

WILLIAM CHILLINGWORTH AND THE ORIGINS OF ANGLO-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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Article abstract

In this paper I look at one of those thinkers who set the stage for, and influenced, Locke and Hume, William Chillingworth (1602-1644), and show how he understood faith, reason, and the relation between the two. Addressing the question of how the relation of faith and reason came to be an issue in the Anglo-American theological and philosophical traditions will provide some context for the later discussions by Locke and Hume on this relation, but will also show the distinctiveness of this earlier account of faith and reason – an account which may provide some insight and resources for discussing the general issue of the relation of faith and reason today.

WILLIAM CHILLINGWORTH AND THE ORIGINS OF ANGLO-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

WILLIAM SWEET

One of the central issues in the philosophy of religion in the Anglo-American traditions is the relation of faith and reason – particularly, whether religious faith can be established by, or is compatible with, what is called reason, or, whether it is not rationally warranted. This is an issue that can be traced back to the late 17th and 18th centuries in Anglo-American philosophy and particularly to authors such as John Locke and David Hume – authors who continue to be widely cited in the contemporary literature. Indeed, this issue may itself seem to be nothing new – that it reflects a concern found earlier in religious traditions, in authors such as John Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, Ibn Sina, Augustine, and others, and perhaps even further back to Aristotle and Plato.¹

Interestingly, however, Locke and, to an extent, Hume do not see themselves to be following in this longer tradition, and, rather, refer to earlier Protestant thinkers – thinkers who were not interested in a rational justification or critique of faith, or in apologetics, but who saw reason as a tool within theology and faith to be used to help settle religious concerns.

In this paper I look at one of those thinkers who set the stage for, and influenced, Locke and Hume, William Chillingworth (1602-1644)², and show

1. For example, for Plato, see: PLATO, *Laws*, esp. Book X 885c-900c. See also, for example, Robert MAYHEW, *Plato: Laws 10*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; Walter A. KAUFMANN, "Plato's Proof That Gods Exist," in *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, New York NY: Harper, 1958; William Lane CRAIG, "Plato," in *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1980, 1-19; and Lewis TRELAWNY-CASSITY, "Empirical and Dialogical Proofs of God's Existence in Laws 10," *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*, 452 (2010); <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/452>. For Aristotle, see ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, Book XII (Lambda), chs. 6-10. See also, for example, William Lane CRAIG, "Aristotle," in *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, pp. 20-37; Mor SEGEV, *Aristotle on Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

2. For Chillingworth's influence on Locke, see Elwood Ernest WORCESTER, *The Religious Opinions of John Locke*, Geneva NY: W. F. Humphrey, 1889, pp. 110-112, as well as Locke's remarks cited below (notes 53 and 81). See also Tim STUART-BUTTLE, *From Moral Theology to Moral Philosophy: Cicero and Visions of Humanity from Locke to Hume*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 157. For Hume, see, for example, *History of England, from the Invasion*

how he understood faith, reason, and the relation between the two. Addressing the question of how the relation of faith and reason came to be an issue in the Anglo-American theological and philosophical traditions will provide some context for the later discussions by Locke and Hume on this relation, but will also show the distinctiveness of this earlier account of faith and reason – an account which may provide some insight and resources for discussing the general issue of the relation of faith and reason today.

I. Context

The origins of debate in the Anglo-American world concerning the reasonability of religious belief are closely connected with the religious turmoil in 16th and early 17th century England. In 1531, King Henry VIII began to enact a series of measures that soon led to a formal separation of the Church in England from the Catholic Church, most notably through the Act of Supremacy in 1534.³ The actual separation was, however, a much more drawn-out matter, and arguably continued for more than 100 years, through the reigns of five monarchs, until the execution of Charles I in 1649.

The unsettled character and status of religion during this period led many thinkers to wrestle with the question of faith and its relation to reason, argument, and proof, though not in the way in which it had been discussed in earlier times, by figures such as Aquinas. In the 16th and early 17th centuries, the discussion of the relation of faith and reason was not so much one of ‘natural theology’ or apologetics – i.e., providing, or attempting to provide, proof of religious belief or faith – but a more centrally theological one – i.e., how could one be certain of the truth of a putative article of faith or of a religious belief? In the religiously pluralistic environment of the period, where the established Church – the Church of England – was confronted by the activities of Catholic priests as well of as a variety of Protestant confessions (e.g., Arminians (Remonstrants⁴), Calvinists, and Presbyterians), the questions arose: What might, or ought, one believe in order to be a Christian? How can one be certain on matters of faith? What exactly is faith, and is it related to an institution or church?

of *Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols, foreword by William B. Todd, Indianapolis IN: Liberty Fund, 1983, Vol. 6, p. 154.

3. I.e., *Public Act* (1534) [An Act concerning the King's Highness to be Supreme Head of the Church of England, and to have Authority to reform and redress all Errors, Heresies and Abuses in the same] 26 Henry VIII c.1: “the king of this realm shall be reputed to be *the only supreme head of the church of England*; that as such he shall enjoy all titles, jurisdiction, and honors to the said dignity appertaining.”

4. The Remonstrants were a group of Dutch Protestants (“Arminians”) who followed the views of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). While remaining within the Reformed tradition, Arminius rejected some central claims of the theology of John Calvin.

It is in this distinctive context, then, that figures such as William Chillingworth came to engage the issue of the relation of reason to faith.

