

The Logic *of the* Heart

AUGUSTINE, PASCAL,
and the RATIONALITY OF FAITH

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INTRODUCTION

AUGUSTINE, PASCAL, AND HUME ON THE “EMBEDDEDNESS” OF REASON

Novalis, the German romantic poet and philosopher, once remarked that all proper philosophizing is driven intrinsically by the longing to be at home in the world, by the desire to bring to peace the restlessness that pervades much of human life. Wisdom, within this view, and therefore also happiness and well-being, rest on the ability to transpose the alienation and fragmentation that characterize life into a marriage of nature and spirit, or as William Wordsworth described it, a wedding between the human mind and “this goodly universe.”

Norman Wirzba, “The Challenge of Berry’s Agrarian Vision”¹

Modernity, as everyone living in the closing years of the twentieth century can see, is a double-edged phenomenon. The development of modern social institutions and their worldwide spread have created vastly greater opportunities for human beings to enjoy a secure and rewarding existence than any type of pre-modern system. But modernity also has a somber side, which has become very apparent in the present century. . . .

On the whole, the opportunity side of modernity was stressed most strongly by the classical founders of sociology. Marx and Durkheim both saw the modern era as a troubled one. But each believed that the beneficent possibilities opened up by the modern era outweighed its negative characteristics. . . . Max Weber was the most pessimistic among the founding fathers, seeing the modern world as a paradoxical one in which material progress was obtained only at the cost

1. Norman Wirzba, “The Challenge of Berry’s Agrarian Vision,” in *The Art of the Common-place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, by Wendell Berry (Washington, DC: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2002), vii.

of an expanded bureaucracy that crushed individual creativity and autonomy. Yet even he did not fully anticipate how extensive the darker side of modernity would turn out to be.

Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*²

In *The Consequences of Modernity*, social theorist Anthony Giddens characterizes the technological, consumer-driven culture of modernity as a culture of “disembeddedness.”³ Giddens argues that the cumulative impact of the social, economic, technological, and intellectual transformations of modernization has been to extricate the individual self from the traditional bonds of kinship to community, land, and history. His description of the modern, disembedded self echoes Max Weber’s thesis that secularization and disenchantment are necessary corollaries to the rise of modern scientific culture. As Weber remarks in “Science as a Vocation,” “The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’”⁴

The legacy of modernity’s disembeddedness is now a familiar theme in the writings of many contemporary social thinkers.⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas, in particular, argue that modernity’s preoccupation with individual liberation and autonomy has tragically torn asunder the intricate fabric of the individual’s social and historical identity. Modernity’s zeal to free the rational individual from all forms of historical and traditional embeddedness has infected all the major institutions of modernity: the marketplace, academy, political arena, and church.⁶ In the name of the right to forge one’s

2. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 7.

3. *Ibid.*, 17–54.

4. Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

5. See, for example, Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage, 1973); Berry, *Art of the Commonplace*; Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*; *idem*, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1979); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

6. Of the many works of both Hauerwas and MacIntyre that develop this critique of modernity, see esp. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000); *idem*, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); *idem*, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991); *idem*, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); MacIntyre,

own meaning and to improve the material conditions of human existence, modernity has severed individual from community, community from nature, natural from supernatural, and facts (as mere commodities) from human values (as mere private preferences).

Following Hauerwas and MacIntyre, I shall argue that those of us living in the so-called postmodern world, in which fundamental beliefs and practices central to modernity appear to have lost their authority and legitimacy, will suffer the consequences of our disembeddedness until we recognize the extent to which both modernity and mainstream secular postmodernity foster a pervasive ethos of disembeddedness. *The Logic of the Heart* seeks to remedy the disembeddedness of our postmodern condition by returning to the thought of two Christian thinkers of the past, Augustine and Pascal, whose perspectives on Christian faith and human reason provide us with a viable way to overcome modernity's unfortunate legacy of a deep and ugly divide between reason and affection and postmodernism's excessive preoccupation with its own gospel of radical autonomy.

While bequeathing to us a valuable legacy of resistance to various forms of tyranny over the individual self, modernity has perpetrated a damaging illusion of the radically autonomous, rational self. Similarly, while postmodernism has rightly exposed modernity's misunderstanding of the nature of rational objectivity and its failure adequately to foresee the potentially oppressive and exploitative uses to which such modern notions as rational progress and metaphysical essentialism might be put, it has utterly failed to offer any substantial opposition to the intoxicating modern consumer appetite for human autonomy.⁷ In different ways, both modernity and postmodernity have succumbed to the *lure of autonomy*. Modernity's vision of autonomy fosters the distorted conception of the self-governing, ahistorical, nonsectarian, rational self. Following the brilliant but tragically modernist diatribes of Friedrich Nietzsche against the idols of modern culture, the postmodernism of the late twentieth-century Western academy has succeeded in unmasking the incoherence of the modern notions of pure rational objectivity and liberal individualism only to foist on us an even more virulent addiction to autonomous self-creation. The poverty of mainstream, radical, secular postmodernism

After Virtue; and idem, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

7. In my critical discussion of radical postmodernism, I do wish to acknowledge with appreciation some of the significant contributions postmodernism has made to contemporary debates on the nature of human thinking. My critique of postmodernism focuses on those mainstream, secular postmodernists who insist that postmodern liberation requires an aversion to all realist traditions of metaphysical and theological thought, traditions that make definite claims about the nature of objective reality, in order to uphold the radical autonomy of human interpretation. Despite the severity of my criticisms of postmodernism as "hypermodern" rather than truly postmodern, I acknowledge the meritorious contributions of radical postmodernism to the current debates about rationality, objectivity, and the situatedness of all forms of human thinking.

is paradoxically that its professed remedy for the disorders of modernity is itself a form of self-imprisonment within a community of self-liberating and self-creating ironists.

By defending the rationality of faith in a God of grace who alone can satisfy our longings and heal our brokenness, Augustine and Pascal advocate the art of living as embedded creatures. Following such Christian thinkers as Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, Alvin Plantinga, and David Bentley Hart, *The Logic of the Heart* seeks to elucidate and defend an Augustinian and Pascalian account of the embeddedness of human rationality. Properly understood, human reasoning on ultimate issues of human life is inextricably bound up with those affections and feelings that reveal to us our proper place in creation. Reason can function properly, in other words, only when reason is informed by the intuitions of the heart as it is nurtured by historically constituted traditions of belief and practice. By insisting on reason's autonomous authority independent of the sensibilities of the heart, the Enlightenment inadvertently severed reason from the very source on which it depends for its own proper functioning. Similarly, by advocating the poetics of self-creation and extolling the freedom to construct our own worlds, mainstream postmodernism strips the self of its embeddedness in a world beyond mere human artifice, a world that has the power to bestow meaning and dignity on human life precisely because it is not a mere social construct. Augustine's and Pascal's vision of "passionate reason" provides a compelling account of human embeddedness and offers a viable middle ground between Enlightenment rational autonomy and mainstream postmodern poetics of self-creation.

