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# The natural theology of Jacques Abbadie

## ABSTRACT

Jacques Abbadie (c. 1654–1727), a French Huguenot theologian, was a respected preacher and author who combined religious conviction with intellectual rigor, particularly in his efforts to reconcile reason and faith during a period of rapid scientific and philosophical developments. Abbadie employed classical proofs for the existence of God, but the teleological argument was central to his work, by considering the investigation of the book of nature to be an essential prerequisite for Christian faith. In this approach, he was at the forefront of physico-theology, that acquired prominence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Abbadie viewed natural law as dynamic, adapting across history to suit human development – from the Mosaic law to the gospel. While deeply affirming the value of reason, he maintained that divine revelation ultimately completes and corrects it. Faith, in his view, transcends reason without contradicting it. Despite his confidence in human rationality, he warned that passion and imagination can cloud judgment, making divine guidance necessary.

## KEYWORDS

Jacques Abbadie, physico-theology, infinity

## Teologia naturalna Jacques'a Abbadie

## STRESZCZENIE

Jacques Abbadie (ok. 1654–1727), francuski teolog hugenocki, był szanowanym kaznodzieją i autorem, który łączył przekonania religijne z intelektualną rzetelnością, zwłaszcza w swoich wysiłkach na rzecz pogodzenia rozumu i wiary w okresie szybkiego rozwoju nauki i filozofii. Abbadie posługiwał się klasycznymi dowodami na istnienie Boga, jednak w jego pracy centralną rolę odgrywał argument teleologiczny, uznający badanie księgi natury za niezbędny warunek wiary chrześcijańskiej. W tym podejściu stał na stanowisku fizykoteologii, która zyskała na znaczeniu w XVIII wieku. Abbadie odróżniał prawo natury

jako coś dynamicznego, dostosowującego się na przestrzeni dziejów do rozwoju ludzkości – od prawa mojszowego i ewangelii. Choć głęboko wierzył w wartość rozumu, utrzymywał, że objawienie Boże go dopełnia i ostatecznie koryguje. Jego zdaniem wiara wykracza poza rozum, nie przecząc mu, jednak mimo wiary w ludzką racjonalność uważał, że namiętności i wyobraźnia mogą zaciemniać osąd, a to sprawia, że konieczne jest skorzystanie z boskiego przewodnictwa.

#### SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Jacques Abbadie, fizykoteologia, nieskończoność

## Introduction

Jacques Abbadie (c. 1654–1727) was a Huguenot theologian born in Nay in southern France and educated at the Academy of Puylaurens and the Academy of Saumur. In 1671, he received a doctorate in theology from the Academy of Sedan. After a stay in Paris, he moved in 1680 to Berlin to become an ordained pastor of a Huguenot congregation. In 1689, he moved to England and then to Ireland, where he was a chaplain to a French cavalry regiment. From 1692 to 1699, he was a minister at the French Church of the Savoy in London. In 1699, he became dean of Killaloe in Clare County, Ireland. In 1726, he moved to Marylebone in London, where he died at the age of 73.<sup>1</sup> His life and reputation are well summarized in one dictionary entry: “He was a strenuous assertor of the orthodox or primitive doctrine of the Protestants, as appears by his writings, which are numerous. Besides an uncommon knowledge of the learned languages and the classical authors, he was well vers’d in ecclesiastical and prophane history. But what rais’d and supported his reputation was his elevated genius, great penetration, and strong nervous [i.e., powerful] eloquence.”<sup>2</sup> He authored several successful books, some of them with numerous editions and several translations, and his theological works have been highly praised by both Protestant and Catholic theologians.<sup>3</sup>

1 *Essai historique sur la vie et les ouvrages de M. Abbadie*, [in:] J. Abbadie, *Sermons et panegyriques*, Amsterdam: François Changuion 1760, vol. 1, p. III–LVI; E. Haag, É. Haag, *La France Protestante*, Paris: Bureau de la Publication 1846, vol. 1, cols. 7–11; R. D. Fowler, *The life and political thought of Jacques Abbadie*, PhD diss., Lubbock: Texas Tech University 1978, ch. 2.

