

Barth vs. brunner and natural theology

Religion



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

The concept of natural theology pertains to the belief that natural gifts are provided from conception and installed mainly on human mind. Furthermore, it states that the revelations are provided on the general prospect of humans, and not merely on special individuals. In this theory, revelations are said to be revealed not only from the Scriptural basis or even from Jesus Christ .

As for the theory's concern, the scholastic tradition of natural theology had provided their simple explanation why the Scripture and Jesus Christ received some sort of special revelation . According to natural theologians, the rationale for the provision of such special revelation is nothing more than an unexplainable event or beyond human reason . As far as the history of theology is concerned, one of the most highlighted debates comes from Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, dating from 1914 .

From the concepts and theological principles introduced by Barth and Brunner comes the great and prolonged theological debate, forthcoming from the quarters of " dialectical theology", particularly from Barth's radical rejection of the notions of General Revelation and Natural Religion or Natural Theology, including the " point of contact" and the rest. By far, this argument has been known as the Barth-Brunner conflict . Due to the strong influence and very much detailed argument brought by Barth, the conflict between the two theologians has greatly affected the stand point of today's theology.

This controversy has dominated the theological discussion of to-day, and has affected literally every problem . In this study, the primary discussion revolves in covering the issues brought by the debates of Barth and Brunner, and the theological concepts embedded in their proposed principles. From the point of view of the study, the first thing to discuss is the concept of natural theology in order to determine the rationale for its rejection. Next, the study centers on the conflicting theologian, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.

Lastly, the study provides the analysis of their argument to explore the primary stand points from both theological perspectives. Discussion The Concept of Natural Theology In general, the Reformers were less enthusiastic about natural theology, in part because they rejected much of the scholastic tradition, in part because it tended to render special revelation, and particularly Scripture, less necessary, and in part because it granted fallen human beings powers of correct reasoning that the Reformers themselves saw as corrupted by sin .

According to the traditional scholastic movement, the concept of natural theology only provides its significance by illustrating human sin and their never-ending need to survive - more like an instinctive theological description - however, with little standing ground in justifying how these humanistic needs pursue . It is not the place here to enter into the historical, psychological and theological reasons for the development of this great controversy. The historical reason is the adamant opposition that had to be shown to Nazi ideology and the wrong and dangerous theology of the German Christians.

Barth rendered here an immeasurable service to sound theology and the cause of the Church as a whole . A form of natural theology that is worth defending takes its cue from core theological interpretations of the nature of God and the world. The concept of natural theology comprises of three theoretical perspectives that are derived mainly on nature that correlates with the divinity of God. The word ' natural' in the expression ' natural theology' is meant to mark a contrast between nature and revelation.

The concept of Natural theology does not imply natural in the perspective of being a non-complex and unsophisticated belief, but rather, the natural theology is the product of a fairly sophisticated state of western theism and would have been foreign to many great religious thinkers before the Middle Ages. The concept of natural theology was realized during the era wherein theologians tried to logically obtain the answers to divine existence while at the stage of reflecting their religion.

At this point of Middle Age, theologians obtain the elements that have been established already beforehand, and those that can provide unaided rationale for those parts that they believed to be unnatural. Hence, they coined and develop the natural theology, which somehow contradicts the existence of natural activities through single-handed or chose ones. As for the theory, it mainly exemplifies that everyone is chosen in their own account of being an image created after God . The concept of natural theology allied with Nazism most especially during the time of Jews massivediscrimination.

Significantly, the natural theology, even from the early times, pointed its fingers to chosen individuals, such as the Jews, wherein the theology

<https://assignbuster.com/barth-vs-brunner-and-natural-theology/>

contradicts the fact that these people are chose. The possibility of natural theology has been denied by some theologians and by some philosophers. The theological arguments against natural theology are mostly concerned with the relationship between reason and faith: they urge the uselessness of reason as a means to salvation and of philosophical speculation as a step on the road to heaven .

One of the essential criticism that served as ground basis for the concept of natural theology is the fact that these principles are essentially from the philosophical perspectives, which in the end obtained vast arguments and criticisms against natural theology itself. In particular, the theologians of Natural perspective drew heavily on naturalphilosophyto show how the hand of the Creator could be discerned in the Book of Nature as well as the Book of Scriptures.