The modern separation of the sacred from the secular may well have its origins in the worldview of the late medieval nominalists, who by rejecting essences denuded the created order of common forms, thereby reducing the natural order to a realm of valueless, formless individuals; in so doing, these nominalists forged an unbridgeable divide between the truths of reason and the truths of faith. This pioneering, premodern demarcation of the secular from the sacred was in turn reinforced through the epistemological turn of early modern philosophers. Thomas Hobbes, Galileo Galilei, and René Descartes all insisted on redirecting the path of learning away from the antiquated Aristotelian conception of Nature as teleological and toward a dualistic framework in which an objective, mechanized, and valueless natural order was set over against a subjective world of human ideas and sentiments. By abandoning the vision of an *enformed* Nature whose members remain unintelligible apart from their directedness toward their own proper ends, modern philosophy severed the objective realm of Nature from the subjective world of human consciousness. As a result, both the natural order of mathematical mechanism and the subjective order of human ideas and judgments were abstracted from ordinary, everyday human experience in which our encounters with self and world are embedded in an intricate and complex context of natural forms and

are inextricably bound up with a world of historical and cultural traditions. By turning away from the world of ordinary human experience embedded in this web of contingent beings and historical forms of life, the great pioneering minds of modernity, such as Descartes, Benedict de Spinoza, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant, aspired to liberate human rationality by establishing human reason in and of itself as a universal, dispassionate, objective, and autonomous authority. By severing the valueless natural order from the subjective evaluating human mind, the framers of modernity brought into being the disembodied, autonomous mind.

Despite the fact that we live today in what many social thinkers term the “postmodern” world, this modern archetype of dispassionate, unbiased, and disembodied reason has in one form or another become so pervasive in our dominant intellectual, cultural, and political practices that for most of us the very idea of “passionate reason” seems an oxymoron. Now, it is no doubt true that most, if not all, of us have experienced ethical conflicts between what “reason” tells us we should do and what we desire or “feel like” doing: there is no denying that reason and passion do at times conflict. But this opposition between reason and *certain* of our passions and desires does not ipso facto require reason to function most properly in our lives only when it is freed entirely from the influence of *all* passion and *all* sensibility.

The core project of *The Logic of the Heart* is to recover a robust conception of passionate reason. Despite the legacy of modernity that pervades our lives today, I believe that we can reasonably embrace the following radical claims: first, that the proper function of reason in human life is to enable us truthfully to locate ourselves in our world and to live wisely by recognizing who we are and what our proper place is in this world; and second, that reason cannot perform this proper function apart from the guidance of the human heart. Indeed, I will argue that it is only by cultivating habits of love, properly understood, that we can discover the truth about ourselves and make fully rational judgments about the most pressing questions for any age: Who are we? How should we treat one another? And just what is our proper place in a diverse world composed not only of diverse peoples and nonhuman forms of life, but also of human communities and natural landscapes? These are questions that cannot be answered by a dispassionate intellect, but only by “passionate reason.”

This conception of “passionate reason” challenges three predominant modern or postmodern perspectives on the fundamental purposes of reason:

1. the modern technological, consumerist perspective, which assumes that reason’s fundamental purpose is to master the cosmos by scientific manipulation of the forces and raw materials of nature;
2. the Enlightenment-based, dispassionate perspective, which assumes that reason’s fundamental purpose is to gain objective knowledge of a material world of valueless, neutral facts;

3. the radical, secular postmodern perspective, which assumes that reason's fundamental purpose is to create reality, and thereby to exercise our interpretive freedom through the free play of our own artifices.

In contrast to these three mainstream conceptions of rationality, I shall defend an account of the rational self in which the final end of human reason is not to “see” reality dispassionately, or to master a reality of valueless entities, supplying us with endless commodities, or even to liberate us by unmasking metaphysical idols and constructing our own realities. Instead, the real purpose of reason is to allow us to be in communion with, to esteem and lovingly embrace, the truly Real; it is, as Wirzba puts it, to attain “a wedding between the human mind and ‘this goodly universe.’”⁸ In the same vein, following Augustine and Pascal, I contend that our proper *telos* as rational creatures is to cultivate rational love and passionate acknowledgment of God as our highest good and of our fellow humans as dependent icons of divine, infinite goodness.

At this point a sober reader might well inquire whether such a vision of passionate reason can have any validity in a post-Christian, secularized world. What, one might well ask, would it mean for us to conceive of the work of reason as leading us to wholeness, and the purpose of philosophy as enabling us to find our proper place in the world? Can it still make sense today to conceive of human life and indeed the philosophical quest as driven by a humble yearning, even an erotic desire, to partake in a magnificent banquet of nature and spirit in which the human self finds its true fulfillment?

A careful reading not only of the Christian philosophers Augustine and Pascal, but also of the robustly anti-Christian modern skeptic David Hume, can help us to recover a vision of passionate rationality that is more than mere romantic fantasy. This vision of “passionate reason” rejects the misguided, Enlightenment-based myth of the rational person as an autonomous, critical individual who exercises a universal, dispassionate, and objective rationality. Equally unsustainable is the radical postmodern mythos of the self-creating, world-constituting, autonomous community of self-creators. By contrast, the conception of passionate reason acknowledges the complex and intricate interdependence of our beliefs, affections, historical experience, cultural forms of life, and the objective goodness of God and God's creation. One cannot function rationally in isolation from the “heart,” for it is only when the affections are properly oriented to the ends of human life that people can think rationally about themselves, find their proper place in the scheme of things, and acknowledge that the world is neither our creation nor our intellectual shopping mall. Central to this outlook is the conviction that our world is an aesthetic whole, an order of inherently good beings, an order we are meant to

8. Wirzba, “Challenge of Berry's Agrarian Vision,” vii.

honor and respect, rather than to master or lay claim to as our own creation. Nothing in this world, not even our own individual selves, is ever simply our own. Ironically—so at least I shall argue—acknowledging our place in God’s creation and reason’s dependence on the heart is profoundly, and even eternally, liberating. Our embeddedness should not offend us but serve as cause for ecstatic celebration.

My argument develops as an examination of Augustine’s philosophy of faith seeking understanding and the modest skepticism of two modern philosophers who were among the earliest, most original skeptics of the modern, intellectual faith in “progress through scientific objectivity” and “enlightenment through disinterested, autonomous reason.” These two modern philosophers, Blaise Pascal and David Hume, should be understood as modern counterparts of Socrates, warning their rationalist contemporaries of the dangers of a distinctively modern philosophical hubris, the pride of an imperial and autonomous new rationality, offering instead a skeptical critique of the modern faith in purely rational foundations.

