CHARLES J. MILLER CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR’S AWARD

ARTICLES

RICH GRAY, “A Way of Seeing the World”: Synthesizing Art and Belief in Walker Percy’s Novels

DOUGLAS GROOTHUIS, Do Theistic Proofs Prove the Wrong God?

DENNIS W. HIEBERT, The McDonaldization of Protestant Organizations

JOSEPH P. HUFFMAN, Faith, Reason, and the Text: The Return of the Middle Ages in Postmodern Scholarship

DAVID L. ROZEMA, Faith in the Heart of Darkness: What Conrad Intended with “the Intended”

TIMOTHY SHERATT, Rehabilitating the State in America: Abraham Kuyper’s Overlooked Contribution

RUTH LESSL SHIVELY AND THOMAS LESSL, The Abolition of Value in the Classroom: Some Observations from the Language Arts

CLARENCE WALHOUT, Literature, Christianity, and the Public Sphere

ELLEN WEBER, Learning and Christian Faith: Natural Partnerships within a Multiple Intelligence Teaching Approach (MITA): Problems and Possibilities

REVIEWS

BOOK NOTES
Statement of Purpose. The Christian scholar, experiencing the redemptive love of God and welcoming the enriching perspective of divine revelation, accepts as part of his or her vocation the obligation not only to pursue an academic discipline but also to contribute toward a broader and more unified understanding of life and the world. This vocation therefore includes the obligation to communicate such an understanding to the Christian community and to the entire world of learning.

The Christian Scholar’s Review is intended as a peer-reviewed medium through which Christian scholars may cooperate in pursuing these facets of their tasks. Specifically, this publication has as its primary objective the integration of Christian faith and learning on both the intra- and inter-disciplinary levels. As a secondary purpose, this journal seeks to provide a forum for the discussion of the theoretical issues of Christian higher education. The Review is intended to encourage communication and understanding both among Christian scholars, and between them and others.

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Articles should follow The Chicago Manual of Style. Additional information for contributors will be found in the first issue of each volume. All manuscripts should be sent to the Editor, Don W. King, Christian Scholar’s Review, Montreat College, Box 1267, Montreat, NC 28757. Two clear copies of each manuscript should be sent; manuscripts will be returned to the author only if accompanied by return postage. All material should be double-spaced, including notes. Correspondence with the editor may be by e-mail: dking@montreat.edu. Correspondence regarding book reviews should be directed to Hans Bynagle, Whitworth College, Spokane, WA 99251-0901.

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**BOOK NOTES**
Announcement of Theme Issues and Calls for Papers

*Christian Scholar’s Review* is pleased to announce a theme issue for 2001, planned for CSR XXX:4 (Summer 2001) and will be entitled “Christian Scholarship in the Twenty-first Century: Prospects and Projects.” What will be the fate of Christian scholarship in the twenty-first century and/or the third millennium? What are its major challenges and how might they be met? What are its primary pitfalls and how might they be avoided? Does Christian scholarship have a future? What bodes well for it and what bodes ill? As we stand on the cusp of a new century and a new millennium what projects ought Christian scholars undertake? Are there new directions, methods, principles by which it should work? Proposals for articles for this theme issue should focus on specific prospects and/or projects for Christian theology in the new century. For example: an essay devoted to overcoming racism as the most important project for Christian scholarship in the twenty-first century would be welcome as would an essay devoted to arguing that the prospect for Christianity as a unifying worldview is seriously challenged by technological developments (such as cloning) on the horizon. In any case, manuscript proposals should be focused, bold, constructive and integrative. They should focus on specific pressing problems and/or prospects for Christian scholarship in the new century.

Proposals should be sent to guest editor Michael Beaty, Professor of Philosophy, Institute for Faith & Learning, Baylor University, P.O. Box 97270, Waco, Texas, 76798-7270. They should be approximately 250 to 500 words in length. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for response. All proposals for articles for the 2001 theme issue must arrive no later than September 1, 2000. For further information contact the guest editor at Michael_Beaty@baylor.edu or at the address above.
Charles J. Miller
Christian Scholar’s Award:
Paul K. Moser

The publisher and editors of the Christian Scholar’s Review are pleased to announce the fourteenth recipient of the annual Charles J. Miller Christian Scholar’s Award, Paul K. Moser, author of “Jesus on the Knowledge of God” which appeared in the theme issue, Jesus and the Academy, CSR XXVIII:4 (Summer 1999), pages 586-604. Dr. Moser’s article was selected by a panel of four jurors of his peers who carefully and thoughtfully read each article published in volume 28; in their estimation “Jesus on the Knowledge of God” best achieved the goals of Christian scholarship set by CSR.

Paul K. Moser is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Loyola University, Chicago. He earned his B.A. at Covenant College and M.A.’s at Western Kentucky University and Vanderbilt University. Dr. Moser took his Ph.D. at Vanderbilt. He is the author and editor of several books including Empirical Justification (1985), Knowledge and Evidence (1991), The Theory of Knowledge: A Thematic Introduction (1998), and Philosophy after Objectivity (1999). His works in progress include an anthology, Divine Hiddenness, co-edited with Daniel Howard-Snyder, God in Focus, and the Oxford Handbook of Epistemology, forthcoming in 2001. His most current writing project concerns personal knowledge of God and the role of agape in such knowledge. In addition to publishing numerous articles and making dozens of presentations at professional conferences, Dr. Moser has served on the faculty of Loyola University, Chicago, since 1983 and made significant contributions to university life. He is married and has two daughters.

