many of the characteristics of capitalism were emphasized here: the commendation of ceaseless activity and of the postponement of immediate gratifications for the sake of some higher & more enduring satisfaction. In fact, the merchant class became somewhat glorified as a group combining the making of money, exciting work, and benevolence toward humanity.

social utility came to be highly valued, and merchants more honored as architects of peace and prosperity than aristocrats or priests.

A very important element of Enlightenment rationality was its repudiation of most of the past as a tragic pile of error and crime, to be studied for mistakes & injustices, not for models to imitate. Of all arguments in behalf of an idea or an act, the argument from tradition was regarded as the most treacherous and least cogent.

On this point the E. was at odds with the ancients, who had looked to the past for their ideals, who were steeped in nostalgia. The E. was in general suspicious of ~~trad~~ nostalgia. Men tend to deplore the present & extol the past, they said, bec. of their desire to escape their misery. Overburdened by work, depressed by their lot, they like to construct imaginary days of happy idleness. Nostalgia is nothing but complaining, which paralyzes man's will to action. This makes it dangerous. Men's energies must be freed for progress.

The Enlightenment introduced, then, a clash of cognitive claims between autonomous reason and Christian theology. Western Christians themselves, insofar as they shared with enlightenment thinkers the persuasion that commitment to truth was the only authentic way of life, soon experienced, with the aid of the enlightenment challenge, a demand for a wholesale demystification of the Christian religion, for an affirmation of the possibilities of life in this world based on reason and continually scrupulous inquiry into all evidence. The principal question became whether the new methods of rational analysis must simply lay waste the once rich and mythical imagination and style of life of Western Christians. Was not that mode of rational analysis initially fostered by the basic Christian vision of the world? Could it not become the occasion for a process that would both eliminate the merely mystifying components of the Christian vision and yet restore with new integrity Christianity's central vision of God and humanity? This problem has set the stage for the struggle of modern theology. Eventually the struggle was to call into question every important cognitive claim of the Christian tradition, every major ethical stance of that tradition, and the most basic understanding of what the fundamental faith of Christians really meant.

The most obvious crisis was that of cognitive claims. Most Christians now recognize that much of the traditional Christian manner of understanding cognitive claims in the Scriptures should be rejected by the findings of history and of the natural and human sciences. L. Gilkey, Religion and the Scientific Future, esp. eqs. in pp. 3-34 and 137-52.

E.g., to continue to uphold a literal interpretation of the Genesis account of creation is simply and irrevocably impossible for anyone who accepts the findings of the modern physical and life sciences. Or to continue to believe a literalist theory of scriptural inspiration seems no longer an option to anyone familiar with the modern historical study of the Scriptures.

I. Theology and ~~to~~ Modernity

B. Contrasting moralities of inquiry.

1. The general problem

The basic clash underlying the claims and counter-claims of traditional Christianity and the modern sciences is a clash of moralities. The traditional Christian theologian of whatever denomination preached and practiced a morality of belief in and obedience to the tradition and a fundamental loyalty to the church-community's beliefs. The modern historian and scientist preaches and practices an exactly contrary morality. One cannot investigate a cognitive claim with intellectual integrity if one insists simultaneously that the claim is believable because the tradition has believed it. One's fundamental loyalty must be ~~to~~ solely to those methodological procedures which the particular scientific community of inquiry in question has developed. Each inquirer must start with the present methods and knowledge of the field in question, unless he has evidence of the same logical type for rejecting those methods and that knowledge. Furthermore, this scientific morality, unlike the traditional Christian one, leaves room in principle for the overthrow of present scientific methods, paradigms, and conclusions. (Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions).

for this morality.

The modern theologian has, by and large, come to share in the morality of scientific knowledge held by his contemporaries. He knows that he must provide the proper kind of evidence for every claim he makes, and that the announcement of his own tradition's beliefs does not and cannot constitute such evidence for his fellow community of philosophers, scientists, or historians -- or even for himself, if he is committed to the morality of autonomous critical inquiry.