Yet Pascal and Hume do not extol the “higher” wisdom of irrational feelings over against the practice of coherent rational thinking, nor do they propound a kind of “safe” radicalism that in fact has little potency for calling into question the power structures of their worlds. On the contrary, Hume and Pascal risked significant censure as they sought to emphasize both the necessity of substantial rational inquiry and the severe limits of human reason in the face of serious social and religious controversy. In the following chapters, I hope, despite my own commitments and potential biases as a Christian philosopher, to demonstrate the originality and courage of both of these modern skeptics, one deeply Christian and the other vehemently anti-Christian, in their “Socratic,” rather than comfortably “ironic,” skepticism. In essence, I shall argue that what is needed today, at the end of modernity, is not the postmodern exaltation of autonomy and difference but a return to a healthy and balanced Christian skepticism about rational autonomy, which has the power to invigorate and transform lives.

In sum, I intend to defend the integrity and rationality of Christian faith in the context of the skepticism and uncertainty of the so-called postmodern world through Pascal and Hume, who in ultimately quite different ways stand in opposition to the mainstream of modern philosophy and yet offer substantial alternatives to radical postmodernism. For both Pascal and Hume, human nature compels us to believe in realities, the existence of which we cannot verify, a philosophical outlook that accords with the nonrational dimension of our human character. They insist on rendering philosophy human and on humbling our philosophical ambitions in accordance with the narrow limits of human reasoning. Yet despite their kinship in recognizing the limits of reason and in condemning dogmatic philosophers’ proud lack of self-knowledge, Pascal and Hume come to radically different conclusions on the value of Christian

faith. On this critical point of disagreement, Pascal's understanding of the role of reason and love in the life of Christian faith exposes the deficiencies of Hume's skeptical attack on Christian beliefs and practices.

Pascal's account of reason and faith is essentially Augustinian; two principles of Augustine's thought in particular illuminate what is ultimately at issue between Pascal and Hume. The first, "*credo ut intellegam*," sets forth a certain kind of priority of trust and love over understanding, and the second, "*fides quaerens intellectum*," proclaims a mutual dependence and harmony between reason and the heart. These two Augustinian principles play a fundamental role in Pascal's own philosophy. The scholarly characterization of Pascal as an irrationalist fails to perceive the complexity of his Augustinian conception of faith and rationality. Pascal's protests against reliance on reason alone are no more the utterances of an irrationalist than are Augustine's critical words against the dangers of Neoplatonism. Neither Pascal nor Augustine recommends divorcing the life of faith from the life of rational inquiry and reflection. Rather, both philosophers condemn as a distortion that philosophical conception of human reason in which reason has autonomous authority for judging *on its own* any and all claims regarding the human good. In contrast, Hume's attack on Christian faith reveals his failure to comprehend an Augustinian stance on the interrelationship of love, faith, and reason. Although rightly rejecting the autonomy of reason, Hume's understanding of the nature and rationality of the Christian faith fails seriously to consider how reason, faith, and love are interrelated.

Indeed, Hume's infamous attacks on the Christian faith reveal a woeful ignorance about the power of love both in the life of faith and in the process of transforming us into creatures able to make sense of the rationality of Christian faith. Ultimately, Hume's anti-theistic skepticism begs the question: his most forceful criticisms of the Christian life are compelling only if one already presupposes a naturalistic, nontheistic framework.

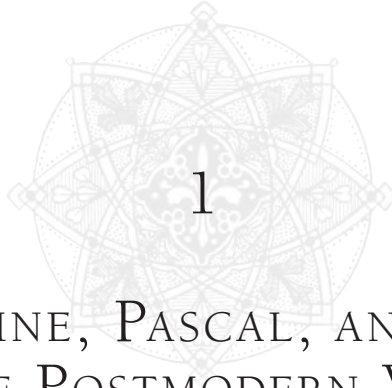
One of the instructive lessons that emerges from a comparative study of Augustine, Pascal, and Hume is that our conception of rationality cannot be separated from our metaphysics—that is, from our understanding of the nature of the world and the human self. In his neoclassical ethics of virtue, Hume develops a perceptive and intricate account of the role of the passions in moral judgment. Yet Hume never considers it plausible to believe that the moral judgments we form on the basis of our passions reveal to us objective features of a morally ordered universe. That Hume finds such a move implausible results primarily from how Hume interprets the meaning of human experience naturalistically. In other words, having presupposed a naturalistic framework in which it makes no sense to regard human judgments concerning good and evil or virtue and vice as having any real ethical correspondence to the objective order of nature, Hume naturally resists regarding our moral sentiments as reliable sources of information about the objective world order

outside the psychological constitution of humans. Hume takes the objective world as a realm of valueless facts about which we can have no rational certainty as one of his starting points. In contrast to Hume, from an Augustinian perspective, the objective world order cannot be a realm merely of valueless facts, because there simply are no such things as mere, valueless facts. Whatever exists, on an Augustinian view, exists as something possessing a unifying form that distinguishes it as an embodiment of inherent goodness and as an icon of the divine reality. In an important sense, then, for the Augustinian “valueless facts” are simply not real. This fundamental difference in metaphysical outlook deeply affects how Augustine and Hume conceive of the virtues and come to judge the merits of Christian faith. When Hume concludes that a rational person cannot embrace the Christian faith, he presupposes a prior, nontheistic conception of the world in which this rational person must navigate. When Augustine concludes that assenting to Christ by faith is eminently rational, he presupposes an entirely un-Humean set of metaphysical beliefs about the self and world.

Of course, the claim that Augustine and Hume disagree in their metaphysics hardly makes for surprising news. Yet it is vitally important to grasp that one’s conception of the nature of the world impacts one’s view of the proper function of human reason. If we agree with Hume’s naturalistic outlook, we may well have no other reasonable choice but to conclude that religious faith, at least the traditional Christian faith, is indeed irrational. That Hume would be right about the irrationality of faith if the world is, in fact, an arena of valueless facts becomes clear, ironically, when we take seriously the Augustinian understanding of the connection between rationality and human nature. For Augustine, as well as Pascal, the rationality of faith is inextricably bound up with a conception of human nature as unhealthy and incomplete apart from divine grace. Insofar as a major purpose of being *rational* for people is to help us find out and become properly aligned to the truth about ourselves, it is rational, according to Augustine and Pascal, to believe in Christ because only through faith in Christ can reason perform its proper function. But, of course, if Hume is right divine grace is a human fabrication, and the road to genuine human health lies not in humbly submitting to God’s love but in reconciling ourselves to our naturalistic destiny. Hume, like Augustine and Pascal, finally upholds a basically functionalist conception of rationality: to be rational about one’s beliefs is basically to form and moderate one’s beliefs in accordance with the proper function of reason. On Hume’s account, the purpose of our rationality is to find peace and tranquility as the complex passionate reasoners that we are, living in a world of facts indifferent to our human sentiments. Hume thinks he can show that faith in the supernatural, in fact, offers little real benefit in enabling the wise person to be reconciled to this human condition. And yet, what Hume seems never to have realized is the difficulty he gets himself into when he does not critically examine the

interrelationship of his conception of rationality and his naturalistic worldview. His conception of rationality presupposes—and thus cannot be used as a prior premise to defend—his metaphysical naturalism. Perhaps under the influence of the Enlightenment thinkers from whom Hume strove to distance himself, he is finally unable to recognize that there is no single, neutral standard of rationality by which we can adjudicate substantial philosophical disagreements independently of metaphysical context. Unlike Pascal and Augustine, Hume seems unaware of the role faith plays, even if it is a faith in naturalism, in a person's very conception of what it means to be rational.

