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Errata

There is an error on page 79 in the article by Nathan Rinne, “Paradise Regained: Placing Nicholas Hopman’s *Lex Aeterna* Back in Luther’s Frame,” *CTQ* 82 (2018). The last sentence of the second paragraph should read, “Even if they are born of a spontaneous love, the good intentions and works that characterize the ‘new man’ can be of a very impure love, still tainted by sin, even as that sin is covered by Christ’s blood.”

The Editors

Luther's Heidelberg Disputation Revisited in Light of the Philosophical Proofs

Eric G. Phillips

The year 2018 marks the five-hundredth anniversary of Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*. Harold J. Grimm's English translation in volume 31 of the American Edition of *Luther's Works* is not quite that old, but was published in 1957. Now, sixty-one years does not make it old enough for the English to sound dated, but it is old enough for the translation to be challenged in other ways. The *Heidelberg Disputation* consists of forty theses; the first twenty-eight are theological, and the last twelve are philosophical.¹ Volume 31 includes translations of all forty theses, but it provides the proofs that Luther prepared to explain and support them only for the theological theses—not because the editors discriminated against the philosophical proofs, but because they did not have them. However, twenty-two years later, in 1979, Helmar Junghans published nine of the missing proofs, those for theses 29–37, material that had previously been mostly unknown to modern Luther scholars.

The new proofs make it clear that Grimm's translations of the philosophical theses missed a lot of their meaning. This is a problem not only for the philosophers among us, but also for anyone reading them; because, as this paper will show, an appreciation for the philosophical side of the *Heidelberg Disputation* is of some importance if one is correctly to understand the theological side too. As translated in AE 31, the philosophical theses are not very philosophical. It is easy to get the impression from them that Luther, having concluded the real work of the twenty-eight theological theses, was just trying to fulfill an assignment in which he had no real interest; throwing together some disparate, nontechnical thoughts on the subject; trying to push the buttons of anyone in the audience who liked Aristotle too much—not really *doing philosophy*. In this one-sided environment, interpreters seem inevitably to exaggerate the degree to which the theological theses are opposed to philosophy. For example, Gerhard Forde, in his influential 1997 commentary *On*

¹ Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518): vol. 31, pp. 39, 41, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

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Being a Theologian of the Cross, sees the deprecated “theologian of glory,” as anyone who thinks that philosophy can help him learn about God:

Theologians of glory operate on the assumption that creation and history are transparent to the human intellect, that one can see through what is made and what happens to peer into the “invisible things of God. . . .” We can, that is, figure out something of what God is like by looking at the world he has made and how it works. The “invisible things of God” we can supposedly “see” by this operation are, in Luther’s mind, such things as “virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, goodness, and so forth.” They seem to be a collection of those things humans are to strive for and that find their perfection in God, essences and qualities, both divine perfections and therefore also human goals . . . a glory road, which should eventually lead to God.²

Beginning with the new data from the philosophical proofs and working backward to the pivotal theological thesis 19, I will show that these are bad conclusions from the *Heidelberg Disputation*, misrepresenting Luther’s actual arguments.

Theses 29 and 30, the first two philosophical theses (and not coincidentally the only two whose proofs were published between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries³), do not prepare the reader for much more than what modern interpreters have expected: a broadside against philosophy.

Thesis 29: Whoever wishes to philosophize safely in Aristotle must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ.

Thesis 30: Just as no one uses the evil of lust well unless he is married, so no one philosophizes well unless he is a fool, that is, a Christian.⁴

Grimm takes one small liberty in his translation of thesis 29: “without danger *to his soul*,” in place of “without danger,” or “safely,” as I have translated it, but that does capture Luther’s meaning. Grimm has no trouble with thesis 31 either: “It was easy for Aristotle to suppose that the world was eternal when the human soul, in his

² Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 72–73.

³ “Resolutiones Dvarvm Conclvsionvm In Disputatione Heidelbergensi. D. Mart. Lvtheri. 1518,” in Johann Franz Buddeus, ed., *Supplementvm Epistolarum Martini Lvtheri* (Halle: Orphanotrophium, 1703), 297–298; cf. the introduction to Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518): vol. 1, p. 352, in *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Schriften], 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), hereafter WA.