The modern theologian's loyalty to his church tradition, then, has changed from one of defending or even reinterpreting in an orthodox manner his own or his tradition's beliefs, to one of honest resolve to study his tradition and aid its ongoing self-understanding. In this study, his analysis should be characterized by

the same ethical stance of autonomous judgment, critical reflection, and scientific exactitude as found in other fields.

2. The example of history

Perhaps I must present an example here, and I take my example from one history. (Van Harvey, The Historian and the Believer).

The 19th century saw the development of what has come to be called the historical-critical method. It involved a sustained critical attempt to recover the past by patient analysis of the data, of evidence, and an insistence on the impartiality and truthfulness of the historian. The aim of the historian was to "tell what really happened." Description, impartiality, and objectivity were the ideals. It became clear that much of what was previously accepted as fact was, in truth, fiction, myth, legend.

The critical-historical method was incompatible with much traditional Christian belief. E.g., in the case of Biblical criticism, the method was based on assumptions that the Bible is intelligible only in terms of the historical context and is subject to the same principles of interpretation & criticism as are applied to other ancient literature. For traditional Christian belief, however, the Bible is supernaturally inspired. Its events are the results of the supernatural interventions of God and they are unique. For the historian, these events are analogous to present events. Otherwise they can't be assessed at all. While the theologian believed on faith that certain events occurred, the historian regarded all historical claims as having only a greater or lesser degree of probability. He regards the attachment of faith to these claims as a corruption of historical judgment.

For any theologian who takes this method seriously, there is implied a willingness to see the matter through to its final consequences, to let burn what must burn, and to hope that a new synthesis can emerge on the other

side, one stronger for having been purged by the fire.

The principal question in such a debate is over the issue of freedom of inquiry, the question of intellectual honesty and integrity.

One example of the difficulty may be seen in the history of the question of the historical Jesus. In 1834, David Friedrich Strauss published a Life of Jesus which tried to argue that many of the details of Jesus' life in the Gospels are mixed with legendary elements. He argued that the NT writers were naive, mythologically-minded people w/o any conception of natural law or order. In their age unusual events of nature & history were attributed to supernatural beings of all kinds. Their writings expressed this picture.

One of the major results of Strauss' book was the attempt of liberal theology to pursue the question of the historical Jesus. The object of faith was the God-consciousness of Jesus, the forces of his religious personality. To establish the trustworthiness of the Gospel tradition about Jesus in this respect, the liberals worked to determine the exact nature of the NT sources. They established that Mark was the earliest Gospel, used by Mt & Luke, & that John could not be read as making historical claims about Jesus. Then they ambitioned the project of drawing a "life-like portrait which, with a few bold strokes, should bring out clearly the originality, the force, the personality of Jesus."

Then, however, other biblical critics began to raise doubts as to whether such a picture is possible. Even Mark could not be considered a reliable source for a chronological picture of Jesus' ministry or for an insight into his personality! The Gospels came to be regarded less as sources for a life of Jesus than as a picture of the beliefs of the early church.

The neo-orthodox theologians took this as an opportunity to develop a new form of theology, according to which the kerygma was not at all concerned with the

religious personality of Jesus, about which statements could find no justification in the historical sources. Rather the kerygma was about God's identification with the manhood in the full ambiguity of human history. Jesus was the bearer, the incarnation, of the word of God. But his life and personality were as ambiguous as those of any other human. Only faith perceives God in him.

This position too came under attack as lacking stability: i.e., it professed to accept in full the humanity of Christ yet denied any interest in its actual concrete manifestation; it insisted on the once-for-all character of this divine intervention in history but renounced any desire to know what it was really like. So there issued a call to return to the historical Jesus. But it was not established whether or not such knowledge was possible. Some theologians proposed a new conception of the kerygma and of historical method. They said that the kerygma is about the existential selfhood of Jesus, and that the NT sources do preserve just those sayings & scenes in wh. his self & intention are made clear. And the aim of history in general is to re-create the existential self-understandings of past human beings. This can be done in the case of Jesus, even if a chronological description of his life cannot be given.