I have written this book out of the conviction that the basic Augustinian and Pascalian position on faith and understanding is well suited for a post-modern age disillusioned with the idols of hard facts, passionless reason, absolute foundations, and the amoral rhetoric of consumerism and materialism. Augustine's and Pascal's conception of a situated and dialectical reason, of a reason dependent on the heart, of a reason nurtured and transformed by God's love, provides a viable middle ground between the Enlightenment idolatry of reason and the radical postmodernist's idolatry of autonomy and its call for the end of traditional philosophy and theology as unwarranted and oppressive metanarratives. Both Hume and Pascal tried in their own ways to caution us against the pretensions of philosophers who insist that we live by reason alone. I shall attempt in what follows to place these two dialectical opponents against each other. In the end, whether we opt for Hume's or Pascal's position on the merits of Christian faith depends on a question at the core of our human nature: "What are people for?" As an Augustinian, my own response to this question cannot help but reflect my own conviction that we are characterized at the core of our being by a desire and a yearning for God's perfect and inexhaustible *agape* love, and that we are made for the purpose of abiding in this love for all eternity. While reasonable people may well dispute my conclusions, I deeply believe that individuals committed to, opposed to, or even curious about the meaning of human life have much to learn from a careful study of Augustine, Pascal, and Hume.



1

AUGUSTINE, PASCAL, AND HUME FOR THE POSTMODERN WORLD?

I would be quite happy to continue and to show here the whole chain of other truths that I had deduced from these first ones. . . . I have always remained firm in my resolve not to suppose any principle but the one I have just used to demonstrate the existence of God and the soul, and to take nothing to be true that does not seem to me clearer and more certain than have the demonstrations of the geometers been previously. And still I dare say not only that I have found the means of satisfying myself in a short time regarding all the main difficulties commonly treated in philosophy, but also I have noted certain laws that God has so established in nature and has impressed in our souls such notions of these laws that, after having reflected sufficiently, we cannot deny that they are strictly adhered to in everything that exists or occurs in the world.

René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, part 5¹

Objectivity, in practice, means that one studies or teaches one's subject *as such*, without concern for its relation to other subjects or to the world—that is, without concern for its truth. If one is concerned, if one cares, about the truth or falsity of anything, one cannot be objective: one is glad if it is true and sorry if it is false; one believes it if it is judged to be true and disbelieves it if it is judged to be false. Moreover, the truth and falsity of some things cannot be objectively demonstrated, but must be determined by feeling and appearance, intuition and experience. And

1. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 23.

this work of judgment cannot take place at all with respect to one thing or one subject alone. The issue of truth rises out of the comparison of one thing with another, out of the study of the relations and influences between one thing and another and between something and many others.

Wendell Berry, *Home Economics*²

In this chapter I will set forth my case that the three philosophers I have chosen for my inquiry are especially relevant for the postmodern era, for a time when a diverse array of thinkers in many different disciplines have called into question major presuppositions and fundamental convictions of modern philosophy. Given the great resurgence of interest among philosophers and theologians today concerning how we should now assess the rationality of religious faith in the wake of the demise of modernity's doctrine of autonomous reason, and, indeed, whether it even makes sense to talk of objective truth, it is especially worthwhile to examine closely the Humean, Pascalian, and Augustinian views on the complex relationship of rationality, theistic belief, and human nature. These philosophers not only acknowledge that people cannot live by "hard" evidence alone, and that certain of our fundamental beliefs are neither self-evident nor incorrigible, but they also develop in a somewhat similar fashion a justification for these fundamental beliefs in terms of the indispensable role they play in human life. Yet Hume, unlike Pascal and Augustine, is determined to expose the lack of evidential grounding for theistic beliefs as a major defect and, indeed, as an insuperable impediment to faith.

For Augustine, Pascal, and Hume, the fundamental question about faith is not simply whether such belief is based on reason—that is, a belief supported by empirical or logical premises—but whether it is wise, given our lack of unambiguous evidence, to assent to the existence of, and indeed commit our lives to, a transcendent God.³ By directing our attention away from the simple matter of the presence or absence of objective evidence to the question of how

2. Wendell Berry, *Home Economics* (New York: North Point, 1987), 91–92.

3. I do not mean to suggest that for Hume the lack of rational evidence for theistic belief is unimportant. On the contrary, Hume expends much energy in showing his Enlightenment contemporaries that their commitment to rational belief conflicts with their Christian faith. But Hume's own attitude to rational belief is more subtle than that of his Lockean contemporaries, for Hume recognizes that as humans we cannot live by evidence alone. Once Hume undermines the evidentialist case for religious belief, he then must show why we should not embrace faith with the self-knowledge that such faith is not supported by rational evidence. Although Hume permits himself to utter such Enlightenment platitudes as, "The wise man proportions his beliefs to the evidence" (see his essay "Of Miracles," in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975], 110), he knows full well that the wise man cannot and should not always attempt to limit his beliefs in this way. My contention is that Hume relies primarily on his psychological diagnosis of religious belief to back up his stance that such belief is unwise. We could say that for Hume, as well as for Pascal, the truly appropriate statement would be, "The wise person proportions his or her beliefs to human nature."

people can believe wisely, Augustine, Hume, and Pascal recognize that the justification of a person's religious commitment ultimately hinges on an account of human nature. For Augustine and Pascal, Christian faith is rationally justified insofar as it makes sense of the human condition and enables us to align ourselves with our true nature. In sharp contrast, for Hume, Christian faith and theism in general ultimately are rationally unjustified because they violate our human nature and impair our efforts to align ourselves with our true nature.

Skeptics of Modernity: Embedded Rationality versus Rational Autonomy

The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.