⁴ “29. Qui sine periculo volet in Aristotele Philosophari, necesse est ut ante bene stultificetur in Christo. 30. Sicut libidinis malo non utitur bene nisi coniugatus, ita nemo Philosophatur bene nisi stultus, id est Christianus” (Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], WA 1:355.2–5). Here and throughout this paper, unless otherwise indicated, the translation of the *Heidelberg Disputation* is my own; it will appear in the forthcoming AE 72.

opinion, was mortal.”⁵ But then there are difficulties. The proof Luther offers for thesis 31 is the second-longest proof in the whole disputation, excepting only the additional proof for thesis 6 that appears at the end in WA 1:365–374 and AE 31:58–70.⁶ It takes up 211 lines in the Weimar Edition. For purposes of comparison, if you add up all the lines devoted to the proofs that appear beneath each of the 28 theological theses, the tally comes to 284, an average of just over 10 lines apiece.

So, by the time we get to thesis 32, the disputation has become technical and precise in ways that Grimm (not having the proofs) was not prepared to appreciate. In thesis 31, Luther writes, “It was easy for Aristotle to suppose that the world was eternal when the human soul, in his opinion, was mortal.”⁷ Then in thesis 32, he writes, “Once it was accepted that there were as many Substantial Forms as composite things, it necessarily also had to be accepted that there were just as many Matters.”⁸ But Grimm translates, “After the proposition that there are as many material forms as there are created things has been accepted, it was necessary to accept that they are all material.”⁹

There are three significant problems with this rendering. First, *substantialis* does not mean “material.” It has to do with independent subsistence, not the presence of matter. And a substantial *form* in Aristotelian metaphysics is specifically the *nonmaterial* part of the substance in question. Second, *composita* are not “created things,” but composite things. The rendering is lexically possible, but it leaches most of the philosophy out of the thesis, and in context, it is clearly wrong, since one of the arguments that Luther offers to prove that Aristotle considered the human soul to be mortal, is this: “Second, according to Aristotle (*Physics*, book 1), a composite is corruptible; and soul and body make up a corruptible continuum or composite, just as matter and form do. It is clear from this that his definition of the soul describes the matter and form of man.”¹⁰ Third, Luther does not say that the end result of Aristotle’s premise is to make all things *materiales* (material); he says it is to postulate a number of *materias* (matters) equal to the number of substantial forms. This intention is clear in the proof that follows:

⁵ Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), WA 1:355; cf. Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:41.

⁶ The additional proof for thesis 6 runs 319 lines by itself.

⁷ “Facile fuit Aristoteli mundum aeternum opinari, quando anima humana mortalis est eius sententia” (Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], WA 1:355.6–7).

⁸ “Postquam receptum est tot esse formas substantiales quot composita, necessario et tot esse materias fuerat recipiendum” (Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], WA 1:355.8–9).

⁹ Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:41.

¹⁰ “Secundo, quod secundum Aristotelem 1 Physicorum compositum corrumpitur, at anima et corpus sicut materia et forma faciunt corruptibile continuum vel compositum; unde et definitio animae exprimit materiam et formam hominis, ut patet” (Luther, *Philosophical Theses of the Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], WA 59:412.6–9).

Second, the definition of matter in book 1 of the *Physics* runs as follows: “Matter is that which is the first substratum[*subiectum*] of every single thing, from which a being comes to be.” Surely this pronouncement holds that *every individual being has its own substratum*, not that all things have the same one.

Third, if it is not so, we will fall back into Plato’s opinion, although he is criticized by Aristotle for his matter, or chaos, in [*Metaphysics* 12.6].¹¹

In other words, Luther argues that Aristotle’s matter is not an undifferentiated universal substratum, but one divided into as many different substrata as there are substantial forms, and therefore as there are composite things. Neither form nor matter can have being apart from the other. By teaching this, Aristotle implied that the human soul could not continue existing once the body-soul composite of a living man had been dissolved by death. This is a clear case where Luther argues philosophically or, rather, as a *Christian* philosopher. The philosophical proofs clarify and correct misunderstandings (such as Grimm’s) on his meaning in thesis 32.