2 P. Bayle, *A general dictionary, historical and critical*, London: James Bettenham 1735, vol. 1, p. 22; the entry was actually added by the editors in the English translation of Bayle's *Dictionnaire*; cf. the French translation of all the additions in the English version, J. G. de Chauffeptié, *Nouveau dictionnaire historique et critique*, Amsterdam: Z. Chatelain 1750, vol. 1, p. 7, 16–17; Incidentally Bayle did speak rather warmly about Abbadie, A. Baudouin, *Jacques Abbadie, Prediger der französischen Gemeinde zu Berlin*, in *der Geschichte der französischen Literatur*, Dresden: M. Dittert & Co. 1939, p. 44.

3 R. D. Fowler, *The life and political thought of Jacques Abbadie*, PhD diss., Lubbock: Texas Tech University 1978, p. 43; A. Baudouin, *Jacques Abbadie, Prediger der französischen Gemeinde zu Berlin*, in *der Geschichte der französischen Literatur*, Dresden: M. Dittert & Co. 1939, pp. 45–47; P.-F. Marquié, *Abbadie considéré comme moraliste, étude sur son Art de se connaître soi-même*, Montauban: Imprimerie de Forestié neveu et compe 1855, pp. 9–11;

Abbadie was an orthodox Reformed theologian with a particular devotion to Christ the Savior, to be acknowledged in the individual lives of people as well as in society, where he saw Christ as the cornerstone of social and political harmony. It is thus interesting to see the role he assigned to natural religion and human reason in his theology. His views on this subject are well summarized in the opening lines of his book about the divinity of Christ: “The essential truths of Religion are so closely connected that in this respect they resemble the principles of Geometry, some of which serve as steps leading to the knowledge of others. Thus, ... the truth of the existence of God led us to that of natural Religion, the truth of natural Religion to the knowledge of the Jewish Religion, and the Jewish Religion to the truth of the Christian Religion, and all this by a series of consequences so accurate (*justes*) that it does not seem possible to dispute them without renouncing what is purest in the natural light” (V 3.1).<sup>4</sup> It is interesting that the *more geometrico* method, so prominent in Descartes and Spinoza, his theological adversaries,<sup>5</sup> should serve Abbadie as an indispensable tool to establish the foundations of religion, just as much as it was used to the same end by these two philosophers whose views Abbadie rejected.

Importantly, the above-mentioned epistemological ascendancy replicates the history of progressive revelation. God leads people to the knowledge of Himself. He leads them from the senses to imagination, from imagination to spirit. From pagan religions, that wanted to see the object of their worship, to the Jewish religion, in which God revealed Himself to imagination in the form of corporeal images (S 1.239), then to the Christian religion, which revealed God as a spirit; pagans wanted to see, the Jews wanted to imagine, and Christians seek to comprehend this object of worship (240).

## The book of nature

Abbadie subscribed to the traditional idea that the book of nature and the book of Scripture are the sources of knowledge of God, although, interestingly, he extended a bit this list. In his view, there are four books showing God to people: the book of nature, the book

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R. Whelan, *From Christian apologetics to enlightened deism: the case of Jacques Abbadie (1656–1727)*, “The Modern Language Review” 87 (1992), pp. 59–60.

4 References to the following works of Abbadie are used:

A – *L'art de se connoître soy-meme, ou la recherche des sources de la morale*, La Haye: Guillaume de Voys 1711 [1692].

S – *Sermons et panegyriques*, Amsterdam: François Changuion 1760, vols., 1–3.

V – *Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne, où l'on établit la religion chrétienne par ses propres caracteres*, La Haye: Jean Neaulme 1763 [1684], vols. 1–3.