Dr. Moser’s award-winning article examines the view of Jesus on the nature of human knowers and on the nature of human knowledge of God. He contends that Jesus regards people not as mere physical entities but as morally accountable agents, capable of spiritual communion with God as gracious father. He also shows that Jesus regards proper knowledge of God as filial, so that spiritual communion with God as Father requires filial knowing of God, involving trust, love, prayer, thanksgiving, and obedience toward God as Father.

One juror praised Dr. Moser’s article because it was “so well researched and clearly presented.” In addition, one of the editors of the Jesus and the Academy theme issue wrote, upon learning of Dr. Moser’s selection, that “his was a brilliant essay,
one of the most interesting philosophical essays we have published in years.” “Jesus on the Knowledge of God” is a model of the kind of insightful, interdisciplinary Christian scholarship CSR is eager to support. We congratulate Dr. Moser and thank him for his contribution.
How do novelists describe their visions of life so that they seem believable to readers? How do novelists who have experienced great changes in their beliefs represent those changes convincingly? How is the need to describe life artistically in a novel balanced with the need to show the author’s beliefs? In other words, how does the need for blending art and belief affect the writing of a novel? In this essay I want to examine Walker Percy’s synthesis of his orthodox Christian faith and his writing of novels, showing that Percy harmonized his faith and his career by deriving them from God’s grace. To Percy, his faith was “a way of seeing the world,” a means of viewing life from a divine perspective and writing about life as a pilgrimage of the prodigal returning to the father. Percy sought to merge his commitment to artistic beauty with his religious belief in his novels, and he achieved this union in The Moviegoer, The Last Gentleman, and The Second Coming.

Percy (1916-1990) was trained as a physician, but he contracted tuberculosis while doing autopsies. During his three years of treatment, he embarked on a spiritual search that culminated in 1947 in his decisions to enter the Catholic Church and to fulfill the vocation of a writer. Percy’s new career began in 1954 with the publication of intellectual essays on existentialism and on language. After two unsuccessful attempts at publishing a novel, Percy prevailed in 1961 with The Moviegoer, the winner of the National Book Award. Five novels followed: The Last Gentleman (1966), Love in the Ruins (1971), Lancelot (1977), The Second Coming (1980), and The Thanatos Syndrome (1987). In addition, three books of Percy’s essays have been published: The Message in the Bottle (1975), Lost in the Cosmos (1983), and a posthumous collection, Signposts in a Strange Land (1991).
Throughout his career Percy indicated that orthodox Christianity was the main source of his writing. In 1968 Carlton Cremeens asked Percy about the “deep sense of estrangement” that Percy’s protagonists feel. In the course of a long response, Percy noted, “Alienation, after all, is nothing more or less than a very ancient, orthodox Christian doctrine.” In 1971 Percy spoke about the liabilities of being a Christian writer: “The so-called Catholic or Christian novelist nowadays has to be very indirect, if not downright deceitful, because all he has to do is say one word about salvation or redemption and the jig is up, you know.” “The jig” seems to be Percy’s wish to awaken non-Christian readers to their need for God. From this passage I imagine Percy performing a novelistic tightrope act in which he balances on the rope and the readers are in the grandstands. If Percy could write a novel perfectly, neither preaching religion nor burying it in subtlety, he would reach the far platform to the readers’ eager applause. Percy exhibits here a great fear of disappointing readers with inartistically rendered religious themes; yet at the same time he continues to insist that expressing a Christian viewpoint is his chief motivation in writing. Herein lies his success: he always sensed an aesthetic struggle between picturing Christianity and hiding it when shaping his novels by his beliefs. Ultimately, Percy committed himself to balancing the artistic shape of his novels with a Christian outlook on life, for his religious faith synthesized his view of life with his view of the novel.

In 1971 John C. Carr asked Percy about his “will toward theism,” a demure probe into the religious. Percy replied, “I think my writings reflect a certain basic orientation toward, although they’re not really controlled by, Catholic dogma.” Further on, Percy elaborates about the edge his faith gives him: “So, to me, the Catholic view of man as pilgrim, in transit, in journey, is very compatible with the vocation of a novelist . . .” The modern hero’s sense of alienation, the character’s sense of cosmic loneliness, that either there is no God or God is so far away that he may as well not exist—this anguish Percy claims to understand; it is the result of the character’s estrangement from an all-wise God who entered human history to end that estrangement.

In 1974 Barbara King asked Percy about his Catholicism, and he replied with a

3Conversations, 28.
4Conversations, 41.
5Conversations, 63, 64.
pointed assertion about the value of his faith: “I’m a convert and I really didn’t begin to write until after I became a Catholic. I would agree with Flannery O’Connor that my Catholicism is not only a hindrance but a help in my work . . . it’s a way of seeing the world” [Percy’s emphasis]. In other words, Percy’s faith offered an explanation of why human problems undermine human happiness so frequently; it also offered a hope for the human future. The metaphor, “a way of seeing” implies that Christian faith enlightens the imagination, clarifying the turmoil of living, and giving prophetic assurance to the novelist. To Percy “the vocation of a novelist” was a call from God to be a witness of the gospel in his novel-writing.