G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*⁴

One particularly significant insight shared by Hume, Pascal, and Augustine centers on the importance of the passions in guiding the dictates of reason. These three philosophers insist that reason must not be permitted complete autonomy from the life of the passions. While their specific accounts of the proper role of the passions in human ethical and religious judgments differ markedly, they agree that reason alone, operating in isolation from our passions, is insufficient for the tasks of determining how we ought to live and of guiding us to live properly in accordance with our human limitations. To appreciate something of their basic stance on the necessity of the passions, it may be instructive to compare the characteristically modern form of philosophical rhetoric, the propositional assertion [P], with a different form of persuasion, the metaphoric mode of expression [M], characteristic of the craft of the literary or dramatic poet. Consider, for example, the following two statements:

[M] "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child" (*King Lear* 1.4.295–96).

[P] The daughter's cold ingratitude evoked in her father a piercing sense of betrayal and regret.

Unless we already had been disciplined in the wisdom of twentieth-century Anglo-American positivistic philosophy of language, or some other modern account of meaning that divorces fact from value, we would not presume that the statements [M] and [P] are identical in their cognitive meaning; most of

4. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1959), 19.

us, at least in our preenlightened condition of everyday life, would intuitively recognize a crucial difference between the poetical [M] and the “merely descriptive” [P] forms of utterance, a difference that would not be reducible to some noncognitive, “aesthetic” embellishment inherent only in the poetical. For while both assertions more or less describe the same painful human experience, their forms of expression differ so poignantly that few but the most artless of readers would dare presume that the meaning of [M] may be reduced without loss of significance or cognitive content to that of [P].

And yet what is it about the poetic utterance of King Lear that moves us deeply and strikes us as so vivid and instructive? Is it not that the uniqueness of the poetic is a function of its brilliant use of metaphor? But then, we might well ask, “What makes the metaphor in this case so powerful?” Is not the special power of metaphor here that Lear’s utterance moves us not only *to think* but also *to feel* something of the sharpness and bitterness of a child’s ingratitude? We recoil from the idea of the thankless child through our grasp of Shakespeare’s metaphor: our impression of the serpent’s tooth evokes in us a sense of revulsion; we feel a loathing of the bite of serpentine fangs that, in its juxtaposition with the weight of human ingratitude, clarifies for us what it means to dishonor our parents. And, clearly, we fail to “grasp” the metaphor adequately if we do not feel its power, as it is meant to evoke in us a bitter, stinging sense of disapproval. In moving us both to think and to feel this distaste, Shakespeare shows us what it means for a parent to be treated with ingratitude and what it means for all of us who are children to neglect our parents: in pursuit of our own selfish ambitions, all of us, like Lear’s daughters, have failed to love and honor those who have sacrificed years for our benefit. Through metaphor, the poetic utterance has the power to evoke in us a *feeling recognition* of the wrongfulness of betraying one’s parents. Such a feeling recognition fuses heart and intellect in such a way that to divorce the component of cognitive judgment from our affections would be to distort the essential character of that very recognition.

By use of metaphor, in other words, Shakespeare transforms us from being indifferent, neutral spectators in the audience to being sympathetic participants in Lear’s distress. On the one hand, a neutral spectator *could* view Lear’s suffering merely as a fact. On the other hand, a feeling participant who understands Lear’s pain knows that betrayal is more than a neutral fact; betrayal is *essentially* an ethical phenomenon—it is cruel, ugly, and repugnant. As witnesses of Lear’s fall into madness, if we fail to feel revulsion at the cruelty of Lear’s two older daughters, we simply fail to function properly as embedded cognitive persons. To grasp the essence of filial ingratitude we must go beyond a mere spectator’s knowledge of the necessary and sufficient conditions of filial ingratitude as a “moral phenomenon”; in other words, an adequate understanding of filial ingratitude requires more from the viewer than simply a neutral type of *knowing that*. More importantly, *knowing the*

nature of filial ingratitude requires *acknowledging* and even sympathetically feeling its repugnant and dehumanizing character. And yet such acknowledgment is unattainable to one lacking in a proper response of the will and the affections, for acknowledging the reality of ingratitude requires that one not be indifferent or neutral toward either its perpetrator or its victim. Put more precisely, acknowledging the ethical status of ingratitude necessitates in the beholder a form of personal participation: the sympathetic knower must enter into the suffering of Lear and must empathize with his pain in order to acknowledge its real character as a moral offense. In this act of personal knowing—"I acknowledge the dignity of the sufferer and recoil from the offense of ingratitude"—the viewer cannot reason properly and thus believe truly without engaging in a complex activity of ethical acknowledgment in which thinking, willing, and feeling are inextricably intertwined. Knowledge as participation thus binds together thinking and being: only by becoming a sympathetic participant in suffering can the viewer acknowledge Lear's plight and thus think truthfully about its meaning. This remarkable form of passionate knowledge, rooted in a unique kind of participation and enacted through acknowledgment, unites "being in the truth" with "thinking about the truth," fusing being and thinking in a complex form of *knowing as acknowledging*. In this act of acknowledging moral reality, rational cognition cannot be merely abstract or indifferent, for it is embedded within a way of being that esteems and evaluates, rather than a way that merely observes.

Now the power of the poet's art to evoke in us this form of feeling knowledge, a knowledge available to us only by participation in an emotional response and unavailable to the detached or "purely objective" intellectual, has particular relevance for our study of Hume, Pascal, and Augustine, all of whom agree that ethical first principles cannot be discovered through disinterested "pure reason." Moreover, they all contend that our ethical judgments ultimately arise from uncertain, fallible intuitions that are essentially bound up with our passions of approval and disapproval—put more precisely, in the case of Augustine, with the order and nature of our loves. They all seek in their own distinctive ways to persuade us of the role of "passion" or the "heart" in forming the fabric of our moral world. As philosophers, Hume, Pascal, and Augustine may well succeed in defending the place of the passions in our ethical lives and in clarifying for us the nature of our ethical concerns. But the poet or novelist has the special power to move us to a feeling recognition and proper estimation of ethical reality. The art of the poet thus shows rather than tells, presents rather than merely describes or defends, our ethical landscape. What the philosopher describes, and then attempts to defend by argument, the poet can show with the immediacy of concrete experience. The relative advantage of poetical language is that it more forcefully and directly engages our passions and thereby brings us to feel such complex sentiments as ingratitude; by awakening our ethical sentiments, the poet enables us to

understand the ethical dimensions of our lives. One of the poet's advantages over the reflective philosopher turns on the fact that fundamental insights about the human condition are available to us only as we are moved either to approve or to disapprove of actions and events that cause joy or sorrow to people. The philosopher, in turn, has the relative advantage of serving as the reflective critic who creates an interpretive space within which we are able to check the potential prejudices and shortcomings of our sentiments. The philosopher enjoys the special power and freedom of self-conscious reflection; from this vantage point the philosopher may articulate, clarify, and subject to critical analysis the complex matrix of individual beliefs and sentiments, as well as the social forms and practices that constitute our embedded moral lives. In their own distinctive ways, Hume, Pascal, and Augustine, as inheritors of the Socratic tradition of the philosophical quest for self-understanding, acknowledge the dependence of rational reflection on the affections and yet defend in no uncertain terms the supreme importance of rational reflection and criticism.