Thesis 34 is another that looks very different in light of the philosophical proofs: “If Aristotle had known the absolute potency of God, he would still [*adhuc*] have maintained that it is impossible for matter to remain unformed.”¹² Grimm translates, “If Aristotle would have recognized the absolute power of God, he would accordingly have maintained that it was impossible for matter to exist of itself alone.”¹³ *Adhuc* does not mean “accordingly,” though; it means “thus far, as yet; still.” And even more tellingly, Aristotle *does* maintain that it is impossible for matter to exist alone, without form. We saw that in the proof for thesis 32, and we see it again here, in different terms: “First, it is clearly the case that in creatures, it is impossible to have actuality [*actum*] without potency, as all declare. But matter is potency, and form is actuality, so they cannot be separated.”¹⁴ And notice a third problem with Grimm’s translation: *potentia Dei* would seem at first glance to mean simply “the power of God,” but here, just two lines later, *potentia* is one half of the

¹¹ “Secundo, quia sic explicat definitio materiae 1 Physicorum: ‘Materia est id, quod est primum uniuscuiusque subiectum, ex quo aliquid fit’. Quae oratio certe id habet, quod uniuscuiusque rei est suum subiectum, non omnibus idem. Tertio, nisi sic tunc relabimur in opinionem Platonis, qui tamen reprehenditur ab Aristotele in sua materia seu caho . . .” (Luther, *Philosophical Theses of the Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], WA 59:420.11–16).

¹² “Si Aristoteles absolutam Dei cognovisset potentiam, adhuc impossibile asseruisset materiam stare nudam” (Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], WA 1:355.12–13; 59:422.11–12).

¹³ Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:41.

¹⁴ “Primo sic patet, impossibile est actum esse sine potentia in creaturis, ut omnes dicunt. Sed materia est potentia, forma vero actus, ergo non possunt separari” (Luther, *Philosophical Theses of the Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], WA 59:422.13–14).

metaphysical pair *actus et potentia* (“actuality and potency”) and thus is not “power,” but “potency,” which is power of a kind, but passive, requiring *actuality* to shape it and make it real. Here Luther postulates that Aristotle’s error with respect to the human soul must also adversely affect his doctrine of God. He says, “If Aristotle had known the absolute potency of God,” because according to Aristotle, God is the prime mover, *Actus purus*—pure actuality, with no potency at all. And even if Aristotle had come to recognize this as a half-truth, and had attributed to God absolute potency as well, his insistence that the two could exist only in composition with each other would have turned the power of God into necessity instead—into potential that he had no choice but to realize—and would have made *even of him* a soul that could not exist apart from its body, the cosmos. Luther is doing real philosophy here, something you would never guess from the rendition in AE 31. We have seen two examples of it, and there are more. The philosophical proofs make a great difference in our understanding of the philosophical theses.

Now, do they have a similar impact on our understanding of the *theological* theses? We would not expect the impact to be so great, so determinative to their very *translation* as the proofs are for the philosophical theses, which they directly explain. But they were composed along with the theological theses as part of the same document and defended as part of the same academic exercise. They are two halves of the same whole, so they should shed light on each other.

Until now, this exchange has been almost entirely a one-way street. Gerhard Forde summarized the philosophical theses briefly as having been “aimed at the Aristotelian premises undergirding a theology of glory.”¹⁵ There is some truth to this characterization, but it is far too general; Luther was offering specific examples of *how* Aristotle’s unchaste use of philosophy went wrong, not critiquing the foundations of “theology of glory” as a whole. And it is hardly just Forde who takes this one-way approach. Vitor Westhelle, writing in the 2014 *Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, develops the same idea at greater length:

This distinction [between the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross] became the sharpest expression of Luther’s rejection of the dominant canons of rationality that have been accepted as ancillary partners of theology (*ancillae theologiae*) guiding and ordering the theological discourse. . . . The theses of the Heidelberg Disputation, the *locus classicus* of the *theologia crucis*, conclude with an often overlooked section on philosophy, which explains what those accepted canons were for the contemporary reader. The frequent polemical references to Aristotle (in all but three of the twelve theses) are

¹⁵ Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 105.

figurative expressions or metonymies for speculative and rational theological constructs in general.¹⁶

Again, Luther is not critiquing “dominant canons of rationality,” but very specific conclusions that Aristotle did not share even with most medieval Aristotelians, let alone with other philosophers. Not only does Luther do robust and serious philosophy in the last third of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, but he also praises several philosophers by name—not only in the philosophical proofs, but also even in the *theses*, which should have been a clue. He praises Plato in theses 36 and 37, Pythagoras in thesis 37, Parmenides in thesis 38, and Anaxagoras in thesis 39. And with Plato, he goes *far* beyond just giving him a good word in passing. He states in thesis 36, “Aristotle wrongly criticizes and mocks the philosophy of Platonic ideas, which is better than his own.”¹⁷ Grimm’s translation is good evidence that he did not believe he was really translating *philosophical* theses: “Aristotle wrongly finds fault with and derides the ideas of Plato, which actually are better than his own.”¹⁸ He not only misses the reference to Plato’s famous theory of the forms in the phrase “*Platoniarum idearum . . . philosophiam*,” but he also is willing to translate *sua* as if it were a plural referring to Aristotle’s generic “ideas” in order to make the mistranslation work. The word *philosophy*, to which the *sua* actually refers, does not even appear in his translation.