II. Chillingworth⁵

Born in 1602, a year before the death of Elizabeth I, William Chillingworth graduated from Trinity College, Oxford, in 1620. He was influenced by the Remonstrants, but, despite the religious conformity expected of College members,⁶ became a Fellow of Trinity in 1628. Through much of his early life, Chillingworth was caught up in debates concerning whether a Christian had to be a Catholic. In 1630, he decided to become a Catholic, and went to Douai, in France, to study at the English College⁷ there. He returned to Oxford the following year⁸, however, and to Protestantism in 1634.⁹ In 1637, he published his most important work, *The Religion of Protestants, a Safe Way to Salvation*.¹⁰ Chillingworth did not argue so much for the error of Catholicism or the truth of Protestantism, as for the allowability of Protestantism. The following year, in 1638, Chillingworth subscribed to the Thirty-Nine Articles¹¹, becoming a member of the Church of England, and, in July of that year, was made Chancellor of Salisbury Cathedral. Because of the importance that

5. Basic biographical material is available in Mandell CREIGHTON, "Chillingworth, William," in Leslie STEPHEN (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. X, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1886, pp. 256-257 (henceforth CREIGHTON, "Chillingworth"). The classical biography of Chillingworth is Pierre DESMAIZEAUX, *Historical and Critical Account of the Life of William Chillingworth*, London, T. Woodward, 1725 (DesMaizeaux, who worked largely in "drudge-work" as a copy editor, was known to Pierre Bayle, Locke, and Hume). A more recent study of Chillingworth is Robert R. ORR, *Reason and Authority: The Thought of William Chillingworth*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967. See also Sarah MORTIMER, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, and Jason E. VICKERS, *Invocation and Assent: The Making and Remaking of Trinitarian Theology*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2008 (on Chillingworth, esp. pp. 48-58).

6. See "Economics at Oxford," *The History of Economic Thought* <https://www.hetwebsite.net/het/schools/oxford.htm>

7. The English College at the University of Douai, in France, was established as a seminary and university for English Catholics living in exile during the period. There, they could undertake or continue studies in preparation for clandestine missionary work in England and a possible return of England to Catholicism.

8. There has been some question about what Chillingworth did at Douai, or even whether he even attended the College there. See Robert R. ORR, *Reason and Authority*, pp. 38-39. See also John AUBREY, *Brief Lives*, Vol 1, Oxford: Clarendon, 1898, pp. 171-174; and John TULLOCH, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. 1, New York NY: B. Franklin, 1872, pp. 272-273.

9. CREIGHTON, "Chillingworth," pp. 256-257.

10. *The Religion of Protestants a safe way to salvation. [Or An answer to a booke entitled Mercy and truth, or, Charity maintain'd by Catholiques, which pretends to prove the contrary]*, A New and Complete Edition. London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, 1846 (henceforth: *Religion of Protestants*). References to this text in this chapter are to this edition.

11. The Thirty-Nine Articles is a summary of the principal doctrines of the Church of England and is included in The Book of Common Prayer.

Chillingworth gave to reason, he was accused of Socinianism¹², but his ‘High Church’ views also led him to be suspected of having returned to Catholicism. Chillingworth joined the royalist army at the beginning of the English Civil War (1642). When the royalist army took refuge in Arundel Castle, in 1642, he became ill and, when the army withdrew, he was captured by Puritan forces. Chillingworth died in 1644, five years before the execution of Charles I, and the establishment of the Commonwealth by Protestant Puritans.

Throughout his writings¹³, the principal questions for Chillingworth were whether and how one can be certain about matters of faith. Chillingworth’s aim, followed by other writers such as John Tillotson (1630-94)¹⁴, was not primarily to vindicate religious belief as such (e.g., belief in God) or to show that the Christian faith in general was reasonable – all parties to these debates took these for granted – but, more moderately and theologically, to show that ‘reasonableness’ was an appropriate and useful criterion for determining these matters of faith of which human beings can be certain, and that reason was an appropriate tool in a theological investigation into what one may or should believe.¹⁵ The Catholic Church offered magisterial authority as a rule or guide of faith, but was that necessary? Was it relevant? Was it even reasonable?

Chillingworth’s work, *The Religion of Protestants, a Safe Way to Salvation*, seeks to address these questions. *The Religion of Protestants* is a reply to a volume by Edward Knott [a pseudonym of Matthias Wilson, a Jesuit apologist and controversialist], who had argued in two books that “Protestancy unrepented destroys salvation.”¹⁶ Knott, like many other Catholic apologists, had argued that the Protestant view rests on an assumption that ultimately destroys the case for Protestantism – that, in rejecting the Catholic teaching authority or Magisterium, there is no reliable means of knowing religious truth and, thus,

12. Socinianism was a Christian theological tradition, dating from the 1540s, and based on the writings of the Italians Lelio and Fausto Sozzini. While sometimes used broadly to refer to the beliefs and practices of ‘non-conforming’ Christians, Socinians generally held that religious beliefs must be known by or confirmable by natural reason, and so they rejected a number of orthodox Christian beliefs, such as the Trinity and Christ’s preexistence and divinity.

13. See William CHILLINGWORTH, *The Works of William Chillingworth*. 10th edition. 3 vols. Oxford: University Press, 1838 (henceforth *Works*).

14. See William SWEET, “Tillotson, John,” in Douglas GEIVETT (ed.), *Dictionary of Christian Apologists and their Critics*, New York NY: Wiley-Blackwell (forthcoming).

15. Sarah Mortimer writes that there could be “reliance upon individual reason, rather than [simply] on Scripture read through the eyes of faith.” Sarah MORTIMER, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution*, p. 110. See also the discussion in Alan C. CLIFFORD, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640-1790—An Evaluation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

16. See Knott’s/Wilson’s (but published anonymously), *Charity mistaken, with the want whereof, Catholicikes are vniustly charged for affirming, as they do with grief, that Protestancy vnrepented destroys salvation*, Saint-Omer: Widow of C. Boscard, 1630, and his *Mercy & Truth, or, Charity maintayned by Catholiques* [Saint-Omer: Printed at the English College Press], 1634, pp. 3, 9, 288, 290. See also *Religion of Protestants*, p. 24, see pp. 33, 63-65.