5 “I am neither a supporter of Democritus nor of Descartes,” said Abbadie (V 1.27); Spinoza’s anti-Biblical arguments had been composed “in bad faith, ignorance, inconsideration, and lack of judgment” (1.228).

of Scripture, the book of the heart, and God Himself (S 2.241). Somewhat discordantly, he also spoke about four sources of truth: nature, society, the human heart, and religion (V 1.18). To reconcile these two lists, society should be associated with the book of Scripture and religion with God, although it is probably better to see these two lists as only partially overlapping.

A very prominent position in Abbadie's theology is occupied by the teleological proof of the existence of God, a kind of proof which became a theological fulcrum of physico-theology, which became very popular particularly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Abbadie's view, to see that there exists a sovereign wisdom, it is enough to consider the marvels of nature, the regular motion of celestial bodies (V 1.18), the seas, plants, the diversity of animals, and the structure of the human body. It is impossible to assume that all parts of nature conspire to fool people by showing signs of wisdom where there is none. Wisdom implies a design and the means to actualize this design. It would be foolish to doubt that the eyes are organs enabling people to see, ears to hear (19), the voice to communicate, legs to walk, and the heart to circulate blood, and that all of them were designed for their special purposes. This wisdom is seen in individual bodies and in their multitude. Consider the sun – its proper distance to warm the earth; consider air – its transmission of light, its transmission of sounds, and its use for breathing, and clouds that water the earth (20). Consider the interdependencies: light without eyes is darkness, the eyes without light are blind. Consider fruits, which, after being eaten, transform into the body of people and animals, consider hunger, which prompts people to eat to nourish the body. What would all these fruits be for (21), if there were no animals to eat them (22)? This is the most natural proof that can be best seen by all people. Unbelievers, to undermine the wisdom of such an arrangement, ask why thunders strike in uninhabited areas, why hail falls so abundantly on rocks, why lightning breaks rocks, what insects are for, why are there flies, frogs, caterpillars, and worms, that eat corpses in tombs, or the small critters that suck human blood?

From the signs of wisdom found in nature, we can conclude that God exists, but we cannot conclude from the ignorance that prevents us from seeing signs of wisdom in other parts of nature that there is no God, since "what we don't know can never serve as a principle of reasoning." From the investigation of the parts of a clock, we can conclude that someone made it, but we cannot conclude from not seeing the reason for some of its parts that it was not made by an intelligent craftsman. Also, to see wisdom, we should ask for a reason for the existence of kinds, not individuals. It is also enough to consider general laws of nature, not the reason for the existence of each individual. Moreover, the existence of a physical cause does not exclude the existence of a final cause (V 1.24). Thunder strikes an uninhabited area or a village to show that God comes closer to the sinner or distances Himself from him. Serpents and other menacing animals exist for people to know better God's justice; however, serpent venom can also be used

as medicine, bees produce honey, flies and spiders purify the air, and insects collect decay from the earth. Also, if we don't know the reason of many elements of nature, it is thus "ridiculous and extravagant" to think that there is none (25); all the more, people should be careful in questioning reasons that are known only to God. In the end, "It is not what we are ignorant of in the wonders of Nature, but rather what we know of them that makes us recognize the wisdom of God" (28).

A complaint has often been made: why God does not prevent people from being bitten by snakes, struck by lightning, or harmed by other natural events. Abbadie could have used an argument he made in his discussion of some small errors and misspellings in some copies of the Scripture. He said that to avoid these small grammatical changes, God would have to perform a constant, perpetual miracle to inspire not only those who wrote the text of the Scripture, but also those who copied it in all the centuries: "a constant and perpetual miracle is impossible, because, besides being outside the ways of God's Wisdom, it would change faith into sight if it happened, and it would even become useless if it were continual; for, in that case, it would be just as easy for God to reveal himself through continual and immediate revelations, without the aid of any Scripture; moreover, a perpetual miracle contains a kind of contradiction, because a miracle is an interruption of the laws of Nature, and such a long and ordinary interruption would itself change into a natural law." (V 1.239). That is, there are usually at least two arguments made to support the veracity of religion: miracles and prophecies (e.g., 1.197, 307, 2.122, 170), and in Abbadie's mind, constant miracles would turn into normalcy and thus would lose their convincing power.