Further insight into Percy’s belief God wanted him to write novels that represented the pattern of his own conversion came in 1997 in an interview published by Korean professor Sr. Park Jeong-Mi, R.S.C.J. Park had traveled to Louisiana in 1983 to meet Percy, and her interview has just recently appeared. Park pointedly sought to get at the religious source of Percy’s vision of life, and Percy answered her both with illumination and characteristic diffidence. In this instance, Percy recounted his own conversion just like he often did before: the tuberculosis, the reading of existentialists, and joining the Catholic Church. Then Percy said: “If you ask, ‘What happened?’, I am not sure you can ever explain these things. In the last analysis it is not something you do, it’s a gift—a grace.” In Percy’s own case, he believed his illness and forced convalescence were part of God’s gift of faith to him. Here lies a reason for Percy’s evasiveness about Christian conversion: to him, conversion is not just a human act of agreeing with an ideology; rather, it is also a gift from God, a gracious act of his love to help the pilgrim believe. Percy thought that representing a conversion experience unequivocally in a novel would not “mean anything to the reader.” Park then asked Percy if he might see himself as a “newsbearer,” someone who tells others the gospel: “can you be an apostle as a novelist?” Percy’s firm response: “You cannot. You cannot do it.” Not satisfied with Percy’s denial of the role of newsbearer, Park probed further, “I was wondering whether there’s a certain reluctance in speaking about . . . positive religious experience. I was wondering whether that was deliberate.” Percy replied, “Very much so.” Percy was so sensitive to being discounted as a religious propagandist that he consistently downplayed his faith in interviews; they show a novelist who believes God has called him to write about his faith, but without being perceived as preaching. Percy felt that proclaiming his beliefs would repel rather than invite readers; he would have to integrate Christianity into the form of his novels.

As he reached 70 and had achieved renown for his writing, Percy spoke increasingly about grace. In 1986 and 1987 he mentioned grace in four interviews, bringing the theme up himself each time, usually in describing his conversion experience: “It’s a gift from God . . . I don’t know why he chooses certain people to give the gift of faith to.” To another interviewer he answered the question of his

6Conversations, 88.
conversion with, “The technical term is grace, the gratuitous unmerited gift from God.”
Looking back over his life and especially over his success at his vocation of Catholic novelist, Percy seems to have felt that God had been working in his heart like he had pictured God working in his characters’ hearts, leading him to forsake his agnostic beliefs and turn to the biblical God. After his final novel Thanatos Syndrome appeared and Percy had begun treatment for cancer, he elaborated on the theme of grace: “I suppose through God’s grace I am a Catholic . . . . I read Scripture one day and discovered that the Lord had founded a Church on a man named Peter . . . . There is no way I can explain it. Because in the end, faith is a gift. It’s a grace, an extraordinary gift.”

The language Percy uses here puts the work of salvation squarely on God, enlivening the prodigal, as Percy certainly was, putting a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

Percy’s Essays on Religion

Confirmation that Percy longed to represent life through the eyes of his faith comes from his early essays, which he collected in 1975 in The Message in the Bottle. In the title essay of this collection we are to imagine a shipwrecked sailor combing the beach for messages in bottles from his homeland. His loneliness drives him to read ardently any messages, hoping one will tell him how to get home. Percy wonders, does the castaway realize he has been shipwrecked, or is he so well-adjusted to life on the remote island that he ignores the messages from his homeland? Will the castaway more readily recognize the news he has been waiting for if it is brought to him, not in a bottle, but by a persevering, authentic messenger? “Well then, the castaway will, by the grace of God, believe him.”

Percy suggests through his parable that his novels are messages in bottles, like the gospel, from across the seas, that is, from God. In addition, as in the Park interview, Percy uses the revealing term “grace.” The castaway will accept as valid the message that has been borne from across the seas, as God’s grace enables him. Percy states that some islanders will not receive the news; they do not see themselves as castaways but as natives of the island. When presented with the gospel message, they ignore it.

In his essays and interviews, Percy frequently came back to the issue of the Catholic view of mankind as a castaway or wayfarer. He keenly felt a dichotomy between the non-Christian world that he loved as a young adult and the church, which he adopted in his early thirties. His life had been revolutionized by his relationship with God through the Catholic Church, and he longed to appeal to other pilgrims with his discovery.

Percy pointedly described himself as a Christian novelist in “Notes for a Novel

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9More Conversations, 185.
10The Message in the Bottle, 149.
About the End of the World.” Percy begins “Notes for a Novel” with a discussion of writers such as Dostoevsky and Sartre who warn that the modern world has lost the view of humans as responsible, valuable individuals. Then Percy points to the aptness of orthodox Christianity in diagnosing this philosophical illness: “the novelist . . . is one of the few remaining witnesses to the doctrine of original sin, the imminence of catastrophe in paradise.” Here Percy daringly asserts his religious purpose in writing; “the novelist” he characterizes in this essay is himself, prompted by empathy for the lost and launching into a novelistic projection of the worldview that energizes him. Continuing this theme, he professes, “I do not conceive it my vocation to preach the Christian faith in a novel, but as it happens, my worldview is informed by a certain belief about man’s nature and destiny which cannot fail to be central to any novel I write.” So Percy’s beliefs are “central to” his novels, but he does not “preach” them—art and belief are balanced when they are integrated in the work of fiction. I see Percy here disclaiming an unbalanced aesthetic in which belief weighs down the novel with sermonizing. Rather, Percy aims at describing “man’s nature and destiny” as his faith understands them. “Notes for a Novel” underscores Percy’s cognizance of being a prophetic writer, both the commitment to render artistically his pictures of life, and the calling from God to write about a worldview that can save a postmodern prodigal.