Clearly then, for Hume, Pascal, and Augustine ethical insights require more than a mere intellectual and disinterested apprehension of facts. Indeed, for these philosophers the very ability to perceive ethical or religious "facts" depends on the proper ordering of our passions. Hume, for example, insists that our ethical judgments about human character and action can arise only through the proper engagement of our sentiments. In a similar way, for Pascal ethical knowledge is fundamentally a matter of knowledge of the heart. And for Augustine the interconnected knowledge of self and God depends on the purifying effect of the virtue of charity. Each offers an analysis of reason and sentiment that makes sense of the special power of poetic metaphor and literary narrative *to reveal* what is true. While the literary artist, through image and metaphor, can move our hearts and thus bring us to a feeling of recognition of the forms and contours of our ethical world, the particular province of the philosopher is to reflect on and assess our ethical beliefs and practices; indeed, such philosophical reflection without the enrichment of lived, existential intuitions will not only be empty but may also misdirect and blind us as to who we really are.

Personal Knowing in Dickens's Hard Times

Modernity certainly has its literary artists who oppose, as do Pascal and Hume, modern philosophy's excessive reliance on reason apart from feeling and passion. Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* is a good example of a work of literature that shows narratively rather than tells philosophically of the folly of living by "reason" alone. As a preface to our inquiry into the thought of Hume and Pascal, it may be instructive to consider Dickens's narrative argument in its relation to the modern philosophical quest for rational progress.

Riding in the wake of modern reformers such as Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Jeremy Bentham, Dickens's character, Sir Thomas Gradgrind, opens *Hard Times* by proclaiming his revolutionary vision of a brave new world of rational "Facts": "Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to the Facts, sir!"⁵

Gradgrind, a "man of facts and calculations," seeks to found a new social world liberated from the forces of fancy and ignorance and peopled by rational citizens, who, rooted in the soil of genuine Facts, could enjoy the fruits of real happiness. For modern progressives such as Gradgrind, rational social progress awaits the dawning of a new era enlightened by a renewed reason. And he is confident that in this age of progress the march of knowledge will not falter, for its feet will be planted firmly on a pathway of hard Facts. Yet as we discover through Dickens's narrative of self-deception and false enlightenment, Gradgrind comes, through the suffering of his beloved, eldest daughter, to see that people cannot live by Facts alone, for the so-called Facts that Gradgrind espouses allow no room for the needs of the human heart, for sentiments beyond primitive self-interest, and, in particular, for those most essentially human of sentiments, trust and love. Gradgrind begins to understand this defect in his vision when finally confronted by the suffering and desperation of his unhappy daughter Louisa:

"Father, you have trained me from my cradle?"

"Yes, Louisa."

"I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny."

He looked at her in doubt and dread, vacantly repeating: "Curse the hour? Curse the hour?"

"How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here?"

She struck herself with both her hands upon her bosom.

"If it had ever been here, its ashes alone would save me from the void in which my whole life sinks. I did not mean to say this; but, father, you remember the last time we conversed in this room?"

He had been so wholly unprepared for what he heard now, that it was with difficulty he answered, "Yes, Louisa."

"What has risen to my lips now, would have risen to my lips then, if you had given me a moment's help. I don't reproach you, father. What you have never

5. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, ed. George Ford and Sylvere Monod, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1996), 7.

nurtured in me, you have never nurtured in yourself; but O! If you had only done so long ago, or if you had only neglected me, what a much better and much happier creature I should have been this day!”

On hearing this, after all his care, he bowed his head upon his hand and groaned aloud.

“Father, if you had known, when we were last together here, what even I feared while I strove against it—as it has been my task from infancy to strive against every natural prompting that has arisen in my heart; if you had known that there lingered in my breast sensibilities, affections, weaknesses capable of being cherished into strength, defying all the calculations ever made by man, and no more known to his arithmetic than his Creator is—would you have given me to the husband whom I am now sure that I hate?”

He said, “No. No, my poor child.”

“Would you have doomed me, at any time, to the frost and blight that have hardened and spoiled me? Would you have robbed me—for no one’s enrichment—only for the greater desolation of this world—of the immaterial part of my life, the spring and summer of my belief, my refuge from what is sordid and bad in the real things around me, my school in which I should have learned to be more humble and more trusting with them, and to hope in my little sphere to make them better?”⁶

As he painfully comes to realize, the Facts of Gradgrind’s world constitute a barren landscape, for they include no more than the material features of a self-seeking, industrial world, the statistics of material efficiency, and the principles of “material progress.” Thus the story of *Hard Times* is for Gradgrind a painful journey from a proud, if also self-deceived, philosophy of “progress” that stifles the human heart and damages human lives, to a truer and more humble enlightenment. The turning point in his own self-understanding comes in a moment of painful uncertainty: “‘Some persons hold,’ he pursued, still hesitating, ‘that there is a wisdom of the Head, and that there is a wisdom of the Heart. I have not supposed so; but, as I have said, I mistrust myself now. I have supposed the head to be all-sufficient. It may not be all-sufficient; how can I venture this morning to say it is! If that other kind of wisdom should be what I have neglected, and should be the instinct that is wanted, Louisa.’”⁷

Gradgrind comes to appreciate that there is more to the Truth than just the Facts. But, ironically, for Gradgrind such an insight about the wisdom of the heart can be attained only through a prior act of relying on the heart in which he trusts that his daughter truthfully reports the nature and cause of her own suffering. Only because he first acknowledges that he deeply cares for Louisa, and thus will trust her own account of her predicament, does it become possible for Gradgrind to see his daughter’s plight as evidence of the inadequacy of his own rational system. Let us not overlook how a more

6. Dickens, *Hard Times*, 161.

7. Dickens, *Hard Times*, 166.

stubborn disciple of Gradgrind's rational philosophy could persist indefinitely in accepting Louisa's crisis as real in a sense, and yet interpret her testimony in a way compatible with the basic commitments of his philosophy of facts. In other words, contrary to Kant's Enlightenment optimism that mere rational consistency precludes disregard for human dignity, a hardened Gradgrindian utilitarian has the rational option of reinterpreting all supposed counterevidence to his outlook as a manifestation of self-delusion or some other form of self-alienation.