The fact of human sinfulness is also an element addressed by Abbadie's theodicy. In his view, sin gives people an opportunity to exercise virtue and patience (V 1.101). Sin also allows people to see some virtues of God that would otherwise remain unknown: His mercy and justice, for which God can be both loved and feared (102). However, God brings some blessings even through sin (103).

"Nature does not exist only to nourish the body of Man, although the rains, the fertile seasons, and the fecundity of the Earth seem to visibly relate to this end, it is also to present to our spirit/mind perpetual objects of esteem and admiration, because what food is to the body, that itself is the knowledge of the wonders of God to our soul." The world also contains objects of fear, respect, and hope, which the human soul owes to God (V 1.86). The universe is for God and for intelligent creatures, just as a painting is for the original that it represents and for those who can appreciate it. God draws human hearts to Himself through all the beauty of the universe, and this connection of intelligent creatures with God is the end of His works (87). In this, Abbadie is clearly impressed not only by what everyday observations of nature can provide but also by the results of the then-burgeoning science (105): anatomy showing the wise arrangement of the parts of the body; chemistry showing the results of the motion of matter (107); astronomy

showing God's sovereignty in the order found in celestial bodies; and jurisprudence showing common principles of justice in all nations (108).

What can the investigation of nature tell people about God? First, that He exists necessarily in and of Himself; in fact, the fundamental idea of God is that He is a necessary being existing by Himself (V 1.121). It is so, since the world – or, more generally, matter – does not exist necessarily in and of itself since, from the fact that it exists now, it does not necessarily follow that it existed in the previous moment or will exist in the next moment. “It does not appear to us that its moments of existence have any essential and natural connection” (V 1.39), and thus, it is a product created by a necessarily existing God. God is an infinite and perfect being – i.e., unlimited – since where would any limitation of His perfection come from (41)? If matter is not necessary, its motion is even more unnecessary; and thus, the motion of matter and its components ultimately comes from God (41, 45). The makeup of the world shows that God is an intelligent and supremely wise being (130), while the immensity of the universe points to His power (134). Reason tells people that God loves them, since they are His creation, a masterpiece of His visible works, and experience teaches them that they have thousands of goods as His gift. So, God is goodness (132). The grandeur of the created world should induce in people awe and admiration for God, and thus, whereby it should become a natural duty for people to glorify God, admire, trust Him, and pray to Him – a duty to be exercised in private as well as in public with others (135). So, religion is an indispensable duty (136); humans are born for religion, and religion is human destiny (138).

Abbadie also used other proofs for the existence of God, mostly traditional ones. One goes back at least to the first *via* of Aquinas, that sees God as the prime mover. Abbadie regards God as the source of constant motion in nature (V 1.28) – the motion that is organized and coordinated to make and preserve the structure of nature (29). It is absurd to attribute it all to randomness; it is a wonder that it was ever thought of it that way. What is the nature of this randomness? If it is the privation of cause, then we are misled by those who say that chance generated the world, since this is the same as saying that nothing produced it or that we don't know the principle of this production. Thus, chance is merely our ignorance; chance is a name without meaning (30-31). For example, a recourse to spontaneous, i.e., random, generation of humans does not work. It is absurd to claim that man was formed from the silt or mud in Egypt or that he came from the sea (73). Why does this not happen today? Whence the wisdom of the silt to create a man and a woman suited together to generate other humans (74)?

The existence of motion in the material world is used to show the incorporeality of the soul, and the existence of the soul, in turn, serves as a proof of the existence of God. The existence of thought cannot be explained as the result of the motion of matter. It is inconceivable that parts of matter can think because they move (V 1.32).

There is in us a spirit distinct from matter, and this spirit has an Author – thus, God exists. But when it is assumed that there is no spirit, then all thought, not being caused by the motion of matter, is caused by a principle that is above matter – the principle we call God (36).