In the proof for thesis 36, Luther goes into explicit detail:

That Plato’s philosophy is better than Aristotle’s philosophy is plain from the fact that Plato always strives for divine and immortal things, separate and eternal things, insensible and intelligible things. Because of this, he held that particular, inseparable, sensible things should be forsaken, since they could not be knowable on account of their instability. Aristotle, being opposed to him in every way, mocks those separate and intelligible things, and ascribes them to sensible and particular and entirely human and natural things. . . . Second, this kind of form is just whatness,¹⁹ and is the whole of his metaphysics, and thus he has destroyed all the ideas already, putting in their place his own forms and whatnesses, conjoined with matter, and mocking and denying ideas separate from matter, as is clear in many passages. . . . But that Plato’s ideas are separate is plain from blessed Augustine, Iamblichus, and all the Platonic

¹⁶ Vítor Westhelle, “Luther’s *Theologia Crucis*,” in Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and Lubomír Batka, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 156–157.

¹⁷ “*Aristoteles male reprehendit ac ridet Platoniarum idearum meliorem sua philosophiam*” (Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], WA 1:355.16–17; 59:424.5–6).

¹⁸ Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:42

¹⁹ Or *Quiddity*.

disputants. And so it is clear that Aristotle's philosophy crawls in the dregs of corporal and sensible things, while Plato is occupied with separate and spiritual things.²⁰

Far from taking an indiscriminate wrecking ball to the philosophical knowledge of God, Luther here tells you why Plato's philosophy makes a better preparation for Christian theology than Aristotle's, and in the process, he strays into territory that Forde and quite a few others would immediately flag as "theology of glory." Namely, he demeans "the dregs of corporal and sensible things" in comparison with Plato's spiritual, separately-existing ideas.

As if that were not shocking enough, he proceeds in thesis 37 and its proof to offer a glowing description of the argument in Plato's *Parmenides* for the philosophically-derived, ultimately-transcendent-*and*-immanent conception of God that the Neoplatonists later called "the One Beyond Being":

Thesis 37: The imitation of numbers in beings is ingeniously maintained by Pythagoras, but more ingeniously is the participation of ideas maintained by Plato.²¹

The second part is clear from Plato in the *Parmenides*, whereby a most beautiful argument he draws out that first One and Idea until he takes all things away from it and leaves it to be nothing. Then he goes back and clothes that same One with all things, until nothing is left in which that One is not, and there is nothing that has being unless the One is implanted within. In this way, it is beyond all things, and nevertheless within all things, just as blessed Augustine also contends in *On True Religion*, bk. 1. But that peculiar participation and separation of the One, or of Idea, can be understood better than it can be expressed, and understood of number better than [of how] it truly is.²²

If Luther engages so approvingly in this kind of theological philosophizing in the very same disputation in which he starkly distinguishes the theology of the cross and the theology of glory, then he must not think of it as theology of glory at all, at least until it takes priority over the revelation of the cross. And if it is not theology of glory to philosophize in this way, then quite a few of his modern interpreters have misunderstood what he meant.

Now, it must be acknowledged that Luther went after Aristotle so ruthlessly because Aristotle was "the Philosopher" in the high and late Middle Ages, the one

²⁰ Luther, *Philosophical Theses of the Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), WA 59:424.8–14, 425.1–4, 425.6–9.

²¹ "Imitatio numerorum in rebus ingeniose asseritur a Pythagora, sed ingeniosius participatio idearum a Platone" (Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], WA 1:355.18–19; WA 59:425.11–12).