Percy’s Correspondence with Kenneth Laine Ketner and Shelby Foote

Further corroboration of Percy’s seeing himself as a novelist whose beliefs have informed his art has appeared in the last three years. Exciting primary information on Percy has been published, letters between Percy and two readers of his novels. Kenneth Laine Ketner, a philosopher who specialized in Charles Sanders Peirce’s work on linguistic signs, was an admirer of Percy’s novels and especially of Percy’s language essays. In 1984 Ketner began to send Percy essays on Peirce that Ketner had written or liked, and Ketner even taught a special interest course on Peirce and Percy at Texas Tech. Throughout these letters, the correspondents disagree on the priority of Christian orthodoxy: insists Percy, “It is orthodox to believe these two statements: 1) God entered into a unique covenant with the Jews, 2) God was uniquely incarnated as a man in history, Jesus Christ. To deny this, as in Arianism, that J.C. was only a good man, the best, is unorthodox.” Sensing that Ketner doubts Christianity’s exclusivity, Percy repeatedly seeks to bring Ketner to embrace the Christian “kerygma,” but all Ketner can profess is, “Open your heart . . . and you will have direct contact with God.” Mostly because he is writing about philosophy and not Percy’s novels, Ketner’s letters take on a rational, distant tone; still, Ketner bares his soul enough to reveal that he is fully satisfied with

12Message, 100, 111.
13Message, 117.
a universalist faith, the belief that people of all religions have access to God and will be saved. For his part, Percy cannot resist the opportunity to explain to Ketner the credibility of the Christian faith and to exhibit in letters what his novels do so well: to picture how a character exhausts a secular outlook and turns, submissive-ly, to Christianity.

Shelby Foote, Percy’s life-long friend and fellow novelist, initiated a similar exchange of letters between Walker Percy and a supportive but religiously skeptical reader. These letters began in 1948 and continued until Percy died in 1990. Foote never shared Percy’s confidence in orthodox Christianity, although he did sense that a shadowy God was available for the devout. He often lectured Percy on religion, cautioning him about the liability of identifying with the “hypocritical” Catholic Church:

And that is what I find most regrettable about your going into the Church—you wouldn’t dare go beyond. There is something terribly cowardly (at least spiritually) about the risks to which you wont expose your soul. Pushed, youll [sic] admit that doubt is a healthy thing, closely connected with faith; but you wont [sic] follow it . . . . I seriously think that no good practicing Catholic can ever be a great artist; art is by definition a product of doubt; it has to be pursued.\footnote{Jay Tolson, ed., \textit{The Correspondence of Shelby Foote & Walker Percy} (New York: Norton, 1997), 20. Tolson retained Foote’s mannerism of omitting apostrophes.}

To Foote, art and belief didn’t easily mix; he saw belief as a threat to art, and thus felt belief was best ignored. Foote allowed for representation of spiritual lostness, but hesitated to see faith as being relevant, preferring to doubt God’s goodness. Foote now and then restated his conviction that alliance with organized Christianity was harmful to a novelist, aiming his criticism at the Catholic Church, but leaving room for faith in God, albeit a distant God.

Two years later, upon realizing that Percy had no intention of dropping divine grace from his attempts at novel writing, Foote offered Percy suggestions for being more successful as a Catholic novelist. This comment came in 1950 when Percy was writing his first novel, which was never published: “Let him [Percy’s protagonist] come upon a drunken evangelist . . . . he preaches a wild crazy sermon that, behind the wildness, really shows your poor bastard the way . . . . it should also give a peek at salvation.”\footnote{\textit{Correspondence}, 36.} Foote understood what Percy ultimately practiced: he created heroes who search for religious meaning and never completely lose their agnostic identity, resulting in most of the other characters not realizing that they are seeking God.

Foote deeply respected Percy as a fellow writer, Mississippian, college friend, and explorer of truth. As the years passed, he began to admire Percy’s faith; Percy’s life stabilized around the church, and Foote’s lurched from success to loss without being anchored in a comforting harbor. Eventually, Foote came to think of Percy as a writer to spiritual vagabonds like himself, and Foote urged Percy to stick to his
Catholic calling, even though Foote had not yet adopted a consecrated faith himself. For example, Foote was unimpressed by Graham Greene’s *The End of the Affair*; Foote thought a book by a Catholic should offer more solutions for life’s problems: “There should be some really positive writing . . . . Let him [Greene and by implication, Percy] write of faith as coolly, as detachedly as Maupassant wrote of sex. Then I think you’d have a true religious novel.” Foote seems to say that writers must withhold their eagerness to sermonize in a novel, weaving religious faith into the story in an organic, realistic manner.

**Religious Themes in *The Moviegoer* and *The Last Gentleman***

If the search for the Christian gospel occupies a central place in Percy’s novels, where is it? Typically, Percy’s novels treat biblical faith with great subtlety; one may suspect that a character has come to faith, but without prayer or confession. In *The Moviegoer* Binx Bolling clearly narrows his search to a pursuit of God, as in the middle of the novel at his mother’s fishing camp, when he wakes up in the night and writes in a notebook, “Starting point for search: It no longer avails to start with creatures and prove God. Yet it is impossible to rule God out . . . . But I am onto him.” Binx’s philosophical search to end “everydayness” and “the malaise” seems to be focused on God.

At the end Binx reassures his half-brothers and sisters that they will see their dying brother Lonnie in heaven. Does this comment show that he has been regenerated? If so, when and how? He may be acting like a Christian, but his discovery of God is uncertain, even at the end; Binx is much more a searcher than a finder. Blending these two stages of faith, searching and finding, Gary Ciuba in *Walker Percy: Books of Revelations* applies the theme of eschatology to Percy’s protagonists. According to Ciuba, when Binx tells his half-brothers and sisters that they will see their brother Lonnie in heaven, Binx exhibits a faith in God’s consummation of Lonnie’s history: “Binx’s personal apocalypse finds its fulfillment in an eschatological faith.” Is this faith the same as faith in the biblical God? I see Binx’s groping faith at the end of *The Moviegoer* as a necessary beginning of a prodigal’s pilgrimage back to the father. Here at the beginning of his novelistic career, Percy established a paradigm for his fiction: the protagonist would undertake a lucid