What emerges from this discussion is how inextricably intertwined the historical & theological issues are. Many people found themselves driven to historical skepticism, and asking whether faith was compatible with such skepticism. Can one rest his faith on historical assertions wh. themselves do not seem capable of a high degree of probability? What is the relation between faith and history? Can one and the same man hold the same judgment tentatively as a historian but believe it passionately as a Christian? If one simply assumes the doctrine of Biblical inspiration & accepts the principle of supernatural intervention, he begs the issue & arrives at conclusions which were in the premises for wh. he started. If he ~~side~~ sets aside these assumptions, he necessarily

employs the canons of those with whom he is in debate. What then happens to his faith? Or: if historical inquiry can at best yield only results of a greater or lesser degree of probability, and if faith is said to be dependent on such inquiry, how does one avoid identifying faith with assent to certain historical propositions & thereby corrupting the balance of judgment of critical historical work?

These were the problems raised by the confrontation of cognitive claims in Christian faith and critical history. Fundamentally, though, the issue is moral. There is a certain morality of knowledge implied in the historian's task, and it is radically different from the morality of knowledge of traditional Christian belief.

The morality of historical knowledge has four characteristics: 1) the autonomy of the historian; 2) his responsibility for making his arguments & statements capable of rational assessment; 3) his need to exercise sound and balanced judgment; and 4) his need to use critically interpreted experience as the background against which sound judgments are made about the past.

The autonomy of the historian is his right to think for himself, free of any authority that would dampen his research and inquiry. As we have seen, it is the hallmark of the Enlightenment spirit. In history, it meant that the historian is his own authority. He does not rely on an authority other than himself but submits these so-called authorities and witnesses to a criterion which he himself is possessed of and by reference to which they are criticized. The traditional view was that the historian's task is one of compiling and synthesizing the testimony of so-called authorities and eyewitnesses. His task was editorial & harmonizing, resting on the assumption that the historian has an obligation to believe another person's report. But no witness simply hands down a complete, photograph-like

descriptions) an event. He selects, alters, interprets, rationalizes. This means judgment, and these judgments presuppose other judgments, beliefs, and opinions as the background against which they occur and in the light of which they have meaning: i.e., a "world" which the witness brings with him & to which he appeals to support his judgments.

The historian must assess these judgments & inferences, to establish both their meaning and their truth. And he must give reasons for what he asserts. These reasons will express his own authority. This authority confers authority on a witness, and only after rigorous cross-examination. If he allows his authorities to stand uncriticized, he abdicates his role as critical historian. He is no longer a seeker of knowledge but a mediator of past belief, a transmitter of tradition.

Secondly, the historian must communicate his conclusions to others in such a way that they can be assessed by those with the competence to do so. The public use of reason, based on logical candor, conditions all responsible dialogue aiming at genuine knowledge. The historian is not allowed to claim any single piece of knowledge except where he can justify his claim by exhibiting the grounds on which it is based. Philosophers of history have generally been divided into two groups with respect to the question of the grounds on which some judgments are more entitled to credence than others. Some have maintained that such entitlement is proportionate to the degree to which historical explanations approximate scientific explanations; others that historical explanations are unique and need not be subsumed under a law. It may well be, however, that the quest for any one theory of historical explanation is fruitless, since history is made up of diverse kinds of arguments using diverse data & warrants, so that some explanations will make use of laws, others of generalizations, and still others of neither. Then there will be diverse kinds of verification, diverse criteria. "The

data are various, the warrants vary from field to field, and different claims are entertained with varying degrees of assent. In some cases, the argument makes use of very technical data which themselves presuppose laws; in other cases, the argument turns on certain truisms of human nature and conduct. No one field of argument is more uniquely historical than another. The issue in each case is simply the assessment of the argument in terms of its relevant data, warrants, and backings.

Thirdly, the historian must exercise sound and balanced judgment. The judgment of the historian comes into play in a number of his operations:

1) sorting out the relevant possibilities for a solution to a problem;

2) estimating the dynamics of argument: acknowledging the consensus that already exists, knowing what the crucial questions are, where the weak links in other interpretations lie, which data need to be challenged, and which have been misinterpreted.

3) knowing the degree of force a conclusion is believed to have by virtue of the given data and warrants, carefully placing one's qualifications, indicating what can be affirmed with practical certainty, what only with caution or guardedly, what is possible. He must qualify his claims to the proper degree.