²² Luther, *Philosophical Theses of the Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), WA 59:426.3–10.

invoked almost every time one of his contemporaries forced divine revelation to fit a shape devised by human cleverness. If there had been a rash of *Platonically*-inspired bad theology in the early sixteenth century, I have no doubt he would have written different theses that were not so favorable to Plato. And that is not just guessing on my part. Two years later, in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, we see him dismiss the authority of the ancient author Dionysius the Areopagite (modern scholarship calls him Pseudo-Dionysius, but Luther had only suspicions to go on) because “in his work *Mystical Theology* . . . he is more Platonizing than Christianizing.”²³ If he had been in a different intellectual milieu, surrounded by Eastern Palamites instead of Western Thomists and Ockhamists, we might have seen a lot more of *that* kind of criticism. Christian doctrine can be warped by Plato too; Aristotle has no monopoly on that. But it is clear that Luther in 1518 finds Plato *more* amenable to the task, *closer* to the truth than Aristotle. The theses in which he criticizes Aristotle are *not* just “figurative expressions or metonymies for speculative and rational theological constructs in general,” as Westhelle claims.²⁴ Luther has specific complaints about Aristotle and his influence on the theologians of his day, complaints that expressly do not apply to all philosophers or to philosophy in general.

This leads us to take another look at what Westhelle calls “the epistemological implications of the scandal of having a crucified God,”²⁵ the broad claim we meet in his article, in Gerhard Forde, in Oswald Bayer,²⁶ and in most treatments of the *Heidelberg Disputation’s* ramifications for philosophy²⁷ that Luther here rejects the traditional role of philosophy as a prolegomenon to theology, and along with it any number of traditional doctrines, including but not limited to divine impassibility, immutability and eternity, and the whole category of theodicy. How could Luther do that with the theological theses and then turn right around and say such effusive things about the beautiful and all-fruitful immanence and transcendence of the Platonic One?

²³ Luther, *Babylonian Captivity* (1520), WA 6:562.9–10; cf. AE 36:109.

²⁴ Westhelle, “Luther’s *Theologia Crucis*,” 157.

²⁵ Westhelle, “Luther’s *Theologia Crucis*,” 156.

²⁶ E.g., *Theology the Lutheran Way* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 26–27, especially as it connects to his discussion that follows on pp. 28–32.

²⁷ An example is Heino O. Kadai, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross,” *CTQ* 63, no. 3 (1999): 180: “In Thesis 19 Luther speaks primarily to scholastic theologians when he warns that true theologians should know better than to try to speculate about God on the basis of the created world and historical data. The ‘invisible things of God,’ His eternal power and deity, cannot be properly derived from a knowledge of things. Luther clearly rejects the Thomistic type of natural theology. But he does not reject a ‘natural’ knowledge of God. As far as Luther is concerned, to move from below to above, from creation to the Creator via *analogia entis*, is not sound theology.”

And when we take this second look, we find that the philosophical theses are not the only ones mistranslated in AE 31. The heart of the *Heidelberg Disputation's* supposed attack on philosophy's ancillary (handmaidenly) usefulness for theology is thesis 19, which in AE 31 reads, "That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20]."²⁸ Readers working with this translation will think that Luther is denying that the invisible things of God *can* be perceived "in those things which have actually happened." Surely that is the import of "as though." But Luther did not write "as though." The translator inserted this key phrase without any warrant from the Latin. Luther's actual words are "*Non ille digne Theologus dicitur, qui invisibilia Dei per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspicit.*" ("He is not worthily called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God, understood through those things that have been made."²⁹) The single Latin participle *intellecta* ("having been understood") has been expanded into "as though they were clearly perceptible."

If Luther had used a verb of deeming, such as *opinatur* or *habet*, instead of *conspicit* ("looks at, perceives, observes, contemplates"), then such a rendering might be lexically defensible. Yet, not only does he use a simple observing verb, but also it is the same verb found in the Vulgate version of Romans 1:20. Grimm's translation offers this reference along with thesis 19, so we can tell that Luther's allusion was not missed entirely, but it is by no means clear in AE 31 that more than half the text of the thesis is simply a quotation of that verse:

Thesis 19: *Non ille digne Theologus dicitur, qui invisibilia Dei per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspicit.*

Rom. 1:20, Vulgate: *invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur sempiterna quoque eius virtus et divinitas ut sint inexcusabiles.*³⁰

²⁸ Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:40.

²⁹ For comparison and by way of a second opinion, here is Alister McGrath's translation of the same thesis: "Anyone who observes the invisible things of God, understood through the things that are created, does not deserve to be called a theologian" (*Luther's Theology of the Cross* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1985], 202).