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17Correspondence, 59.
After the success of *The Moviegoer* Percy grew bolder about describing the work of God’s grace, but always blending grace into a realistic story. For instance, in *The Last Gentleman* a youthful Will Barrett searches for a father figure to tell him the answers to life’s questions. He comes to trust the reluctant and suicidal Sutter Vaught, but Sutter is more a skeptic about false answers than a guide to reliable ones. Finally, when Sutter’s teenage brother Jamie is dying of cancer, the question of repentance and God’s forgiveness enters the novel. To satisfy Val Vaught, the sister of Sutter and Jamie and a devoted Catholic, Will summons a priest to the hospital bed. Father Boomer certifies a deathbed conversion, much like Lord Marchmain’s in *Brideshead Revisited*:

Do you accept the truth that God exists and that He made you and loves you and that He made the world so that you might enjoy its beauty and that He himself is your final end and happiness, that He loved you so much that He sent His only Son to die for you and to found His Holy Catholic Church so that you may enter heaven and there see God face to face and be happy with Him forever.20

In this, the penultimate scene in the novel, doctrinal themes are explicitly depicted, though ambiguous as they relate to Will, who is left bewildered as to how God’s grace typically comes to the lost. An orthodox Christian worldview is described, but neither Will nor Sutter yet believe it. Edward J. Dupuy believes the alert reader can find in Percy’s novels “a good measure of expression in what they do not say.”21 This silence at the end of a philosophical search is a Percy trademark, his effort at keeping theological themes in the foreground, but drawing readers into the search for God’s grace, rather than moralizing. Exemplifying the novel’s inductive effect on readers, Cleanth Brooks expresses surprise at Percy’s indirection in this novel: “I confess that when I first read *The Last Gentleman*, I was thrown back hard upon myself by what didn’t happen . . . . my interest in the novel went far beyond the mere satisfaction of the outcome of the plot.”22 I take Brooks’ comment to mean he expected Will to make a religious commitment. In this sense, *The Last Gentleman* asks readers to imagine Will following Jamie’s baptism with his own commitment, but the novel ends before Will makes any definite decision about belief, leaving readers with an understated emphasis on conversion and baptism. Secular life is satirized, and Christianity is considered, but just when a step toward conversion looms, Will and Sutter hesitate outside of grace.

In an alternate reading, Lewis Lawson ties Will’s state of mind at the end of *The Last Gentleman* to Kierkegaard’s “religion of transcendence”: by achieving an intersubjective relationship with Sutter, Will has reached the end of his search,

20*Last Gentleman*, 403.
even though he does not come to Christian faith along with Jamie.\(^2^3\) Lawson downplays the strong theological nature of the scene, placing greater emphasis on the putative father-son relationship. But Gary Ciuba, using the framework of Scripture, believes that “both Will and Sutter seem ready to be reborn . . .,” ready, as prodigal sons, to come to themselves and return to their heavenly father.\(^2^4\) Yet The Last Gentleman ends without confirmation of what Will or Sutter feels. The ambiguity of the final scene—Will chasing Sutter down the street away from the hospital—masterfully poses the question: Is a search for God necessary? It seems to be necessary for Will, and thus the novel induces readers to ask the question for themselves.

**The Search for God Extended: The Second Coming**

By looking at The Moviegoer, The Last Gentleman, and The Second Coming as a group, we see unfolding a progression in Percy’s aesthetic. Each novel takes the protagonist further into an explicit search for God, but always without definitively finding God. In The Second Coming Will Barrett returns as protagonist, twenty years after the action of The Last Gentleman and after he has enjoyed a successful Wall Street career, retired early, and suffered the loss of his wife Marion. The time is right for Will to resume the search he had begun two decades ago, and he does it by making a dangerous wager with God: Will descends into a cave and plans to wait there until either God reveals himself or Will dies.\(^2^5\) But a toothache ignites his passion to survive, and he tumbles through a previously unknown ventilation opening into Allison Huger’s greenhouse.

This series of rebirth images accompanies Will and Allie’s new life together, and the novel closes with little further mention of Will’s quest for spiritual answers to life’s perplexities, ones which drove Will’s agnostic, stoic father to suicide. However, as Will prepares to marry Allie, the presence of the retired Episcopal priest, Father Weatherbee, spurs Will’s thoughts back to his search: “Is she a gift and therefore a sign of a giver? Could it be that the Lord is here, masquerading behind this simple silly holy face? Am I crazy to want both, her and Him? No, not want, must have. And will have.”\(^2^6\) Most commentators see this final narrative passage as taking the form of the emphatic search for God that appears in The Moviegoer and The Last Gentleman. As Bernadette Prochaska explains, “Although he is not always aware of the reality, a constant presence of Grace, God’s promise, ‘I will never forget you,’ has been his salvation throughout his journey.”\(^2^7\) Prochaska finds


\(^{2^4}\) Ciuba, 130.


an implied providence present in *The Second Coming*’s conclusion, where Will for a
time forgets about God, but God keeps blessing Will, first with rescue, then with
healing, and finally with a helpmate.