Gradgrind falters and doubts his own philosophical system only because of his fundamental choice to place his trust and love for his daughter above his faith in his own rational system. Without this act of commitment, which is rooted in the affection of his heart, he would not feel compelled to take seriously the principles of the wisdom of the heart espoused by his daughter. Most significantly, then, Gradgrind's awakening to the wisdom of the heart occurs only because he first *believes in* the veracity of his daughter—"credo ut intellegam." His intellectual reflection, in which he humbles himself and strives to reassure his daughter that he trusts her sense of the wisdom of the heart, depends on his prior act of trusting his own daughter.⁸

Bacon and Descartes: Seeds for the Enlightenment

Gradgrind's vision, though unique in its details, and specifically intended by Dickens as a satire of Bentham's utilitarianism, actually bears the unmistakable form and blueprint of an ingenious early modern philosophical vision of a new *scientia*. It is a revolutionary vision heralded in Bacon's *Novum Organum* and Descartes's *Meditations, Discourse on Method*, and the unfinished *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. To appreciate the prophetic nature of Dickens's story, it may be useful to review some of the basic features of this modern intellectual revolution that sowed the seeds for the Enlightenment.

In his *Novum Organum* of 1620, Bacon embarked on the discovery of true knowledge with a word of warning: "They who have presumed to dogmatize on nature, as on some well investigated subject, either from self-conceit or arrogance, and in the professorial style, have inflicted the greatest injury on

8. From the point of view of our contemporary, postmodern skepticism of Enlightenment objectivity and the modern conception of rational autonomy, Dickens's critique of the Gradgrind philosophy has a prophetic tone. Since the 1850s, when Dickens wrote *Hard Times*, we have intellectually and culturally lived through the decline of the age of rational progress. Much debate remains on just what lies ahead. Today many intellectual critics, philosophers, and theologians are debating the implications of the demise of the Enlightenment for the most fundamental questions concerning the rationality of religious belief and the life and authority of the church. What these debates often lack is an understanding of the integrity and rationality of the Christian faith, as defended specifically by Augustine and Pascal, in the face of the challenges and perplexities of our postmodern world.

philosophy and learning.”⁹ Such a warning is necessary, Bacon presumes, for he believes that the modern mind of the early seventeenth century is still dominated by the imprecise and sterile method of Aristotelian logic, a “logic [that] rather assists in confirming and rendering inveterate the errors founded on vulgar notions than in searching after truth.”¹⁰ If there is to be genuine progress in the sciences, he argues, those seeking the truth must reject the speculative metaphysics of the past and pursue a new method of empirical reasoning. In contrast to the unproductive methodology of past thinkers, and of the Scholastics in particular, this new method of empiricism would both humble the pretensions of the human mind and render intelligible for the first time the book of nature. And insofar as he thinks that “knowledge and human power are synonymous,”¹¹ and that the new science will afford much knowledge, Bacon, as does Gradgrind, confidently looks ahead to our technological mastery of the forces of nature:

We must next, however, proceed to the supports and corrections of induction, and thence to concretes, the latent process, and latent conformations, and the other matters, which we have enumerated in the twenty-first aphorism, in order that, like good and faithful guardians, we may yield up their fortune to mankind upon the emancipation and majority of their understanding; from which must necessarily follow an improvement of their estate, and an increase of their power over nature. For man, by the fall, lost at once his state of innocence, and his empire over creation, both of which can be partially recovered even in this life, the first by religion and faith, the second by the arts and sciences. For creation did not become entirely and utterly rebellious by the curse, but in consequence of the Divine decree, “in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread,” she is compelled by our labors (not assuredly by our disputes or magical ceremonies), at length, to afford mankind in some degree his bread, that is to say, to supply man’s daily wants.¹²

So in 1620 Bacon foresees a bright future. Seizing in particular on the promise of scientific renewal on the horizon, Bacon implores his reader to part company with the old ways of Aristotelian Scholasticism, with its emphasis on formal causes and teleological explanations, and to embrace a new intellectual covenant. He assures us that we can now look forward to unlocking Nature’s secrets and regaining rightful mastery over Nature’s subjects if only we take care to follow assiduously the steps of the new inductive method.

Just a few years later in 1628, Descartes laid the groundwork for one of the most distinctive and influential features of Cartesian philosophy—a

9. Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, ed. Joseph Devey (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1902).

10. *Ibid.*, 13.

11. *Ibid.*, 11.

12. *Ibid.*, 290.

purportedly new methodology for attaining a purely objective system of knowledge built on an indubitable foundation of unassailable “intuitions.” Heralding this new system of rational discovery, Descartes writes in the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*: “The whole method consists entirely in the ordering and arranging of the objects on which we must concentrate our mind’s eye if we are to discover some truth. We shall be following this method exactly if we first reduce complicated and obscure propositions step by step to simpler ones, then starting with the intuition of the simplest ones of all, try to ascend through the same steps to a knowledge of all the rest.”¹³

Like Bacon, Descartes formulates his system of clear and distinct ideas as an alternative to the well-meaning but inconclusive inquiries of past philosophers. For Descartes, true *scientia* must necessarily be completely beyond doubt. Given the rather heroic grandeur of such a level of human understanding, it is not surprising that Descartes insists that achieving such knowledge demands the most rigorous of strategies. Both in the *Discourse on Method*, published in 1637, and in the *Meditations*, published in 1644, he is relentless in his ambition to achieve certain knowledge through a strict method of establishing clear and distinct foundations. Even in his earliest philosophical work, the *Rules*, Descartes is confident that his ambitious desire for such firm knowledge is not in vain. So Descartes reassures his reader that:

All knowledge [*scientia*] is certain and evident cognition. Someone who has doubts about many things is no wiser than one who has never given them a thought; indeed, he appears less wise if he has formed a false opinion about any of them. Hence it is better never to study at all than to occupy ourselves with objects which are so difficult that we are unable to distinguish what is true from what is false, and are forced to take the doubtful as certain; for in such matters the risk of diminishing our knowledge is greater than our hope of increasing it. So, in accordance with this Rule, we reject all such merely probable cognition and resolve to believe only what is perfectly known and incapable of being doubted. Men of learning are perhaps convinced that there is very little indubitable knowledge, since, owing to a common human failing, they have disdained to reflect upon such indubitable truths, taking them to be too easy and obvious to everyone. But there are, I insist, a lot more of these truths than such people think—truths which suffice for the sure demonstration of countless propositions which so far they have managed to treat as no more than probable. Because they have thought it unbecoming for a man of learning to admit to being ignorant on any matter, they have got so used to elaborating their contrived doctrines that they have gradually come to believe them and pass them off as true.¹⁴

13. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, eds. and trans., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 20.

14. *Ibid.*, 10–11.

To a significant extent, the scientist Bacon, the philosopher Descartes, and the social reformer Gradgrind all share an intellectual vision and possess the same remarkable confidence in its realization. It is this basic vision of rational autonomy that will become the chief cornerstone of the dominant traditions of modern Western philosophy.