³⁰ The proof for thesis 19 quotes more of this verse (Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], WA 1:361.34–36; cf. AE 31:52). Notice how the first two items in the following list are the two mentioned by St. Paul: "*Porro invisibilia Dei sunt virtus, divinitas, sapientia, iustitia, bonitas, etc.*" ("Furthermore, the invisible things of God are power, divinity, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, etc."). The translation in AE 31:52 ("virtue, godliness") does not reflect this.

Since Luther quotes word-for-word, we should not try to translate thesis 19 without reference to the meaning of those words in their original context. And what is St. Paul's argument in Romans 1:20?

¹⁹ For **what can be known about God is plain to them**, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, **have been clearly perceived**, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For **although they knew God**, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools. (Rom 1:19–22)³¹

The only original thought Luther contributes in thesis 19—the whole substance of thesis 19, in other words—is that the people St. Paul describes in Romans 1:19–22 do not qualify as worthy theologians. The first sentence of Luther's brief proof drives this home further: "This is clear through those who were like this (*tales*), and were nevertheless called 'fools' by the Apostle in Romans 1."³² And the people described in Romans 1 explicitly *do* perceive the invisible things of God, understanding them from "the things that have been made."

So, thesis 19 in AE 31 is not just mistranslated; it is mistranslated in such a way as to state exactly the opposite conclusion that Luther assumes about the question of whether the invisible things of God *can* in fact be understood and contemplated "through those things that have been made." Luther assumes along with St. Paul that they *can* be, but that sinners are so wrongheaded that they *still* go astray, even where they have known better, proving themselves to be hopeless fools, unworthy theologians. The tendentious insertion of the phrase "as if they were" has caused a great deal of mischief in English-language Luther scholarship since 1957.³³ In fact,

³¹ From The Holy Bible, English Standard Version' (ESV), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Emphasis added.

³² Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), WA 1:361.34–36; cf. AE 31:52.

³³ Alister McGrath avoided this by translating the thesis himself (see n. 32 above), but did not call attention to the problem the way he did with Grimm's rendering of thesis 20 (see n. 39 below), probably because he had not consulted the philosophical proofs, and his own emphases fit well enough with the mistranslation. German scholarship has obviously not been hindered by the American Edition. It has also responded to the publication of the philosophical proofs with much greater alacrity than English scholarship, with a German translation published in 1989 (Gerhard Ebeling, *Lutherstudien*, vol. 2 [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989], 472–489) and (among other studies) an in-depth commentary by Theodor Dieter in 2001 (*Der junge Luther und Aristoteles: Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Philosophie* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001], 431–631).

the Gerhard Forde quotation from near the beginning of this article,³⁴ comes from his commentary on thesis 19. It begins, "Theologians of Glory operate on the assumption that creation and history are transparent to the human intellect, that one can *see through* what is made and what happens so as to peer into the 'invisible things of God.'"³⁵ Many readers of these words have doubtless been perplexed (as I was, the first time I read them) by the fact that Forde seems to be contradicting St. Paul on the subject, and worse, that Luther seems to support him. Until now, we have blamed this on Luther, or more likely, ceded the point in confusion. Let this be done no longer.

The man who runs afoul of thesis 19 does not deserve to be called a *theologian*, it is true. Aristotle is such a thinker—and so is Plato, despite all the approving things Luther says about him in the philosophical theses—but he might still be a good *philosopher*. And if he, unlike the semi-Pelagian scholastics in Luther's crosshairs at Heidelberg, should "become thoroughly foolish in Christ" (thesis 29), humbly accepting "the visible rearward parts of God as observed in suffering and the cross" (thesis 20),³⁶ he can then proceed to "philosophize safely in Aristotle" (thesis 29), or preferably in Plato (theses 36–37), and still "deserve to be called a theologian" (thesis 20). What else could Luther mean in thesis 30 when he likens a *Christian* use of philosophy to the *good* use that a married man makes of lust? There is, in fact, a good use.

³⁴ See above, p. 236.

³⁵ Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 72.

³⁶ As translated by Alister McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 202. McGrath finds Grimm's translation of thesis 20 to be as bad as I find thesis 19. "Thesis 20 of the Heidelberg Disputation is ineptly translated in the standard American edition of Luther's works. . . . This translation is linguistically and theologically indefensible: *posteriora Dei* is there incompetently and incomprehensibly rendered as 'the manifest things of God,' which is a flagrant mistranslation that makes no sense within the context of Luther's emerging 'theology of the cross'" (204).