Other interpreters object to the way Will’s search dwells on God’s providence;
to them, the action seems forced, allegorically following Percy’s non-fiction
descriptions of his beliefs. For instance, Kieran Quinlan in *Walker Percy: The Last Catholic
Novelist*, indicts Percy for presenting an orthodox Christian conclusion to Will
Barrett’s spiritual search: “Indeed, it seems as if it is the author himself rather than
Will who is determined to keep the religious question in the foreground.” To
Quinlan, the narrator’s description of Will’s risky search constitutes an authorial
intrusion into his story. I sense that Quinlan confuses narrator and author, as if
Percy were writing an autobiographical sketch, not a fictional work that he in-
vented. In this casual interpretative technique, Quinlan slights “matters of form,
style, humor, tone, satire, characterization, the open-endedness of the novels’ con-
clusions, and most importantly, the spiritual struggles of the protagonists,” sug-
gests John F. Desmond. In fact, all of Percy’s novels about searches for God are
repugnant to Quinlan: “Finally, the protagonist comes to accept the Christian mes-
gage in a way that . . . strains credulity.” But as I noted above, Percy’s protagonists
only seem to “accept the Christian message.” They actually only seek God. In Percy’s
novels discussed in this essay, the protagonists never pray; never submit to sacra-
ments such as baptism, confession, or the Eucharist; and never formally join a
Christian community. The young Will Barrett of *The Last Gentleman* never fully
trusts God; for twenty years he attends a church to please his wife, but finds him-
self just as spiritually lost at the beginning of *The Second Coming* as he is at the close
of *The Last Gentleman*. Quinlan’s statement that the protagonists’ search for God
“strains credulity” implies that religious conversions don’t happen any more, a
highly subjective conclusion.

Quinlan excels in recognizing the Christian themes in Percy’s vision of life.
However, he believes that Percy is “a writer engaged in an illusory spiritual pur-
suit . . .” because Percy saw his novel-writing as his response to God’s call. Such
a conclusion again reveals Quinlan’s skepticism concerning the authenticity of
Christian faith and the reality of believers sensing God calling them. As a result of
his insight into Percy’s theological themes, Quinlan has the unusual role of search-
ing the beach for news from across the sea, but then throwing the bottle back into
the surf because it is not the message he wanted to read. Quinlan’s response to *The
Second Coming* shows that even when belief is integrated into a novel’s picture of

University, 1996), 163.
of Revelations*, which offers theological readings of Percy’s novels that maintain the novels’
literary integrity.
31 Quinlan, 13.
Conclusion: Cunning and Secrecy of a Christian Writer

Successful novelists neither parade their beliefs in their reflections of life nor repress them, but they recognize that belief makes the random events of life meaningful. In Percy’s words, “the so-called Catholic or Christian novelist nowadays . . . has to practice his art in cunning and in secrecy and achieve his objective by indirect methods.” From this and similar passages, I conclude that Percy accepted, even took pleasure, in blending orthodox Christianity into his novels, aiming at a broad audience which held a pluralism of beliefs, and gauging his success from the feedback he got in reviews, interviews, letters, book sales, conversations, and scholarly criticism. Percy’s fictional pictures of life bear the image of their creator’s faith, for “In becoming a writer as in professing Catholicism,” claims Alfred Kazin, “he declared himself born again, born to a new understanding.” Percy’s career illustrates that when a novelist’s commitment to excellence in art springs from his faith in God, high achievements can result. Just as God graced Percy with faith to believe the Christian gospel, so God called him to represent the contemporary story of the prodigal, a castaway who hunts along the beach for a novel about a home across the seas.

32 Conversations, 41.
Do Theistic Proofs Prove the Wrong God?
By Douglas Groothuis

Introduction

In the “memorial,” a fragmentary record of a profound experience of God, Blaise Pascal contrasted “the God of philosophers and scholars” with “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” or “the God of Jesus Christ.” The former is but a philosophical abstraction; the latter is a living reality of which Pascal testifies, not simply a warranted conclusion. Pascal summarizes his experience with one word, “Fire,” and elaborates by saying: “Certainty, certainty, heartfelt joy, peace.” He further differentiated the God of the philosophers from the God of his fiery experience by saying “He [God] can only be found by the ways taught in the Gospels.”

Theistic proofs are certainly not in view. Even if one would assent to classical theistic proofs, this would not yield the biblical deity. As Pascal affirms in Pensees:

Even if someone were convinced that the proportions between numbers are immaterial, eternal truths, depending on a first truth in which they subsist, called God, I should not consider that he had made much progress toward his salvation.

The last phrase is paramount for Pascal. Here, unlike the passages on God’s infinity that introduce the wager argument, he seems to grant that some kinds of natural theology might yield the existence of a metaphysically ultimate being, but that such proof, in itself, lacks the religious force required to transform one into a devout and obedient Christian. One convinced by the argument from immutable truth—and Pascal probably has Father Mersenne or Augustine in mind—need not, for instance, view the Christian doctrines of original sin or the Incarnation to be

Blaise Pascal and other thinkers have often claimed that “the god of the philosophers” is too abstract to refer to the God of living faith. The entity argued for through natural theology is so far removed from the God of revelation that the former cannot serve as a metaphysical preface for consideration of the latter. Douglas Groothuis argues against these claims: if natural theology can philosophically establish several attributes of God, this would be a religiously worthy achievement, even though revelation is still required to fill out the fuller picture of God’s character. Mr. Groothuis is associate professor of philosophy at Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary.
truths. Rather, if the argument is successful, God’s existence is deduced from the existence of eternal truth, but not all of these truths need be those of orthodox theology. Such a God may be a divine mathematician, but not much more. Pascal goes on to say: “The Christian’s God does not consist merely of a God who is the author of mathematical truths and the order of the elements.”3 This “God,” Pascal avers, is too abstract and too impersonal to be a compelling object of spiritual consecration.