By contrast, those still wedded to a more traditional order in Church and State tended to be wary of natural theology and the forms of natural philosophy interlinked with it as obscurities from a theology based on Divine revelation . On the other hand, the significance of Natural theology is its ability to provide an analysis of the human situation and the question of God implied in it. One side of the traditional arguments for the existence of God usually does this, in so far as they elucidate the dependent, transitory, and relational nature of finite human existence.

But, in developing the other side of these arguments, natural theology tried to derive theological affirmations from the analysis of man's finitude . The natural theology concentrates mainly on the natural imagery of men as earthly beings being linked to God's image. As for the theory, it mentions <https://assignbuster.com/barth-vs-brunner-and-natural-theology/>

that every human being possesses the right to obtain revelation from God for everyone is from the same image, which is God. Somehow, these two rationales are deemed as the primary arguments that render the argument of the Natural theology.

First, natural theology should not claim to operate with an account of pure, objective, ahistorical reason. For man's reasoning cannot be considered absolutely pure from intention for man by his own nature is deprived from complete purity; hence, contradicts the statement of natural theology itself. Second, natural theology should not offer a philosophical metaphysics as a way of mediating between faith and the world. From these concepts, the argument against natural theology settles in. Different theologians, most significantly Karl Barth realizes the wrong ideations brought by the theology.

From the perspective of Thomas Aquinas (1225—1274), he claimed that there are certain truths that are attainable by the powers of "reason properly applied, and others that are beyond the reach of reason, and are known only through revelation". From Aquinas' theology, the concept attaining revelation and reason conjoins to further discover the truth and absolute reasoning. The concept of nature in the doctrines of theology can be misleading and contradictory for its very meaning can be a profound statement of obscurity, which can also contribute to the eclipse of God's imagery.

As for the theory of Natural origination, it is a major concept where philosophy of religion interrelates theological aspects. Philosophies of religion scrutinizes what the sheer existence of the universe entails what it forces us to conclude, and likewise what its order entails. Protestantism is

<https://assignbuster.com/barth-vs-brunner-and-natural-theology/>

usually against the concept of natural theology for they claim that God, whose existence is demonstrated, is not the Christian God. For Protestants, God Himself should not concern in Himself in providing His existence for He in fact exist above all.

Whether natural theology is to be dismissed and why is a major area of investigation in Christian theology. Roman Catholic somehow defended the concept of natural theology for they believe that there are essential differences between what we can know of God by means of natural theology and what we know of God by revelation. Currently, natural theology tends to act and to be used as a tool that metaphorically provides clergy and students some rigorous proof to demonstrate God's existence .

Emil Brunner In 1914, Brunner published a work entitled Nature and Grace wherein his main argument coincides mainly on the generational theology's task of reverting back to the concept of natural theology . Brunner, being one of the main characters of natural theological concept, obtained his idea of natural theology from the concept of imago Dei or in translation would mean, " Image of God". Human nature is constituted in such a way that there is an analog with the being of God .

Considering the sinful nature of human beings as installed already in their instinctive characteristic, Brunner stated that the ability of human beings to discern the presence of God is still there by the concept or reasoning that God remains in the natural environment. Within the context of human beings as sinners, still their innate nature are capable of recognizing the presence of God and are still aware of their guilt before God. All these linkage are

brought by the concept of natural stand present in man from the time of his creation and image pattern.

Hence, as Brunner concluded, this linkage brings forth revelation to every man with no special disposition present, such as sinner or holy, rich or poor, or any other means. Brunner significantly pointed out that God can manifest His revelation to anyone with no consideration on human characteristic since human beings are all created out of His natural image. As per Brunner's defense on natural theology, greatly point out the significance of the doctrine of the incarnation to revelation: in Christ may be seen the personal self-disclosure of God.

From Brunner's ground basis, it is the story of creation that serves as the fore ground of this theological belief. He reasoned that there are considerably three rationales that offer support for the theory of Natural theology namely, human reason, and order of the world and beauty of the world. In the argument of Human Reason, considering that God's existence can be found in His creation, and then it is acceptable to use the idea that God can be most likely found in the highest peak of His creation, which is human reason.