With all possible proofs of the existence of God, it appears that, unless belief in God can be directly induced in a person, even a cursory investigation of nature seems to be an indispensable prerequisite for faith. This is because the concept of God, according to Abbadie, is not inborn – with which view he distanced himself from Descartes (A 105) and from the *incrédules* (V 1.94–95). This idea is not inborn, since different people have different ideas of God (A 114). The idea of God is formed from the material found in ourselves: being, substance, spirit, intelligence, wisdom, goodness, etc. (112). It is, however, unclear how the ideas of being, substance, etc. make their way to the soul. Are they inborn, or also formed from some other ideas? Moreover, Abbadie agrees that the sentiment (not an idea) of the existence of God is universally found in all nations. This cannot be the result of education, since educational systems differ from one nation to another. Thus, “this sentiment does not come from simple education, but is based on some natural proportion which is between this first truth and our understanding” (V 1.10) – which is an explanation that explains very little.

On the other hand, although the idea of God is not inborn, God “has so formed our spirit that it cannot help but know the existence of its Creator from his characters [engraved in the universe]” (V 1.141). The idea of God is not inborn, but there is an inborn cognitive apparatus, which has been so formed by God that it inevitably arrives at the idea of God – all the more so because human reason “is filled with natural light which prevents it from making errors when it freely judges objects presented to it” (1.23). Well, not quite inevitably, since its workings can be undermined by the senses, by imagination, and by passions (1.8). It does not appear that the workings of reason are damaged, but that the voice of reason is pushed aside by the voice of the senses, imagination, and – most of all – unruly passions. Incidentally, this has eternal consequences, since unless the voice of reason is restored to take command of passions, the salvation message cannot penetrate the heart, leading to a somber fate in the afterworld.<sup>6</sup>

There is a touch of circularity here. “It is also God who is the principle of the knowledge that we have of his existence, because, on the one hand, he has engraved the characters of his wisdom in this Universe, and, on the other hand, he has so formed our spirit/mind that it cannot help but recognize the existence of its Creator in these characters.” (V 1.141).

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6 Salutory truths “can enter the heart only through reason, that is, knowledge and salvation are inseparable,” R. Whelan, *Le Dieu d'Abraham et le Dieu des philosophes: épistémologie et apologétique chez Jacques Abbadie (1656–1727)*, [in:] M.-C. Pitassi (ed.), *Apologetique (1680–1740), sauvetage ou naufrage de la théologie?*, Genève: Éditions Labor et Fides 1991, p. 67.

Thus, the certainty that the existence of God can be recognized through reasoning appears to presuppose that God exists. Ultimately, the physico-theological approach seems to have the last word, since even the most uncivilized people can recognize the existence of God, because “the revelation of Nature is so before their eyes that they cannot draw the smallest consequence from all that they see, nor know other things, nor know themselves, nor look at Heaven or Earth, nor open their eyes, so to speak, and turn them on the World with some reflection, without saying that all this did not happen by itself: for this thought does not come from some speculation of Philosophy; it is born from the first idea of things, and from the purest and most common light of common sense: so that every man necessarily has it, or will have it as soon as he makes use of his reason” (146).

There seems to be a shadow of a sentiment, if not an idea, of God in the soul, which is possible since an inborn presence of ideas/sentiments in the soul is not unacceptable for Abbadie. He does not consider the mind to be a *tabula rasa*, and, arguably, the strongest inborn presence belongs to natural law.

### Natural law

The natural law is in us. It is the oldest, the most general, the most essential, and the foundation of other laws (A 79).<sup>7</sup> People have a natural inclination toward goodwill toward one another – the natural law of equity and justice – the violation of which leads to remorse (V 1.80). That is, conscience contains the natural law, which is clear from the remorse it feels when this law is violated (142). This remorse consists of judgments of the spirit and sentiments of the heart. The spirit has three truths: there are some criminal actions; a crime should be punished; and God disapproves of criminal behavior (143). There is a slight contradiction here: if the concept of God is not inborn, how can an inborn truth refer to God and His disapproval of vice? In any event, the natural law appears to be fairly elaborate.