Protestantism leads to scepticism. Chillingworth replies that Knott's arguments fail, and that there is "no reason why, among men of different opinions and communions, one side only can be saved."¹⁷ Protestantism, Chillingworth argued, has resources to maintain itself, holds all that is necessary for one to be a Christian, and so is, at least a plausible alternative to Catholicism.

At the root of this debate, and of Chillingworth's book, then, is the place of reason. To decide matters of religious controversy – i.e., matters where there is a dispute about what religious claims are true or are certain – Chillingworth claims that reason may and should be a guide. Moreover, on the general issue of "the rule of faith"¹⁸ – i.e., what must be believed to be a faithful believer – Chillingworth argued, again, for a role for reason. A rule of faith, Chillingworth writes, is one that "contains all the material Objects of faith, is a compleat and total, and not only an imperfect and Partial Rule."¹⁹ While Scripture serves as such a rule, he notes, one must be cautious: "Every text of scripture, though it hath the perfection belonging to a text of scripture, yet it hath not the perfection requisite to a perfect rule of faith."²⁰ More generally, "it is one thing to be a perfect rule of faith, another *to be proved so* unto us."²¹ In short, in order to be certain about matters of faith, and to have a 'rule of faith,' reason must be involved.

III. Reason and reasonability

For Chillingworth, Scripture is sufficient as a rule of faith only if it is properly interpreted. This is not simply a matter of following tradition, but involves reason.

In the Preface to *The Religion of Protestants*, Chillingworth writes:

But I, for my part, unless I deceive myself, was and still am so affected, as I have made profession, *not willing*, I confess, *to take anything upon trust*, and to believe it without asking myself why; no nor able to command myself (were I never so willing) to follow, like a sheep, every shepherd that should take upon him to guide me; or every flock that should chance go before me; but most apt and *willing to be led by reason* to any way, or from it...²²

How does Chillingworth understand reason? He writes of "natural reason"²³ (i.e., the capacity to know, understand, and infer, that human beings naturally

17. *Religion of Protestants*, p. iii; cf. p. 59.

18. E.g., *Religion of Protestants*, p. 93.

19. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 94.

20. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 94.

21. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 94, emphasis mine.

22. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 2, emphasis mine.

23. "Natural reason (... built) on principles common to all men, is the last resolution, unto which the church's authority is but the first inducement." See *Religion of Protestants*, p. 104, cf. 92.

possess), and states that what is reasonable – i.e., how far one ought to adopt a view – depends on “the *evidence* that is given.”²⁴

Reason is valuable because it provides arguments that provide certainty. There are, however, at least two kinds of certainty. Chillingworth speaks of “rational and acquired certainty”²⁵ as well as of ‘moral certainty,’²⁶ though he rarely uses the former term. ‘Rational and acquired certainty’ would be that produced by mathematical demonstration or, as the case may be, direct sense experience. ‘Moral certainty’ would be that produced by other forms of argument, for example, involving testimony and the use of inductive inference (though Chillingworth does not use this term).²⁷

There is, then, no single method or way by which one can be certain of something. Thus, if the subject matter is mathematics, a demonstrative, deductive method is suitable and can properly be said to produce knowledge and certainty. If the subject matter is the perceptible world, the proper method involves sense perception and, given the general reliability of the senses²⁸, allows for certainty. Similarly, the rules and procedures of the law also provide a method for making legal judgements of which one can be “certain.”²⁹ What kind of certainty one has, and whether it is reasonable to believe something, is, then, relative to the subject matter.

Chillingworth notes that such different methods, though they do not guarantee inerrancy, can provide certainty. He writes:

...for my sense may sometimes possibly deceive me, yet I am certain enough that I see what I see, and feel what I feel. Our Judges are not infallible in their judgments, yet they are certain enough, that they judge aright, and that they proceed according to the Evidence that is given, when they condemn a Thief or a Murderer to the Gallows. A Traveller is not always certain of his way, but often mistaken: and doth it therefore follow that he can have no assurance that Charing-Cross is his right way from the Temple to White-Hall?³⁰

The preceding methods, dealing with law and experience (such as perception), then, provide moral certainty, but this is no shortcoming; this kind of

24. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 203, emphasis mine. See also Frederick K. BEISER, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defence of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 126.

25. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 66.

26. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 66; cf. p. 418. Chillingworth also refers to “certainty of evidence” and “certainty of adherence” and of that which is “metaphysically certain” (*Religion of Protestants*, p. 66), though he defines none of these terms.

27. See *Works*, Vol. I, pp. 115-116, for an example. On ‘induction,’ see *Works*, Vol. I, pp. 10, 17, 29.

28. Chillingworth writes, quoting Richard Hooker: “I have taught, that the assurance of things which we believe by the word, is not so certain as of that we perceive by sense.” (*Religion of Protestants*, p. 413)

29. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 185.

30. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 185.

certainty is all that ‘the matter will bear.’ Chillingworth states that it would be “unreasonable as to expect mathematical demonstration (...) in matters plainly incapable of them”³¹ and, he writes, it is a “froward [i.e., difficult to deal with] and undisciplined scholar, who desires stronger arguments for a conclusion than the matter will bear.”³²

Natural reason, then, is the capacity that makes it reasonable for one to believe or be certain of, a wide range of things. Chillingworth does not, however, say that it can *prove* everything, and he is careful to distinguish his position from the Socinians. For he also rejects the view (which he attributes to Catholic apologists) that “‘Nothing ought or can be certainly believed, further than it may be proved by evidence of natural reason;’ (where, I conceive, natural reason is opposed to supernatural revelation).”³³ Indeed, Revelation is by itself a legitimate source of knowledge³⁴ Nevertheless, Chillingworth claims that at least some religious truths or articles of faith can be known by reason.

IV. Faith

What does Chillingworth mean by faith? In *The Religion of Protestants*, Chillingworth regards Knott’s account of faith as something “‘obscure’ yet certain”³⁵ and as problematic, and he rejects Knott’s view “that faith should be an absolute knowledge of a thing not absolutely known, an infallible certainty of a thing, which though it is in itself, yet is not made to us to appear to be, infallibly certain.”³⁶

Chillingworth nevertheless allows that the term, ‘faith,’ is vague. For example, there may be religious claims that are not part of faith. Thus, there is, to begin with, a distinction to be made between ‘faith’ and other religious claims; he remarks: “why you should conceive that all differences about religion are concerning matters of faith, in this high notion of the word, for that I conceive no reason.”³⁷ Moreover, Chillingworth distinguishes different senses of the word ‘faith’ itself. Chillingworth refers to “*historical faith*”³⁸, “articles

31. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 2.

32. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 2.

33. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 16.

34. See *Religion of Protestants*, pp. 8, 65, 246; cf. John LOCKE, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, 19.4; 18.4; 18.9. See William SWEET, “Paley, Whately, and ‘Enlightenment Evidentialism,’” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 45 (1999), pp. 143-166.

35. *Religion of Protestants*, pp. 416-417, cf pp. 451, 458; cf. Edward KNOTT, *Mercy & Truth*, p. 234.

36. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 417.

37. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 469.

38. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 65.

of faith”³⁹, but also the individual’s faith or disposition to act on these articles or “claims.”⁴⁰

By ‘historical faith,’ Chillingworth means “an assent to Divine Revelations upon the Authority of the Revealer, which though in many things it differ from Opinion, (...) in some things (...) it agrees with it.”⁴¹ These revelations are contained largely in Scripture, and what can be derived from it. That being said, “historical faith” is, however, not obviously very extensive; Chillingworth writes: “ofttimes” by “the faith” is meant only that doctrine which is “necessary to salvation” – presumably, that found in ‘articles of faith’.⁴² This includes faith that comes directly from Scripture and serves as ‘the rule of faith.’⁴³

It is not, however, clear what, specifically, this ‘faith’ includes. For example, Scripture, by itself, is not sufficient to provide the content of faith, for not all that is in Scripture is part of faith. Chillingworth writes that one may “know (...) the Scripture to contain all fundamentals, (though many more points besides, which makes it difficult to say precisely what is fundamental [sic] and what not...).”⁴⁴ That being said, Chillingworth does hold that faith must line up either with the explicit word of Scripture, or be derivable from it.

Moreover, there seems to be openness in which fundamentals one must believe. Chillingworth writes:

He that believes all fundamentals cannot be damned for any error in faith, though he believe more or less to be fundamental than is so. That also of the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son – of purgatory – of the church’s visibility – of the books of the New Testament, which were doubted of by a considerable part of the primitive church (until I see better reason for the contrary than the bare authority of men) – I shall esteem of the same condition.⁴⁵

Thus, Chillingworth allows that there could be things that are revealed (and, so, are part of ‘faith’) that one can, legitimately, *not* believe – because one may not know them to be revelations and, therefore, cannot be expected

39. *Religion of Protestants*, pp. 241, 258, cf. 186.

40. See *Religion of Protestants*, p. 450. In his “Sermon VIII,” Chillingworth suggests that ‘faith’ is a ‘disposition’ given to believers by God: “if that proposition of St. Paul, ‘We are justified by faith, without the works of the law,’ (...) excludes not only the righteousness of the law (which indeed it doth) but the obedience of faith, or the gospel likewise, from being necessary dispositions in us, before we receive remission of sins; then another saying of his, parallel to this, will exclude as well the necessity of an evangelical obedience to our salvation: for, saith St. Paul, (Eph. ii. 8,) “By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” (*Works*, Vol. III, p. 240)

41. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 65. See Simon’s comment that “The Puritans distinguished between assent, or ‘historical faith,’ and saving faith, i.e. actual experience of ‘a work of grace.’” Irène SIMON, *Three Restoration Divines: Barrow, South and Tillotson. Selected Sermons*, 2 vols, Paris: Société d’édition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1976, Vol. II, p. 98, n. 4.

42. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 469.

43. *Religion of Protestants*, pp. 91, 94.

44. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 488, Answer to the 7th chapter, § 14.

45. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 269, see also p. 204.

explicitly to believe them. (Some might see this as a kind of ‘Latitudinarianism’ in religion.⁴⁶) For example, doctrines such as

That Adam and the angels sinned: that there are angels, good and bad: that those books of scripture which were never doubted of by any considerable part of the church are the word of God: that St. Peter had no such primacy as you pretend: that the scripture is a perfect rule of faith, and consequently that no necessary doctrine is unwritten: that there is no one society or succession of Christians absolutely infallible. These, to my understanding, are truths plainly revealed by God, and necessary to be believed *by them who know they are so*. But not so necessary, that *every* man and woman is bound, under pain of damnation, particularly to know them to be Divine revelations, and explicitly to believe them.⁴⁷

In addition to historical faith and articles of faith, Chillingworth writes of faith as a submission and disposition to act on a doctrine or an article of faith.⁴⁸ Yet, this seems to be a kind of trust or commitment that, by itself, may not carry much cognitive content. Moreover, as noted above, such a faith can be ‘incomplete’ and yet still count as ‘faith.’ There can be, then, *degrees* of faith.⁴⁹ Chillingworth writes “as Opinion, so Faith admits Degrees; and that, as there may be a strong and weak Opinion, so there may be a strong and weak Faith.”⁵⁰

What does it mean to be certain about one’s faith? Chillingworth insists that the believer can be certain of some articles of faith; the kind of certainty that the believer has is, generally, as noted above, ‘moral certainty’ (though this is not always so), and it is not based on ‘demonstration.’ Yet this certainty has a proportionality to its object, Chillingworth holds, for while the articles of “faith to be in themselves truths, as certain and infallible,” we may not (strictly

46. Latitudinarians were Anglican clerics and theologians, particularly in the 17th century, who held that certain Christian doctrines, while based on tradition or past practice, could not be demonstrated or known with absolute certainty, and that the doctrines necessary for Christian belief were relatively few. As a result, they sought to provide a reasonable faith, and allowed for a wide degree of latitude on which Christian teachings were necessary for salvation. These churchmen were often regarded as heterodox. See John “Latitudinarianism,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, London: Taylor and Francis, 1998, <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/latitudinarianism/v-1>.

47. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 260, emphasis mine.

48. See note 40, above.

49. Chillingworth writes this in response to the view of Knott – that, if one element of faith is wrong, one has lost faith altogether, i.e., that “Every least error in faith destroys the nature of faith” (*Religion of Protestants*, p. 487) [“Nature of Faith, which is destroyed by any least error” (Edward Knott, *Mercy & Truth*, p. 289)] or “that any small error in faith destroys all faith” [*Religion of Protestants*, p. 490)] [“as if any small error in faith did not destroy all Faith” (Edward Knott, *Mercy & Truth*, p. 291)]. Chillingworth replies to Knott: “faith, even true and saving faith, is not a thing consisting in such an indivisible point of perfection as you make it, but capable of augmentation and diminution. Every prayer you make to God to increase your faith, or (if you conceive such a prayer derogatory from the perfection of your faith) the apostles praying to Christ to *increase their faith*, is a convincing argument of the same conclusion.” (*Religion of Protestants*, p. 413, emphasis Chillingworth, underscoring mine)

50. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 65.

speaking) know or be as certain of them as we are certain of the products of sense or science.⁵¹ For Chillingworth, then, “our faith is an assent to” certain ‘fundamentals’ such as the “conclusion, that the Doctrine of Christianity is true ... whereof we can have ... a Moral certainty.”⁵² Recall that, while this may sound rather modest, there is, presumably, no greater certainty that can be had.⁵³

In short, faith can be understood as the possession or expression of an epistemic attitude or disposition towards someone or something, and of which one can be certain, but it is not a kind of knowledge. Chillingworth asserts that “faith is not knowledge, no more than three is four, but eminently contained in it, so that he that knows believes, and something more; but he that believes, many times does not know, nay, if he doth barely and merely believe, he doth never know...”⁵⁴ Faith, then, is primarily an individual assent that includes the belief that certain propositions are true, and a disposition to act in accordance with them even if, at some level, these propositions are not fully understood. Faith in this sense of ‘assent’ is similar to having a disposition to hold a claim – not knowledge of it – and, just as there can be weaker and stronger dispositions, so there can be weaker and stronger faith. Articles of faith, therefore, can be true and certain, though there may be, strictly speaking, no knowledge of them, and even “certainty of adherence is *not* required to the essence of faith.”⁵⁵

V. Reason, reasonability, and proof

Chillingworth’s emphasis on reason in interpreting Scripture and having faith is illustrated in a story about an event that occurred following his return to England from Douai, when he was living with the family of Lady Falkland, who were Catholics. Chillingworth was reputed to have discussed religion with Lady Falkland’s daughters, insisting that “everyone ought to be able to

51. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 412-413.

52. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 66.

53. Chillingworth writes: “I do heartily acknowledge and believe the articles of our faith to be in themselves truths, as certain and infallible, as the very common principles of geometry and metaphysics. But that there is required of us a *knowledge* of them, and adherence to them, as certain as that of sense or science; that such a certainty is required of us under pain of damnation, so that no man can hope to be in the state of salvation, but he that finds in himself such a degree of faith, such a strength of adherence; this I have already demonstrated to be a great error, and of dangerous and pernicious consequence.” (*Religion of Protestants*, pp. 412-413, emphasis mine). This is a position that Locke comes to hold as well, and Locke quotes the first part of this passage, with agreement, in John LOCKE, *Letters to the Right Rev. Edward Lord Bishop of Worcester, concerning Mr. Locke’s Essay of human understanding*, in *The Works of John Locke*, new edition, corrected. 10 vols., London: Thomas Tegg: 1823, Vol 4, pp. 275-276.

54. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 412.

55. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 452, emphasis mine.

give a reason of his faith,” and arguing that “it was not enough to believe the right, unless they could defend the reasonableness of it.”⁵⁶ Lady Falkland asked him to leave.