Pascal’s fundamental worries about the sub-Christian object of natural theology have been voiced by Christian theologians and philosophers throughout the centuries. These thinkers—such as Tertullian, Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and John Hick4—join Pascal to argue that the kind of entity argued for by the various forms of natural theology falls far short of the living and personal Deity of biblical revelation. As such, these proofs or arguments5, even if philosophically successful, do little if anything to substantiate the biblical position, because the “God of the philosophers” has so little (if any) affinity with the living Lord of Christian faith.

In light of the recent renewed interest among philosophers in theistic arguments, this kind of criticism is important to discuss, since its truth would render even the best argument (or collection of arguments) religiously inadequate or even misguided. I believe Pascal’s objection highlights the theological limits of any natural theology, but that he is, nevertheless, essentially misguided in claiming that the enterprise of natural theology is defective in principle. A close scrutiny of Pascal’s arguments will, I believe, help disclose the inadequacies of his objection.

1. The God of the Philosophers

Pascal’s overall argument against the “God of the philosophers” from the Pensees can be reconstructed as follows: (1) The biblical God is not an abstract being or general metaphysical category, but a personal deity with specifiable and particular attributes; (2) The God of philosophy, derived from natural theology, is an abstract being that lacks the specifiable and particular personal attributes necessary for Christian theism; (3) Therefore, the biblical God and the God of philosophy cannot be identical; (4) Because of 3, natural theology is not a legitimate enterprise to derive knowledge of the (non-abstract) biblical God. Even philosophers who find theistic arguments compelling or at least plausible admit that the classi-

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2Ibid., 449/556. The first number is the Lafuma enumeration of the fragments; the second is the older Brunschvicg system.
3Ibid.
4Hick’s position will briefly be discussed below.
5Recent discussions of natural theology have distinguished a theistic proof (as a demonstrative argument) from a theistic argument (a compelling but less than demonstrative case). For the purposes of this paper, the distinction is moot because in the case of both theistic proofs and arguments the object of the argumentation is philosophically derived—and this is the factor that bothers Pascal and others.
cal arguments taken singly or conjointly do not demonstrate the existence of a God possessing all of the important attributes of God as given in revealed theology. Elements of the divine character essential and indispensable to Christian theism—such as the Trinity or the Incarnation—are not deducible through philosophical argument alone (although they may be rendered more intelligible or coherent through philosophical analysis). St. Thomas Aquinas readily admitted that theistic argumentation, what he called “the philosophical sciences,” must be supplemented by revelation for any adequate view of God and, further, for any hope of attaining salvation.7

Along these lines, Richard Taylor, having presented cosmological and design arguments for God’s existence, admits that his theistic conclusions hardly “amount to any sort of confirmation of religion” because they are “metaphysical and philosophical considerations having implications of only a purely speculative kind” that “imply almost nothing with respect to any divine attributes, such as benevolence.”8

Perhaps Taylor is being too theologically modest. If his arguments succeed, he has proved this: (1) God exists as a causally necessary being and who thus supports the contingent cosmos;9 (2) God exists as the designer of our cognitive equipment who renders them generally reliable for reasoning and observation.10 This being would be the only such being to possess causally necessary existence or self-existence (aseity). This accords well with Christian theism’s view of God as the supreme existent who sustains the universe. Taylor’s philosophically derived deity is also like the Christian God, because both are viewed as a cosmic designer.

These two qualities, contra Taylor, surely are part of a larger cluster of essential “divine attributes,” classically understood. But these attributes, while necessary for the Christian view of God, are not sufficient to establish God’s moral character (“benevolence”) or any specific intentions toward humanity. They say nothing of the Trinity or of the Incarnation or of any way of salvation. Taylor himself seems to rest content in something less than Christian theism when he concludes Metaphysics by recommending that one seek to understand “what Spinoza meant by the intellectual love of God.”11 This shows that a philosophically derived deity

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6In addition to the elements of monotheism discussed below, I take Christian theism to mean the belief in one God who exists in three co-equal and co-eternal persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is also taken to be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnibenevolent, as well as having incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ for the purpose of human redemption. Theological debates on the precise definitions of all these theological terms need not be addressed for the purposes of this paper, although my understanding of Christian theism does rule out the Process theology of some thinkers (especially those significantly influenced by Alfred North Whitehead) who identify themselves with the Christian tradition despite their redefinition of key Christian doctrines about God.7

7See Summa Theologica, 1a, 1, 1.


9Ibid., 99-110.

10Ibid., 110-116.

11Ibid., 123.
may be worthy of assent and some wonderment, but may fail to evoke the worship required by a spiritually vigorous monotheism. Whether this less than orthodox view is necessarily or even likely the conclusion for those who argue philosophically about God will be taken up below.

2. Peter Geach on Abstract Natural Theology

Without referring to Pascal directly, Peter Geach attacks the idea embraced by Pascal that the God of natural theology is too abstract to be identical with the “true and living” God of revealed religion and religious belief. Geach finds this view confused. He argues that abstract inferences can single out concrete referents in certain situations; and if this is so, there is no reason to disqualify natural theology from referring to the God of Scripture simply on the basis that natural theology can yield only an abstract entity that lacks some of the essential attributes of the God of biblical revelation. His project is not to construct a cogent natural theology but to justify this kind of project as free from any intrinsic theological deformity.

To make his point about abstract reference and concrete referents, Geach uses an example from Sherlock Holmes’ investigation of a mysterious death. Imagine that Holmes deduced from available evidence both the existence of a murderer—that the death in question was a homicide—and some of the murderer’s characteristics. This is a rather abstract notion of the murderer in the sense of being general; it is not a specific or personal description. The description is abstract in that the characteristics of the murderer are ones that many people share. The description fails to pick out one particular person, as would that person’s fingerprints and social security number.