The natural law is composed of four rules: the temperance rule, the natural affection rule, the rule of justice, and the reconnaissance/gratitude rule. The first rule can be expressed in these four maxims: we should prefer a greater good over a smaller one; we should endure a small evil to avoid a great one; we should forfeit (*perdre*) a small good to avoid a great evil; and we should endure a small evil to obtain a great good (V 1.160).

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<sup>7</sup> In this way, “the goal of moral activity is therefore no longer outside or above man, it is within himself; the moral being has within himself his end as his rule,” P. Chaudier, *Étude morale sur L’Art de se connoître soi-même, par Abbadie*, Montauban: Imprimerie Forestié neveu 1862, p. 13.

The second rule is based on this principle: we should love what belongs to us or is related to us. This concerns self-love (*l'amour de nous mêmes*) and the love of others (161). The justice rule is contained in this maxim, known today as the golden rule: we should do to others what we would like them to do to us. The fourth rule says: we should love those who do something good for us. These four natural rules have to be maintained by natural motives – the motives of conscience (162).

In his later book, Abbadie somewhat modified this classification by dividing the general natural law into four laws (A 76): the law of temperance, to avoid excess; the law of justice, to treat others as we want to be treated; the law of moderation, preventing us from vengeance; and the law of beneficence, prompting us to do good to others (77).

What is interesting in Abbadie's view of natural law is that this law evolves. Natural law was given to the first parents (A 80). With the increase of people, God modified the natural law and gave it to them in a different form to fit new circumstances. The Decalogue includes simple and common principles of natural law; it is a renewed natural law accommodated to the Israelites delivered from Egyptian bondage (82–83). The Decalogue is an expression of natural law, commanding people to love themselves and others (98), and to love God with all their hearts (89). The love of God excludes idolatry (99), and, where God never wanted to manifest Himself visibly, so, no physical representation should be done (102).

Just as the Mosaic law is the natural law accommodated to the condition of the Israelites' life and, more generally, to mortal people, the Gospel is the natural law accommodated to the state of immortal people (A 122). It is against human nature to love enemies, to consider adversity as something positive, and the like (124). But this is against the perishing nature related to the present life, not against the immortal nature, where hate has no place – and so, where there is no hatred of enemies (125).

The concept of an inborn natural law is surely not new, but usually it was believed that this law is the same for all people throughout all the ages and that it was incorporated into later moral laws, including Christianity. In particular, self-love and the golden rule were admitted among rules of natural law, but the love of enemies was something specific and new to Christianity, hardly existing in the original natural law and hardly ever considered a natural sentiment. By allowing natural law to evolve, Abbadie seems to have strengthened the position of Christian moral law: if the latter is built on the foundation of natural law, then – in a way – it could be considered unnatural, and such a designation could blunt its convincing – i.e., proselytizing – power. If it is considered normal from the start, then it may be more easily acceptable, at least terminologically. In either case, God's help is needed to make people sincerely love their enemies.

## Infinity

One contentious issue in Abbadie's theological and philosophical investigations is the problem of infinity, which has been debated on a large scale since at least Aristotle. Against his authority, Christian theologians – particularly the Scholastics – rejected the eternity of the world and had to philosophically justify the biblical creation account.

If the world were eternal, said Abbadie, the flow of rivers would create an infinity of small islands, the sea would be completely filled with gravel brought by rivers, and all hills and mountains would be reduced to the same level by erosion (V 1.57). It is clear that humankind has a first person (*chef*) (58) – an origin. It is useless to resort to the existence of an infinite number of generations, which is contrary to right reason, and our imagination rejects infinity (59). There would be an infinity of people, considering that the first couple, a hundred thousand years ago, could eventually have produced the current population of the earth (62–63). Resorting to accidents and disorders does not help, since the earth is far more populated than it was 3000 years ago – a fact we can state with the utmost certainty (64).

