



Creation, Modernity and Public Theology

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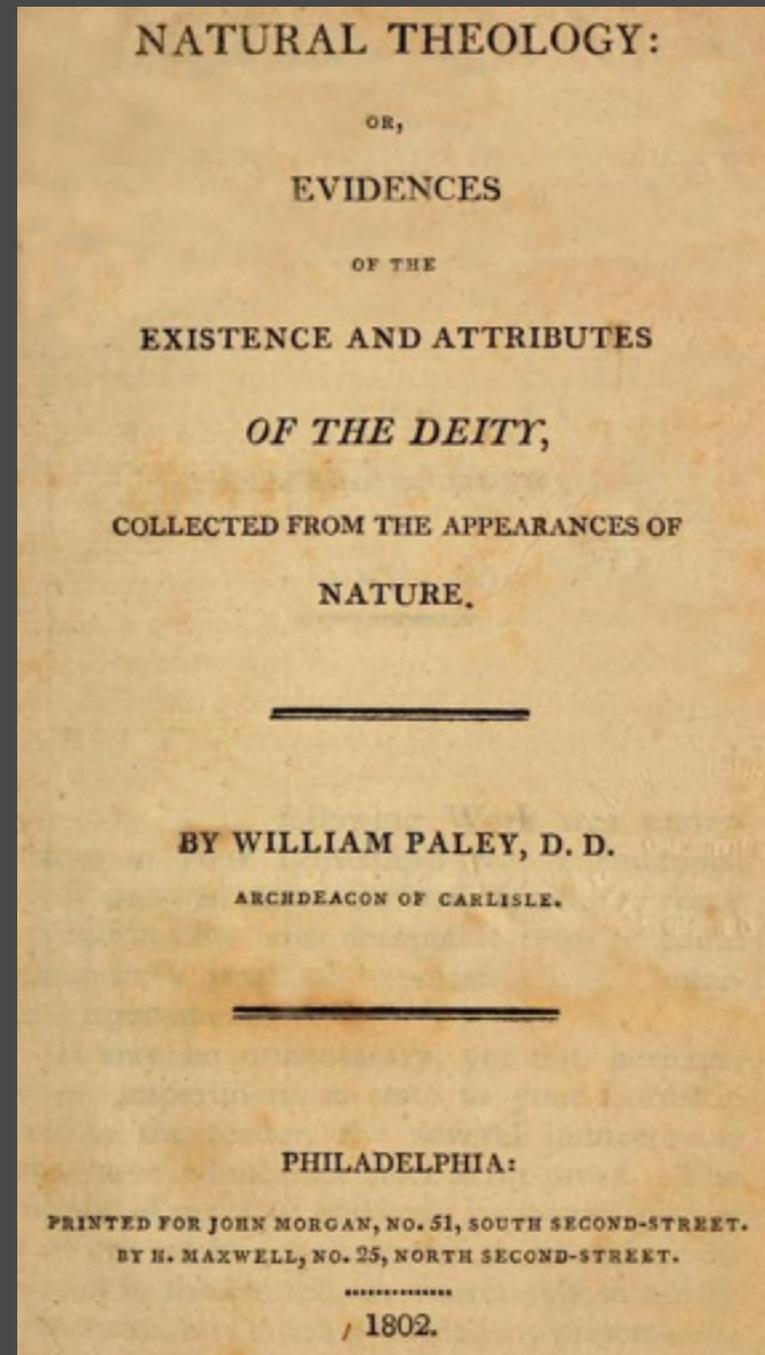


St. Paul delivering the Areopagus sermon by Raphael, 1515.

‘Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, “To an unknown god.” What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.’



William Paley, 1743-1805





- Material cause - the marble
- Formal cause - the 'what it is to be something'
- Efficient cause - the principle of change or rest
- Final cause (*telos*) - that for the sake of which; the goal; the purpose.



Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274)

‘Whence it is said that the end is the cause of causes, because it is the cause of the causality in all the causes.’