So, how can we have ‘moral certainty’ about the articles of faith, or about “the doctrine of Christianity,” or about faith itself? As we see, reason, reasons, and proof are relevant here. Yet it is a delicate matter to determine exactly how far is reason involved. Chillingworth used Socinian arguments against Knott⁵⁷, and so was himself accused of Socinianism, though, as noted earlier, he made an effort to show that religion or faith was not entirely a matter of proof or argument from natural reason. Moreover, Chillingworth argues that the putative ‘Catholic’ view of the role of reason – that reason is productive of ‘an “obscure” certainty’ – is also untenable.⁵⁸

Chillingworth is confident that individuals are capable of being appropriately certain of some beliefs. Concerning the place of reason and proof in relation to faith, Chillingworth writes “It is impossible that any man should certainly believe any thing, unless that thing be either evident of itself, (as that, twice two are four, that every whole is greater than a part of itself,) or *unless he have some certain reason* (at least some supposed certain reason) and infallible ground *for his belief*.”⁵⁹ He says, further, that a person can have “an absolute certainty” of some beliefs or articles of faith – for example, “of this thesis – all which God reveals for truth, is true – being a proposition, that may be demonstrated, or rather so evident to any one that understands it, that it needs it [i.e., demonstration] not.”⁶⁰ Moreover, Scripture itself provides certain belief. Chillingworth states “That all things necessary to salvation are *plainly* delivered in Scripture.”⁶¹

56. Cited in Richard SIMPSON (ed.), *The Lady Falkland: Her Life from a MS. in the Imperial Archives at Lille*, London/Dublin: Catholic Publishing and Bookselling Company, 1961, p. 69. See Georgiana FULLERTON, *The Life of Elisabeth, Lady Falkland, 1585-1639*, London: Burns and Oates, 1883, ch. 9; William M. HAMLIN, *Tragedy and Scepticism in Shakespeare's England. Early Modern Literature in History*, Hampshire: Palgrave/St. Martin's Press, 2005, p. 200, and Frederick K. BEISER, *The Sovereignty of Reason*, p. 107. Whether Chillingworth was being duplicitous about his religious beliefs, and was attempting to convert the daughters to Protestantism (as the Simpson volume suggests), or was working out his own return to Protestantism (as Mortimer [*Reason and Religion in the English Revolution*, p. 66] suggests) is not clear.

57. See Sarah MORTIMER, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution*, pp. 65-78.

58. Chillingworth finds this view in Knott, and quotes Knott's remark that: “We must therefore, for the ground of our faith, find out a motive obscure to us, but most certain in itself, that the act of faith may remain both obscure and certain.” (*Religion of Protestants*, p. 390). See Edward KNOTT, *Mercy & Truth*, p. 234.

59. *Works*, Vol. III, p. 356. See also Chillingworth's “A Discourse against the Infallibility of the Roman Church, with an Answer to all those texts of Scripture that are alleged to prove it,” in *Works*, Vol. III, p. 307; cf. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 382.

60. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 66.

61. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 289, emphasis mine.

Yet even when one looks at the ‘plainest’ Scripture, there is a role for reason here for, Chillingworth asks, “*what certain ground have I to warrant me that [a] consequence [“from scripture truly interpreted”] is good, and this interpretation true? And if answer be made, that reason will tell me so; I reply, (...) that this is to build all upon my own reason...*”⁶² In other words, in matters other than what is self-evident, including some matters of faith, there is room for, and a need for, reason – e.g., for a ‘rational’ reading of scripture.

Reason is also required for a moral certainty of at least some beliefs. Chillingworth continues, “yet of this hypothesis ‘That all the articles of our faith were revealed by God,’ we cannot ordinarily have any rational and acquired certainty, more than moral, founded upon these considerations: first, that the goodness of the precepts of Christianity, and the greatness of the promises of it, shews it, of all other religions, *most likely* to come from the Fountain of goodness.”⁶³ In other words, moral certainty of some articles of faith can be acquired on rational grounds; the evidence for such articles of faith is from these effects – what we would perhaps call today an inductive inference.⁶⁴

Thus, first, there are some matters of faith that people can *through reason* “see” as true. Chillingworth writes, for example, that “reason will convince any man, unless he be of a perverse mind, that the Scripture is the word of God: and then no reason can be greater than this; God says so, therefore it is true.”⁶⁵

Second, as noted earlier, reason is necessary to faith in the reading of Scripture itself; “every man by reason must judge both of scripture and the church.”⁶⁶ For, while some things that we read there, Chillingworth says, are so

62. This comes from Chillingworth’s “A Discourse against the Infallibility of the Roman Church” (in *Works*, Vol. III, p. 309, emphasis Chillingworth, underscoring mine). A similar view on the need for reason in interpreting Scripture or revelation is found in Locke’s views on ‘revelation’; see John LOCKE, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk IV, ch 19, 4 and ch 19, 14. See also William SWEET, “Paley, Whately, and ‘Enlightenment Evidentialism.’”

63. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 66, emphasis mine.

64. Still, the certainty of the conclusion cannot exceed the strength of the premises. As an illustration of this, in *The Religion of Protestants*, Chillingworth writes: “Now our faith is an assent to this conclusion, that the doctrine of Christianity is true; which being deduced from the former thesis, which is metaphysically certain, and from the former hypothesis, whereof we can have but a moral certainty, we cannot possibly by natural means be more certain of it than of the weaker of the premises; as a river will not rise higher than the fountain from which it flows. For the conclusion always follows the worsser part, if there be any worse; and must be negative, particular, contingent, or but morally certain, if any of the propositions from whence it is derived be so: neither can we be certain of it in the highest degree, unless we be thus certain of all the principles whereon it is grounded: as a man cannot go or stand strongly, if either of his legs be weak: or, as a building cannot be stable, if any one of the necessary pillars thereof be infirm and instable; or, as if a message be brought to me from a man of absolute credit with me, but by a messenger that is not so, my confidence of the truth of the relation cannot but be rebated and lessened by my diffidence in the relater.” (*Religion of Protestants*, p. 66)

65. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 465.

66. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 512.

obvious and evident that they are not a matter of any reasonable dispute, other matters may require reason. Moreover, it may be “difficult to say precisely what is fundamental [in Scripture] and what not...”⁶⁷ Still, he holds that what faith requires is “probably deducible from” Scripture,⁶⁸ and it is here, again, that reason has a role.⁶⁹

Further, third, Chillingworth’s view is that, even if one does not have access to revealed truth, there may be aspects of faith that are available to human beings through ‘natural reason’ or “the light of truth.”⁷⁰ Correlatively, however, without reason or a rational justification or argument, it seems that there is no obligation to believe an article of faith, and it may even be inappropriate – unreasonable – to believe.⁷¹ Chillingworth states that “God desires only that we believe the conclusion, as much as the premises deserve.” Chillingworth adds that: “But that I should believe the truth of anything, the truth whereof cannot be made evident with an evidence proportionable to the degree of faith required of me, this I say for any man to be bound to do is unjust and unreasonable, because to do it is impossible.”⁷² Thus, regarding belief in or of things that contradict or are inconsistent with human reason, having therefore no evidence at all, it would be impossible to provide “certain assent” to them and, therefore, it presumably would be better to not believe at all.

What exactly, then, is the role of reason and proof in faith? Articles of faith, but also the (disposition of) believing, need grounds or a proof. But what constitutes a proof in this context? Chillingworth’s view is, as we have seen, that, first, proof involves natural reason and evidence (though it need not involve much evidence⁷³); second, evidence includes Scripture and “testimony” – but

67. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 488.

68. See *Religion of Protestants*, p. 16. In response to Knott, Chillingworth writes: “I believe all those books of Scripture which the church of England accounts canonical to be the infallible word of God: I believe all things evidently contained in them; all things evidently, or even probably deducible from them.” See also Sarah MORTIMER, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution*, p. 218.

69. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 488, cf. p. 16.

70. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 92, cf. pp. 104; 412.

71. See *Religion of Protestants*, p. 66: Chillingworth continues: God desires “that the strength of our faith be equal or proportionable to the credibility of the motives to it. Now though I have and ought to have an absolute certainty of this thesis, “All which God reveals for truth is true,” being a proposition that may be demonstrated, or rather so evident to any one that understands it that it needs it not; yet of this hypothesis, “That all the articles of our faith were revealed by God,” we cannot ordinarily have any rational and acquired certainty, more than moral...”

72. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 418.

73. Chillingworth writes: “as Opinion, so Faith, is always built upon less Evidence than that of Sense or Science” (*Religion of Protestants*, p. 65). But, he adds, Protestants can have “as much certainty as is required to faith of an object not so evident as to beget science” (*Religion of Protestants*, p. 458).

not simply magisterial authority⁷⁴; and, third, the amount of evidence is that which is to provide at least a moral certainty. It is not a mathematical deduction or a demonstration. Recall, however, that proof itself is relative to the subject matter; in this sense, reason is, as it were, grounded in faith.⁷⁵ So while holding an article of faith or having faith (e.g., in response to Knott's insistence on the need for an institutional magisterium) ought to be "built upon the rock of evident grounds and reasons,"⁷⁶ Chillingworth adds that he is "always submitting all other reasons to this one – God hath said so, therefore it is true."⁷⁷ Thus, while reason and evidence are important to faith, faith – and religious discourse in general – is not based on a reason or method of proof that is independent of religion. Chillingworth writes that religious discourse involves "right reason grounded on Divine revelation and common notions written by God in the hearts of all men, and deducing according to the never-failing rules of logic, consequent deductions from them."⁷⁸ It is not "*discourse* (...) guiding itself (...) only by principles of nature, or perhaps by prejudices and popular errors, and drawing consequences not by rule, but chance."⁷⁹ Reason, then, must be understood within the context of religion. Thus, while Chillingworth emphasises the role of reason in deciding matters of faith, as noted earlier, he believes that he can avoid the accusation of Socinianism⁸⁰ – indeed, he accuses Knott of it! – that all such belief must be deduced from reason.

Conclusion

The issue of the relation of faith and reason is perhaps the central issue in the philosophy of religion in the Anglo-American traditions. Yet the origins of this discussion are not, I have argued, in a rational apologetics, but in a debate within religion itself. Authors such as William Chillingworth engaged the question in the 17th century, and are central to understanding how it came to be an issue in later Anglo-American philosophy of religion.

Chillingworth is confronted with contesting views on the legitimacy of Protestantism and, specifically, on which articles of faith are certain and to which one must assent. According to Chillingworth, Catholic magisterial

74. Chillingworth objects, as noted above, that to say that questions of faith need to be decided by a magisterial authority, is problematic. He writes against Knott: "this doctrine of yours, which you would fain have true, that there might be some necessity of your church's infallibility, [is] indeed plainly repugnant not only to truth, but even to all religion and piety, and fit for nothing, but to make men negligent of making any progress in faith or charity" (*Religion of Protestants*, p. 414).

75. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 8.

76. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 1.

77. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 2.

78. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 8.

79. *Religion of Protestants*, p. 8.