Consider the history: philosophy is unknown before Pythagoras; Thales was the first astronomer. We know about the beginning of medicine (65) and the laws. Society was first limited to families, and it grew to villages (66), cities, provinces, and empires. Commerce gradually developed, and all inventions are relatively recent (67). Memories of past events extend back 4000 to 5000 years. History goes back to the flood (68). If there were a flood like the Biblical flood, no one and nothing would have survived without divine intervention (71). It would be just remarkable indeed if humanity could exist from eternity in barbarous state, without laws, arts, and science (72).

Basically, the past eternity of the earth is unimaginable and contrary to reason. Examples Abbadie provided had some convincing power, but his attempt to grapple with infinity – an infinite duration, in particular – was not philosophically successful.

However, an inkling of infinity – of limitlessness – has also a very positive aspect. The human heart is the source of truth, and thus the source of the knowledge of God's existence. There is “the infinite greed of a heart that is not satisfied with any particular good, because it is destined for the possession of the Sovereign good, which encompasses all others,” and “the infinite searches of a mind that seeks to know everything, because it is destined to know God” (A 72).

The human heart is not satisfied with the earthly things; people direct their desires beyond time, and they commonly acknowledge the existence of God. Earthly things cannot satisfy the desire for happiness (V 1.81), because this-worldly happiness is uncertain (A 338), temporary (339), always mixed with misery, and does not fulfill the human soul (341). And since the desire for happiness is engraved in the soul of all people, it must be achievable (332).

How could the heart have developed the capacity to desire this object if it did not exist? Why would nature put in the heart such a useless desire, which can only cause anxiety (V 1.82)? The proof relies on the Aristotelian principles that nature does nothing in vain and, in fact, also on the existence of God – particularly on His goodness, which theologically guarantees that the inborn desire for happiness can be fully actualized in the afterlife by God (V 1.51–52).<sup>8</sup>

### Reason vs. faith

Notwithstanding the elevated status Abbadie gives to human rationality, to natural light and thus to natural religion, the last uncontested word belongs to Christian revelation. Truth can be known only through the light of religion. Submission to it is necessary, and humility (V 2.396), faith, and reason do not contradict one another when they remain within their limits: faith teaches about truth, reason agrees with it; reason does not comprehend it, and faith presupposes this incomprehensibility (410).

There are three sources of knowledge: senses, reason, and faith. Senses provide data for reason, reason provides principles for faith. Senses do not elevate themselves to the level of reason, and reason judges things the senses cannot perceive; similarly, faith judges things that reason does not grasp, such as the incarnation. So, faith is superior to reason just as reason is superior to the senses. Just as reason corrects the errors of the senses, faith corrects the faults of reason (V 3.427). Ultimately, faith is superior to reason (2.411).

In the end, Christianity destroyed paganism, which was the corruption of natural religion. It repaired, reestablished, and supported the principles of uprightness that God put in the human soul (V 2.433). Abbadie criticized the Socinians for shaping the Scripture according to their opinions, not vice versa. He said that we will always find “impenetrable abysses” when measured by the human reason (3.330). Reason leads us to revelation, since it convinces us that God is infallible and thereby it orders us to accept with submission what is stated by His authority. The foundation of faith lies in the belief that what God says is true; the discernment of faith involves examining the spirit to see that it is God who speaks, and then His statements have to be accepted (333–334). Mysteries are not a province of religion, there are mysteries in nature and in religion.

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<sup>8</sup> “The true grandeur of man and his true happiness are based on his immortality,” P.-F. Marquié, *Abbadie considéré comme moraliste, étude sur son Art de se connaître soi-même*, Montauban: Imprimerie de Forestié veuve et compe 1855, p. 25; “Through immortality, our heart, a consuming fire that always rises on high and never says, it is enough, when it receives only the goods of the world as nourishment, will be able to be satisfied and find that fullness of happiness that alone can satisfy its desires, since God will throw into this immense void that torments it here below, infinite and eternal goods, the only ones capable of filling it,” p. 28.