The next argument Brunner introduced is the ordering of the world, wherein the prime philosopher concerned is Thomas Aquinas. Considering that the natural pattern in the environment is unquestionably and extremely organized, this phenomena been emphasized to be from God. Brunner did not go as far in denouncing the philosophical approach to God. Nevertheless, Brunner stated that the attempt to derive knowledge of God from creation,

which is the theology of natural religion, is ultimately not being helpful in theological doctrine.

He even admitted that the knowledge of the Creator forms as a component of our existence. However, Brunner concluded that this knowledge component placed to human beings as God's creation does not follow that human beings know God completely, since such philosophical intelligence does not end in communion with God. Brunner's theology has been linked very much within an existentialist, dialectical framework and focused mainly on the uniqueness of existential, personal understanding. He even continued with basically anthropological starting point.

Lastly, the concept of beauty present in the world has also been emphasized as an argumentative statement in Brunner's ideologies. According to these theologians, the presence of beauty in surrounding world is the primary depiction of God's existence through the nature's beauty. Another focus entailed by Brunner in his beliefs is in faith of having personal encounter between the one who hears the Word, believer, or human being per say, and the God who speaks and draws near in grace, as distinct from an acceptance of abstract propositions of belief.

Christianity thus sets forth "truth as encounter", Brunner's primary effect and influence thus far had come through his writings of "The Mediator and The Divine Imperative" and in Brunner Oldham perceived the chances and events for creating an innovative and urgently required dialogue between evangelical theology and the contemporary human sciences — vital if the churches were to address seriously the current world context. Enveloped in

Brunner's appeal to nature is an idea, which can be traced back to Luther, known as "the orders of creation."

The generation Nineteenth-century German Liberal Protestantism had utilized this perspective as their basis, and further developed a theology, which permitted the German culture, including a positive assessment of the state, to become of primary significance theologically. Brunner had used this idea of the "point of contact" back in 1927, and it is integral to his understanding of human nature. For Brunner, human nature is constituted in such a way that there is a ready made point of contact for divine revelation. Revelation thus addresses itself to a human nature, which already has some idea of what that revelation is about.

For example, take the gospel demand to "repent of sin," Brunner argues that this makes little sense, unless human beings already have some idea of what "sin" is. Karl Barth: Analysis of the Argument During the twentieth century, Karl Barth (1886—1968) initiated the so called spiritual argument or attack in the theoretical concept of natural theology. For this reason, the theological ties between him and another leading 'neo-orthodox theologian, Emil Brunner (1889—1966) broke due Barth's attack on Brunner's theological concepts.

Such action is very much important for Barth's perspective in that it shows the importance of natural theology's attempt to further provide an illustration of Christianity's attaining its peak on German civilization; hence, the sole purpose of Barth is to negate the ally status of natural theology to the concept of Nazism. Barth's criticism is that it goes beyond any rejection

of natural theology that is based on claims that it is invalid, unpersuasive, or unnecessary .

From Barth's argument, he exemplified that God has indeed revealed His identity to human beings; hence, it should be natural for humans to be convinced on God's existence. It is already insignificant to have God's existence justified in other forms for He already chosen to be revealed in the form of His true son, which is Jesus Christ . A natural theology that proceeds from a different starting point must inevitably compromise and distract in relation to the primary theological task.

Even worse, it may threaten to subvert the true nature of the faith by the introduction of foreign and ethically dangerous materials . Barth's last consideration to reject the principles of natural theology lies with the fact that such form of theology is a potential ally to compensate the needs of German ideations against Jews and other racial backgrounds. By far, the theoretical principle of Natural theology hinders the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ. From the perspective of Barth's argument, natural theology is a human attempt to initiate subversions for human's necessity for revelation.

The theology, by its very purpose and significance, attempts to learn more about God in a manner and under conditions specified by humans' ways and not by God Himself . In Barth's view, the concept of natural theology is very much compromised in historical, philosophical and theological significances. The great Scottish theologian Hugh Ross Mackintosh once summarized the questions centering on revelation as follows: " religious knowledge of God, wherever existing, comes by revelation; otherwise we should be committed

to the incredible position that a man can know God without Has willing to be known .”