80. *Religion of Protestants*, pp. 6-7, 10-11.

tradition may not be reliable (and is partisan), and Scripture, while sufficient, still needs interpretation. Thus, he turns to reason. For Chillingworth, people of faith – i.e., here, Christians – need reason, not only to be reasonable about what they believe, but to know what, as Christians, they ought to believe. On Chillingworth's account, then, not only can faith be reasonable, but Christianity as a whole is reasonable, basic Christian beliefs are true, and people can have evidence for and rightly be certain of them.⁸¹

Chillingworth's account brings to attention, first, important claims about the nature of faith, of reason, and of proof that, arguably, are not generally found in later discussions of the relation of faith and reason. For example, on Chillingworth's view, faith can and should be understood in different ways. It can mean an assent, a 'trust,' but also the statements or articles of faith from Scripture that may constitute 'the rule of faith.' Moreover, Chillingworth distinguishes between 'faith' and 'religious claims.' The former are, as we have seen, (presumably) certainties that normally should be believed, whereas the latter may not be so, and need not be held by or assented to even by one who has faith. Chillingworth does not, admittedly, provide a full list of what specific beliefs the Christian faith or salvation requires, and some see his position as a latitudinarian one. Moreover, since matters of religion and religious controversy are not always the same as matters of faith, some religious claims need not be believed because they are not articles of faith. While figures such as Locke recognized distinctions such as that between faith and religious belief, this did not always carry through in Anglo-American philosophy of religion, and these distinctions generally have disappeared in later debate.

Second, under the rubric of 'reason,' Chillingworth holds that reason is valuable because it can provide certainty. But there are, as we have seen, different kinds of certainty: a 'rational certainty,' which applies only to mathematical truths and direct sense experience, but also a moral certainty, which is appropriate to the subject matter of most of our beliefs and knowledge claims. A similar distinction appears in later authors. Chillingworth goes further, however. While Chillingworth does not explain whether this moral certainty is based on what we might today call induction, he does note that there is no single method or way that one can be certain of something or that one can have this moral certainty. Reason, then, is not independent of religion; recall that it is "grounded on Divine revelation," and this standard of reason seems to be, what one might say today, 'internal to a practice.' This latter view is a position that, however, does not seem to have carried through into later discussion in the philosophy of religion, though it may be of relevance today.

81. See note 53 above. Locke writes that: "I crave leave to say with Mr Chillingworth 'that I do heartily acknowledge and believe the articles of our faith to be in themselves truths as certain and infallible, as the very common principles of Geometry and Metaphysics.'" *Letters to the Right Rev. Edward Lord Bishop of Worcester*, in *The Works of John Locke*, Vol. 4, pp. 275-276.

Third, recall that Chillingworth holds that doctrines, such as purgatory and transubstantiation, and belief in indulgences⁸² which, he insists, reason finds inconsistent or incoherent, should be rejected. Thus, in the exchanges between Catholics and Protestants, Chillingworth insists that reason has an important role: in identifying what faith and its content is, in distinguishing it from other issues of religion or scripture, in locating inconsistency, and in identifying areas in which doubt is possible (e.g., whether there is sufficient evidence), and that it is important to be reasonable. This view is later taken up by Locke, and Hume was aware of it as well. While Locke would not embrace all of Chillingworth's claims, it is interesting to see an apparent influence of some of them, and Locke writes that "The constant reading of Chillingworth, (...) by his example will teach both perspicuity, and the way of Right Reasoning better than any Book I know."⁸³ Indeed, in this and perhaps other respects, Locke would have seen himself as a Christian philosopher, albeit what might be called – as some called Chillingworth – a latitudinarian.

Chillingworth and, later, authors such as Tillotson, set the stage for subsequent discussion of the relation of faith and reason – that 'reasonableness' was an appropriate and, indeed, necessary tool for determining matters of faith, and that there could be "reliance upon individual reason, rather than [simply] on Scripture read through the eyes of faith."⁸⁴ Admittedly by considering and employing reason within the context of faith, Chillingworth may be said to be doing what one might call today 'philosophy of theology,' not 'philosophy of religion.' Still, as we see from the later discussion of the relation of faith and reason in the Anglo-American world, once one admits a role for reason and empirical evidence within theology, it is a short step to holding that reason and evidence bear on the truth of all theological claims, and of religious faith as such.

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82. See, for example, *Religion of Protestants*, p. 128, 260, 366.

83. Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education* [Appendix III: "Mr Locke's Extempore Advice &c."] ed J.W. and J. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 320-321. See Stuart-Buttle, *From Moral Theology to Moral Philosophy*, p. 157, n. 46: "Locke similarly recommended Chillingworth's defence of his confessional manoeuvrings in the Religion of Protestants as the model of right reasoning."

84. Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution*, p. 110. See also the discussion in Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification. English Evangelical Theology, 1640-1790—An Evaluation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

SUMMARY

In this paper I look at one of those thinkers who set the stage for, and influenced, Locke and Hume, William Chillingworth (1602-1644), and show how he understood faith, reason, and the relation between the two. Addressing the question of how the relation of faith and reason came to be an issue in the Anglo-American theological and philosophical traditions will provide some context for the later discussions by Locke and Hume on this relation, but will also show the distinctiveness of this earlier account of faith and reason – an account which may provide some insight and resources for discussing the general issue of the relation of faith and reason today.

SOMMAIRE

Cet article portant sur William Chillingworth (1602-1644), l'un des penseurs qui ont ouvert la voie et influencé Locke et Hume, s'efforce de montrer la compréhension qu'il se faisait de la foi et de la raison et du rapport entre les deux. Aborder ainsi la façon dont cette relation entre foi et raison en vint à constituer une question débattue au sein des traditions britannique et américaine permet de situer dans leur contexte les discussions dont elle devait faire l'objet de la part de Locke et Hume. Cela permet également de montrer le caractère distinct de cette représentation antérieure de la foi et de la raison et en quoi elle peut encore inspirer les discussions d'aujourd'hui sur les rapports entre ces deux réalités.