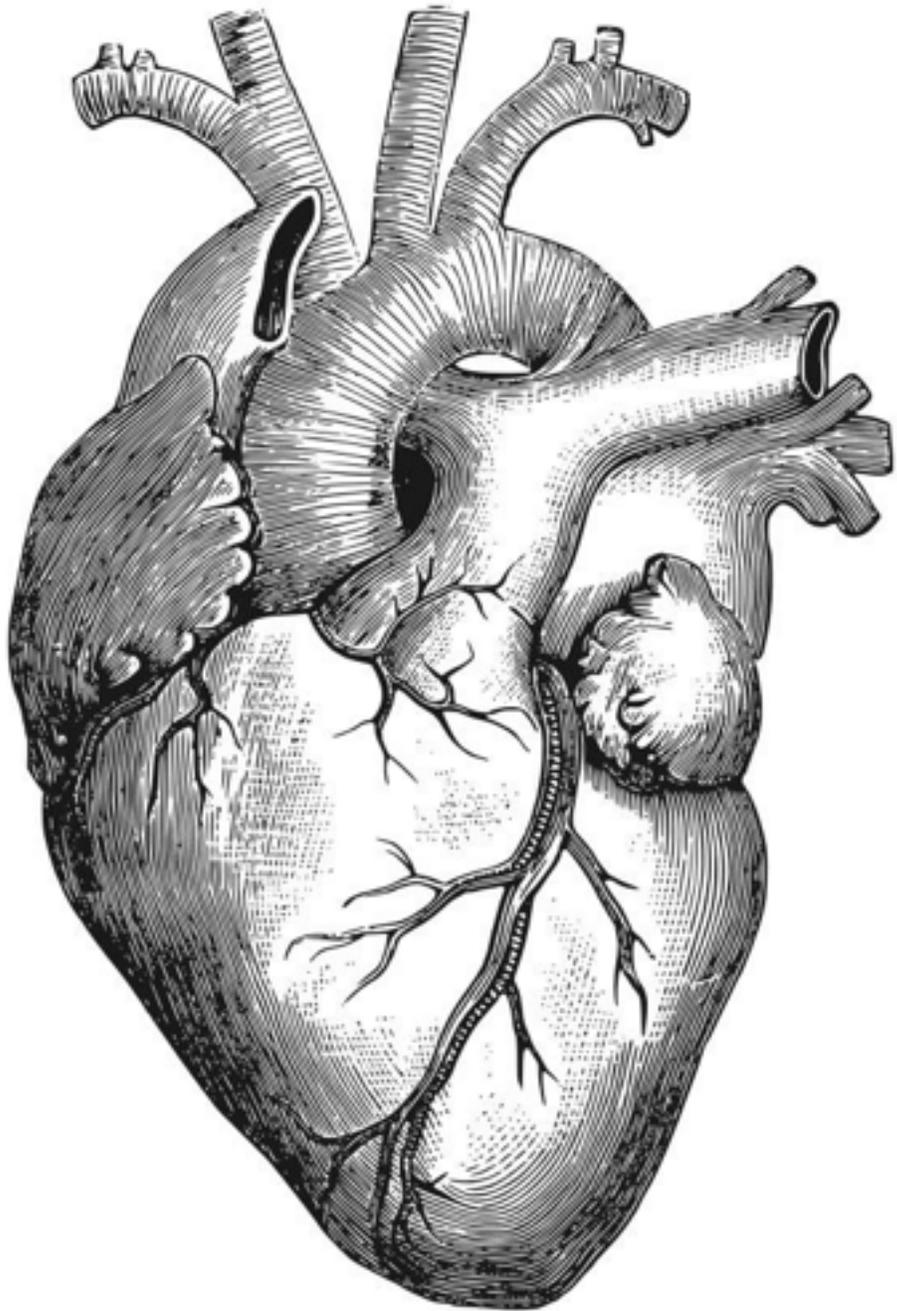
Aquinas, *De Principiis Naturae* 4.22



Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

It is right to lay down: 'to know truly is to know by causes.' It is also not bad to distinguish four causes: Material, Formal, Efficient and Final. But of these the Final is a long way from being useful; in fact it actually distorts the sciences except in the case of human actions.