Fundamental to this modern vision are three significant convictions, the first concerning what went wrong with the philosophies of the past and the second and third concerning how best to remedy philosophy's dismal past. With respect to the diagnosis of the past, the adherents of this outlook take a dim view of premodern philosophical systems. Indeed, they are firmly convinced that even the best minds of the past were led astray by their uncritical reliance on untested theories, mere custom, untutored common sense, and the fancies of the human heart. Here one encounters that distinctively modern philosophical diagnosis of the philosophical projects of the past as plagued by a common disorder: such efforts have been retarded by their lack of objectivity. Rather than discipline themselves according to the canons of objectivity, even the greatest minds of the past have relied on unreflective opinion and uncertain sentiment. Modern advocates of objective reason, like Bacon and Descartes, propose an essentially twofold remedy for philosophy's benighted past. This remedy embodies two of the fundamental articles of modernity's faith in pure reason. What is needed to correct the inherent bias of past philosophies and pave the way for genuine rational progress, Descartes and his Enlightenment heirs contend, is a radically new mental posture in which one strictly governs one's beliefs and assents only to those conclusions certified by a rational, and thus unbiased, apprehension of foundational certitudes. Only with such a union of, first, an enlightened new rational methodology and, second, a purified and unbiased set of rational foundations will it be possible to remedy the errors of the past. For Bacon the recovery of a truly rational methodology depends on the proper collating of pure observations of true science; for Descartes the recovery requires a rigorous methodology of accessing incorrigible rational intuitions that are discoverable only through a subjective turning within one's private consciousness. In a similar fashion, for Gradgrind the road to progress is paved with the foundations of measurable, utilitarian Facts. Though differing to some degree with respect to the proper methodology and content of this progressive, new rationality, all three modern philosophical programs share a common vision of a nonsectarian, universal rationality whose essential character is its autonomy. For Bacon, Descartes, Gradgrind, and the advocates of modern objective rationality who followed in their wake, the power and promise of human rationality lies in its fundamental disembeddedness from the entire fabric of human social and historical contingency.

Descartes and Gradgrind presume that human reason will function properly only when it is divorced from the sentiments and passions of the human

heart. Their motives are properly noble: that we might attain an enlightenment sufficient to nurture our children and procure our general happiness. The Augustinian, on the contrary, argues that one must first believe in order to understand, and that understanding comes not through the intellect alone, but from a mind directed and counseled by the heart. In fact, a careful investigation of the arguments of Pascal and Hume supports such an Augustinian alternative.

All the same, we would do well not to be as dismissive of this modern quest for rational autonomy as the prophets of modern enlightenment were of their own past. Living in times of political and religious turmoil, it is not surprising that many modern philosophers were deeply attracted to this new “scientific” vision of objective progress in theory and practice. That such gifted men as Locke, Bacon, and Descartes should have felt the lure of a “scientific” program of education, free of bias and devoted only to objective facts and pure foundations, is understandable and laudable; they presumed that this new conception of objective reason would provide a common ground on which rational beings could think and live, free from the destructive effects of sectarian intolerance and human presumption. In one form or another, those who shared this vision of rational enlightenment sought a rigorous method that, by setting aside the biases of historical situation, religious commitment, and subjective belief, could get straight to the Facts and thus rely on a purely objective set of criteria for the peaceful resolution of all disputes.

My quarrel with Descartes, Bacon, and the Enlightenment thinkers they anticipate is not directed against their honorable intentions. But despite such noble intentions, Descartes’s profound belief in the viability of an ambitious foundationalism bequeathed an unfortunate legacy in the form of modernity’s mistaken understanding of the authority of autonomous reason—reason that stands apart from tradition, culture, family, and individual affection. The modern philosophical perspective so brilliantly but misguidedly set forth by Descartes fails to recognize that as mere humans we have no choice but to live in the absence of any absolute, purely rational, clear, and distinct truths. As finite humans, we must acknowledge that the normative standards of human beliefs and practices are historically situated and that our fundamental moral intuitions are embedded within a context of shared affections, cultural forms, and religious inheritances.

Interestingly enough, for Augustine and Pascal finite humans can hope to attain a kind of certainty on ultimate matters, but this is a kind of spiritual or ethical certainty rooted in faith and nurtured by participation in a community of fellow believers. Put another way, both Augustine and Pascal contend that true wisdom and ultimate clarity about human life are attainable only through a historical community of faith. They further argue that true rational enlightenment is possible only through acknowledgment of our dependence

on a source of healing goodness outside ourselves that can be accessed only through the guidance and transformation of the affections.

Embedded Reason in Augustine, Pascal, and Plantinga

Despite their serious disagreements, Augustine, Pascal, and Hume all agree that any philosophical system extolling rational autonomy inevitably fails to comprehend the essentially dependent character—the radical embeddedness—of human rationality. Whether Descartes ever intended entirely to oppose his own Augustinian tradition, the historical impact of his methodology was the founding of a tradition, exemplified in the Enlightenment philosophies of such great modern thinkers as Locke and Kant, that declares that we may believe only after autonomous reason apart from faith and affection has granted us permission. Such a doctrine conceives of rational authority as independent from any form of faith; faith in its various and sundry human expressions must submit to the authority of autonomous reason. Rather than embrace the humility about human understanding basic to Socratic, Augustinian, Pascalian, and Humean perspectives, modernity declares in effect “*intellego ut credam*,” “I must first understand in order to believe.”¹⁵

Now, although Hume and Pascal hold fundamentally opposing views regarding the wisdom of believing in an unseen God, both uphold a conception of embedded human reason. The dominant trend of modern philosophy, brilliantly initiated by such well-intentioned thinkers as Bacon, Descartes, and Locke, sought certain foundations for human thinking; moving to Pascal and Hume, we find an outlook that insists on a Socratic form of human philosophy—one that neither boasts of possessing final, infallible knowledge nor recommends that, bereft of such final certainty, people should therefore cease to pursue the examined life and abandon the philosophical quest to understand the true nature of the world.

Unfortunately, in the history of modern philosophy the Cartesian and ultimately un-Socratic quest for certainty, rooted as it was in a faith in autonomous reason, dominated and overshadowed the more humble approach of such modern “Socratic thinkers” as Pascal and Hume. It is clear today,

15. As we shall see, the true Augustinian declares “*credo ut intellegam, et intellego ut credam*.” In other words, while reason cannot properly function apart from faith, faith in turn must be nurtured and refined by rational insight. On a related note, my critique of Descartes is not meant to deny that, in some respects, his philosophy is deeply indebted to and is shaped by important Augustinian insights. My quarrel with Descartes takes issue with his conception of the essential nature of reason as autonomous and his confidence in the powers of human reason to diagnose and solve fundamental philosophical problems independently of the historically constituted influences of character and culture. For an especially fine analysis of this fundamental contrast between Cartesian and Augustinian outlooks, see Ann Hartle, *Death and the Disinterested Spectator* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), esp. 191–213.