Mysterious are the process of vegetation, the way animals move, and the ebb and flow of the sea (420). However, mysteries of religion are on a much higher level (421).

There is practical knowledge and knowledge stemming from curiosity. It is practical to know which waters of which the seas are navigable, it is curiosity-driven to know the mechanism of the ebb and flow, or why the sea has salty water (V 3.422). The same applies in theology. To worship Jesus, it is enough to know that He is God; however, we don't have to know the mystery of the hypostatic union (423). A full knowledge of mysteries would only feed our curiosity (424). In religion, ignorance has its uses, just as knowledge does. The prophets did not know the mystery of the incarnation in the same the way we do, since this knowledge have stopped the effects of the law, the Sinai event would not have impressed them (425). It seems that God wanted to prepare the way of mercy through "the economy of rigor and vengeance, which makes one feel sin and desire one's salvation" (426).

## Conclusion

Abbadie, much more than any Reformed theologian before him, relied on natural theology, carrying it to a somewhat theologically perilous extent by claiming that it is a prerequisite for Christian theology, religion, and morality. This is the case for individual lives, where moral law and physico-theological conclusions derived even from cursory observations of nature should lead people to Christianity, that is, to the recognition of Christ as the only Savior. It is not a facile statement, since the road can be arduous, considering corrupted human nature and the power of sin. Abbadie also justified the historical primacy of natural theology and natural law, as he showing the development of theology in human life from paradise through the Mosaic religion to Christianity. Revelation was the ultimate authority, but natural theology led to it in the personal history of individuals and in the social history of nations.

The prominent position given to natural theology was prompted by the developments of science, particularly from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which showed the wonders of nature and the complexity of its operation on the celestial scale detectable by the telescope and on the micro scale detectable by the microscope. The burgeoning field of physico-theology used results of science to point to the wisdom and power of the Creator by uncovering "the indisputable characters of wisdom imprinted throughout the Universe" (V 1.26, 141). However, there was also a strengthening deistic movement with its bizarre ideas about God (V 1.121) that Abbadie wanted to straighten.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. Sabetta, *Lapologetica moderna e la necessità non (del tutto) necessaria della rivelazione. L'esempio di Jacques Abbadie*, [in:] S. Gaburro (ed.), *Elogio della porosità: per una teologia con-testuale*, Roma: Edizioni Studium 2023, pp. 99, 108.

Since they were satisfied with the all-sufficiency of natural theology, Abbadie argued that, important as natural theology is, it is but the first step that should lead to the recognition of Christian revelation. The influence of Augustinian and Thomistic theologies on Abbadie is readily recognized, considering the Scholastic leanings of the academies he attended.<sup>10</sup> An influence of Pascal,<sup>11</sup> and even Descartes, is also acknowledged, but the influence of physico-theology, whose strength was growing in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is usually missed. It seems that Abbadie's contribution was original. He wrote his major theological books in Berlin, a few decades before various branches of physico-theology exploded in Germany, but a few decades after it became very popular in England— to mention Walter Charleton, Robert Boyle, and Samuel Parker — whose works may not have reached him. If they did not, his sensitivity and theological response to the development of science are even more impressive. However, ultimately, and as the devoted clergyman that he was, his main interest was in the salvation message; and physico-theology, important as it was in his investigations, was only a stepping stone on the way to bring people to Christ.

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10 R. Whelan, *From Christian apologetics to enlightened deism: the case of Jacques Abbadie (1656–1727)*, “The Modern Language Review” 87 (1992), p. 38.

11 The believer in the existence of God risks nothing or very little if he is wrong, but an unbeliever risks infinitely if he is wrong considering the prospect of salvation or perdition; in these words, Abbadie simply quoted the famous Pascal's wager (V 1.110); see also A. McKenna, *De Pascal à Voltaire*, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation 1990, pp. 276–277.

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