- *The New Organon*, Book II, aphorism 2

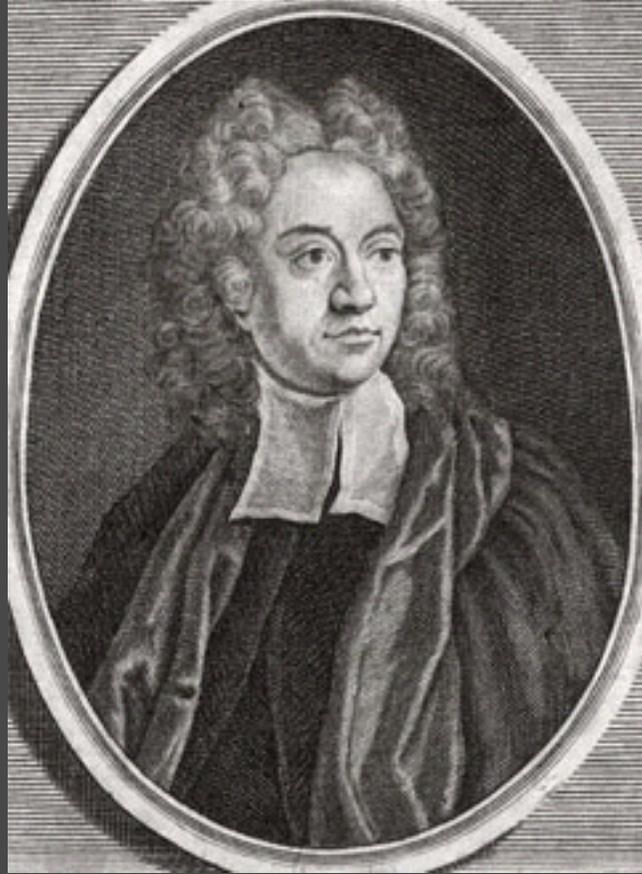


‘The heart beats in order to pump blood around the body.’

OR

‘The heart beats because electrical activity spreads through the walls of the atria and causes them to contract.’