Fourthly, the historian must use his own critically interpreted experience as the background against which sound judgments are made about the past. Thus all historical narration has presuppositions, and the critical historian consciously orders and creates from the basis of what he holds to be the truth.

A debate in modern times has been waged over the presuppositions of critical history. Two

philosophers representative of this debate are F. H. Bradley and R. G. Collingwood. For Bradley the presuppositions are the uniformity of nature and the causal connection: i.e., the verifiable world of science. Collingwood maintained that this made history dependent on science. But history, he said, is its own criterion, depending for its validity only on its own principles and methods. Laws only enable the historian to say what could have happened, not what did happen, and this only in nature, not in the course of human events. Nonetheless the basis for the historian's judgments must be the historian's own critically interpreted present standpoint of which scientific knowledge will be an important ingredient. History does presuppose the sciences, but it also presupposes much more, for the historian makes judgments about men's motives and values, national character, political trends, institutional capabilities, revolutions. Just because these judgments are not scientific does not mean there are no appropriate data and warrants for them. These warrants constitute the background of the historian's inferences. They are the principles which function as the ground of historical explanations. Some of them may be truisms, some laws of nature, some tendency and probability statements, or ethical presuppositions. They are principles the historian believes would hold true unless some other exceptional conditions obtained. The burden of proof lies on the one who denies them. Thus it is legitimate to appeal to our present knowledge as the basis for our judgments about the past without equating that knowledge with scientific knowledge. The historian's presuppositions are relative to given fields and may be more adequate in some than in others.

Thus miracles have all but disappeared from the working vocabulary of historians. In the case of an alleged miracle, the historian will ask, What am I

being asked to believe? What is to be said in its favor? If the report contradicts a well-established warrant, the burden of evidence & argument falls on the one who alleges the report to be true. And the skepticism agst. miracles is not based merely on the conviction that they are incompatible with known laws. It is also that the very existence of miracle stories has itself come to be regarded as a normal and expected occurrence in certain kinds of literature, and so the discussion will focus on, eg., literary genre.

What is agreed generally among most historians coming out of the critical-historical background is that we must use analogies from our present understanding of human nature in order to understand the past: we must, in the sense of ought.

From this standpoint, the historian, whether he is a believer or not, is aware of the falsifying influence belief frequently exercises on critical judgment, so that he is most distrustful of just those answers he would most like to believe. His own ideal of judgment is incompatible with the ethic of belief that has so long been implicit in religion.

The first great conflict of these two ethics of judgment occurred over the problem of whether the Bible was to be subjected to the same methodological canons that were applied to other ancient and religious traditions and scriptures. Biblical research flourished only when believers agreed this could be done. But even then there has been a notable lack of rigor evident in the handling of certain kinds of traditions. No historian is under any obligation to consider any alleged eyewitness to be an authority. What historians would find lacking in much New Testament scholarship is a certain toughness of mind, a lack stemming from the falsifying influence of the demand for belief. The historian will suspect that

traditional belief is obscurantist, that it either appeals to faith, ie the last resort, or permits faith to tip the balance between two possibilities. He will insist that faith has no function in the justification of historical arguments respecting fact. The historian will suspect the believer of being inconsistent, using modern historical warrants sometimes and suspending them at other times, always as a direct function of ~~this~~ his antecedent traditional beliefs. The modern morality of knowledge requires that one embrace that knowledge which presently best explains certain phenomena unless one has evidence and reasons of the same logical type for rejecting it. This morality is not arbitrary: no progress in knowledge is possible if men reject present knowledge for no principled reason.

But the orthodox believer often sets aside the consensus in a given field for no other reason than that this consensus is incompatible with some historical proposition he desires to believe. Yet he welcomes modern knowledge when it seems to support traditional Christian belief in any respect. For the historian the ideal is not to entertain any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant. Thus it is irresponsible to give a heavy ~~assent~~ assent to a proposition that properly deserves a soft one. But traditional Christian belief seems to undermine this kind of judgment, demanding as it does that heavy arguments be given to propositions that properly elicit soft assents, and that assertions with a very low degree of probability be converted into statements possessing a high degree of probability, etc.