The main idea embedded in Barth’s desire to counter the theology of natural perspective is for the purpose of safeguarding the integrity present in divine revelation against human attempts to Construct their own notions of God. As for Barth’s perspective, he argues that revelations from God do not simply occur to anyone, unless God chose to. It is neither inborn nor chosen to be possessed by me, but it is God’s choice to reveal Himself to an individual. Revelation, indeed, is out of human’s power but solely rely to God’s preference.

Although deeply distrustful of all apologetic instincts, Barth appears to make a minor but important concession in his discussion of natural theology. In its proclamation of God’s self-revelation, the Bible does not ignore the details of the cosmos or the physical world as these are known from empirical observation and human experience. In their own way, they attest the divine truth . However, this event does not simply occur or free for man to manipulate. It is not a separate line of enquiry that can simply alter or displace human perspectives from the original faith .

On the contrary, its function in Scripture is to incorporate within a single framework all that attaches to human existence in the cosmos. The argument of Barth provides an extended and systematic criticism of natural theology. The main conflict thrown by his argument argues that such theology, “ which comes to humanity from nature”, expresses the humanity’s “ self-preservation and self-affirmation” in the face of God . Barth views the concept of natural theology as a safeguarding perspective to cover

human being's longing to justify self against God and for the provision of independent intellectualities.

His conflicting idealism against this theology rests on his fundamental belief that it undermines the necessity and uniqueness of God's self-revelation. From the logical statement introduced by Barth's argument, if knowledge of God can be achieved independently of God's self-revelation in Christ, then it follows that humanity can dictate the place, time and means of its knowledge of God. The perspective of Barth against natural theology institutes a close relationship between the theology itself and the subject of human independence against religion and divine supervision.

Considering Barth's familiarity in the concept of natural theology, he confirms and expresses the human desire to find God on our own terms. The central concept on Barth's argument had been scrutinized by the religious community; hence, considering his argument against natural theology. However, other theologians have been having this assumption of Barth's initiating a scientific theology despite of his overcorrection of the Reformed theological position, and that an informed recovery of an older position is overdue.

A scientific theology offers such reappropriation and the second of these merits dose attention. It is a simple fact of historical theology chat the Reformed theological tradition has not, on the whole, opposed natural theology. Conclusion The argument of Barth and Brunner with the subject of natural theology has been present from and long influenced the condition of catholic beliefs and perception against the occurrence of God's existence and the value of human self-justification and intellectual identity.

<https://assignbuster.com/barth-vs-brunner-and-natural-theology/>

The natural theology mainly states that the existence of God is in the physical form of nature itself, considering its organization, beauty and man's intelligence, which are derived from God's imagery. However, Barth refuted this theology and stated that God's existence is in the form of Jesus Christ. He contradicts the theology due to its self-justification, and tendency to form ally with Nazism.

Bibliography

Allen, D. and Springstein, E. O. Philosophy for Understanding Theology (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) p. 19.

Clements, K. Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J. H. Oldham (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999) p. 272.

Gonzales, J. L. Essential Theological Terms (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) p. 118.

Grenz, J. Theology for the Community of God (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000) p. 50.

Huyssteen, W. V. and Shults, F. L. The Evolution of Rationality (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006) p. 392.

Kenny, P. and Kenny, A. . The God of the Philosophers (Oxford University Press, 1979) p. 2.

Kraemer H, Religion and the Christian Faith (James Clarke & Co., 2003) p. 356.

McGrath, A. E. An Introduction to Christianity (Blackwell Publishing, 1997) p. 162.

McGrath, A. E. Christian Theology: An Introduction (Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 170.

McGrath, A. E. The Science of God: An Introduction to Scientific Theology (Eerdmans Publishing, 2004) p. 84.

Porter, et. al. R. The Cambridge History of Science (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 270.

Scott, P. A Political Theology of Nature (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 40.

Tilich, P. Systematic Theology (University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 14.