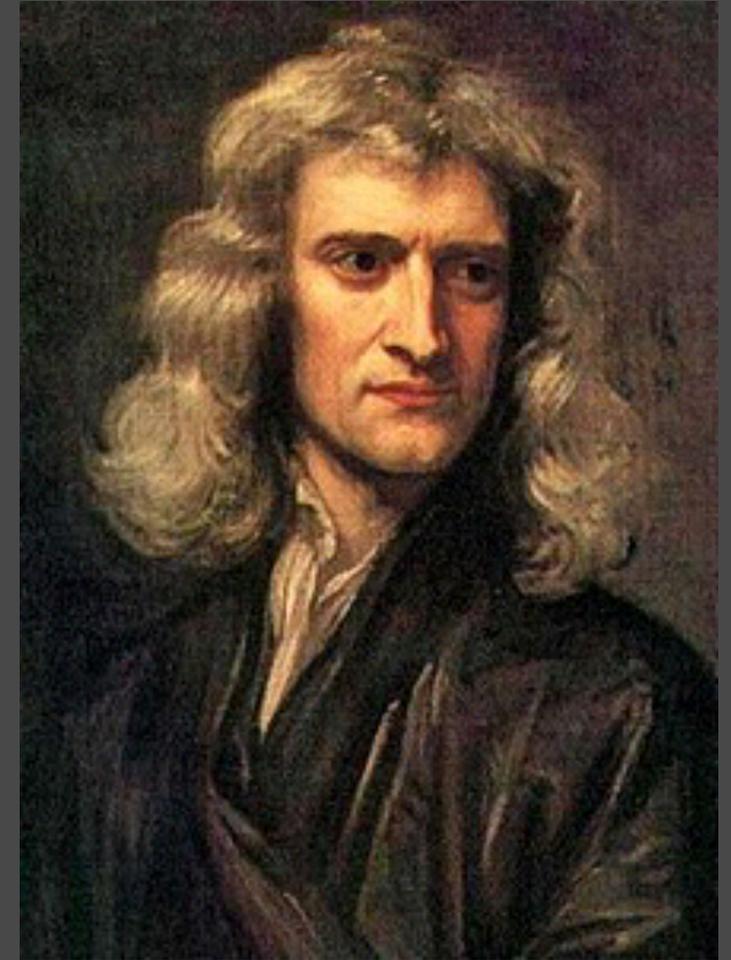




Richard Bentley
1661-1742

“When I wrote my treatise about our System I had an eye upon such principles as might work with considering men for the belief of a Deity and nothing can rejoice me more than to find it useful for that purpose.”

-Isaac Newton to Richard Bentley, 1692



Isaac Newton
1642-1727



“In him all things are contained and move, but he does not act on them nor they on him. God experiences nothing from the motions of bodies; the bodies feel no resistance from God’s omnipresence...We know him only by his properties and attributes and by the wisest and best construction of things in their final causes, and we admire him because of his perfections; but we venerate and worship him because of his dominion.”

-Isaac Newton, *Principia Mathematica*, 2nd ed. 1713, General Scholium



Robert Boyle,
1627-1691

There are not many subjects in the whole compass of Natural Philosophy, that better deserve to be inquired into by Christian philosophers, than that which is discoursed of in the following Essay. For certainly it becomes such men to have curiosity enough to try at least, whether it can be discovered, that there are any knowable final causes, to be considered in the works of nature. Since, if we neglect this inquiry, we live in danger of being ungrateful, in overlooking the uses of things, that may give us just cause of admiring and thanking the author of them, and of losing the benefits, relating as well to philosophy as piety, that the knowledge of them may afford us.

-Robert Boyle, *A Disquisition on the Final Causes of Natural Things*, 1688



What is 'nature'?

‘ ...the distinctive form or quality of such things as have within themselves a principle of motion, such form or characteristic property not being separable from the things themselves, save conceptually.’

- Aristotle, *Physics*, Book 2.

Art

imitates

Nature





Nature (the human body) imitates Art (the automaton)

“The Writer”, c. 1770,
Pierre Jaquet-Droz
(1721-1790)

THE RESTLESS CLOCK

*A History of the Centuries-Long
Argument over What Makes
Living Things Tick*



I think that biologists' figures of speech reflect a deeply hidden yet abiding quandary created by the seventeenth-century banishment of agency from nature: do the order and action in the natural world originate inside or outside? Either answer raises big problems. Saying "inside" violates the ban on ascriptions of agency to natural phenomena such as cells or molecules, and so risks sounding mystical and magical. Saying "outside" assumes a supernatural source of nature's order, and so violates another scientific principle, the principle of naturalism.

Jessica Riskin, *The Restless Clock: A History of the Centuries-Long Argument over What Makes Living Things Tick* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016), p.6.



Creation

- Creation *ex nihilo*
 - *God creates in freedom*
 - *God is the source of everything that is not God, including matter, space and time*
 - *Every moment is ex nihilo*
- The complete asymmetry between God and creation
- The metaphysics of participation
- Primary and secondary causes
- Creation as gift
- Creation as sacramental



'The Creation'
by
Ruth Duckworth,
1984.



René Descartes,
1596-1650

“The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on him entirely no less than the rest of his creatures. Indeed to say that these truths are independent of God is to talk of him as if he were Jupiter or Saturn and to subject him to the Styx and the Fates. Please do not hesitate to assert and proclaim everywhere that it is God who has laid down these laws in nature just as a king lays down laws in his kingdom.”

-René Descartes to Marin Mersenne, 1630.