But suppose the police then arrested a man with the general characteristics deduced by Holmes and found other “confirmatory proofs of his guilt.”12 Geach says, “It would occur to nobody, I imagine, to distinguish between the abstract murderer of Sherlock Holmes’ deductions and the real live murderer raging in his cell.”13 In other words, the two kinds of reference would, nonetheless, have a common referent.

To return to the issue at hand, Geach’s claim seems to be that abstract reasoning—or reasoning that infers the existence of a subject that can only be described through the use of rather general references—need not exclude the discovery of a specific and personal subject of that reasoning. He seems to be arguing that a rather abstract description will fit a specific case under certain circumstances, such as when the murderer is apprehended. But he notes that other “confirmatory proofs” are required to establish properly the identity of the particular man as the murderer. These evidential factors are presented in addition to what Holmes has deduced and so involve evidence compatible with, but also beyond the scope of, his original inference.

13Ibid.
Do Theistic Proofs Prove the Wrong God?

To anticipate a distinction later made by Geach in connection with natural theology, the inference that there is a murderer means that someone or another occupies the title, position, or status as “the murderer” (as opposed to there being no murderer because the death was accidental or suicidal). A particular person is the murderer, but we do not yet know which person has the status or claims the position as the murderer, even though we have a few leads as to what kind of person it is. Whoever it might be, “murderer” is not his or her proper name. Before the “confirmatory proofs” are found, any number of people could conceivably occupy the title or position of murderer, just as several baseball players could bat in the cleanup position for their team in the opening lineup.

This situation of identifying a title or position that someone (we know not who) occupies as a murderer differs from another context in which we are acquainted with a “nice” person whom we later discover is a murderer. In this kind of case we know the particular person before knowing that he has the title or position of being a murderer.

Geach does not develop his provocative analogy any further, but we can do so without, I think, departing from his essential insights: Natural theology tells us in the abstract that there is a God with certain attributes who can be discovered with the assistance of certain other “confirmatory proofs,” just as Holmes’s murderer is discovered through this means. When these additional arguments are given, we find that the specific God discovered is one and the same as the God of abstract natural theology, just as the abstract description of the murderer corresponds with the actual apprehended murderer. To stay with Geach’s analogy, the additional arguments, whatever they might be, would have to show that God possessed certain attributes neither proved by, nor incompatible with, the project of natural theology alone.

This confirmatory project of proof could be difficult, more difficult, in fact, than in the case of the murderer. If natural theology yields a necessary being or designer or a maximal being, is this the God of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam or some monotheistic God distinct from these traditions (there is, for instance, a theistic strain in Hinduism) or of any historical tradition? Geach does not take this up, apart from his comments on how far one can stray from a proper theological description without describing the wrong God. Historically speaking, most natural theologians have only claimed to establish philosophically a monotheistic deity whose specific identity is not exhaustively determined through their procedures. Aquinas ends his discussion of the theistic proofs with the famous conclusion “and this all men call God,” but he grants that natural theology cannot prove the Trinity or creation ex nihilo. Room must be left for revelation and other types of argumentation to fill out the picture.14 Natural theology tells us that there is a God and that

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14 The rational defense of the Christian worldview has traditionally been divided into two categories: natural theology and Christian evidences. The latter addresses specific historical claims such as the historical reliability of the Scriptures. Of course, the categories overlap in many interesting ways.
God has certain attributes. But it is left to us to inquire as to which of the theological contenders, if any, is the specifically genuine deity.

Unlike the case where Holmes’s deduction leads the authorities to pursue the purported murderer, the natural theologian might stop at the deduction of a generic deity and investigate the matter no further. If this is all that natural theology can establish, why go beyond it? There is clearly a moral imperative to catch a murderer, but is there such an imperative to transcend generic theism and decide between competing monotheisms?

In the case of the murderer, a suspect is apprehended through descriptions given by Holmes. Then, through “confirmatory proofs,” the suspect becomes a convict. In the case of the God of natural theology, we have at least three suspects, and the matter of convicting or confirming proof is very involved indeed, more involved than what is required to identify the murder suspect. Viewed in this way by filling out Geach’s analogy, these “confirmatory proofs”—whatever they may be—have substantial epistemic force in identifying the true God.\(^{15}\)

The cases are analogous in that some kinds of “confirmatory proofs” are needed; but a disanalogy appears in considering the complicated nature in discerning just what this confirmation would involve. Holmes gives an abstract description of a human being. His description is abstract in that it could refer to any number of people because it is general. But as Geach says, no one will have any reason to differentiate the “abstract murderer” from the “real live murderer” raging about in the cell. Yet this assertion confuses matters. Strictly speaking, there was, in this historical scenario, no “abstract murderer” (to use Geach’s term), only a concrete murderer who, when his existence was first deduced by Holmes, was referred to in an abstract manner.\(^{16}\) The reference was abstract because of a lack of knowledge by Holmes that rendered his speculative reference a general one. At that point, the question of the existence or non-existence of a murderer was solved, but the exact or specific identity of the murderer remained unsolved. To use our previous distinction: we know that someone holds the position or title of “murderer”; we do not know exactly who holds that title. I cannot now remember the name of the queen of the Netherlands; but I know that there is someone who occupies that position or title. Holmes knew that the murderer was a human being of some stripe, and he knew what kind of creatures human beings are, even if he could not give a specific description of the particular person.

What worries thinkers like Pascal is that natural theologians not only make abstract references to God (that refer to God in philosophical, and not devotional, terms) but actually may refer to God as an abstract being—as a kind of Cosmic Principle or Source lacking concrete personality or goodness or the ability or will-

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\(^{15}\)Pascal himself offered several different kinds of arguments for the truth of the Christian faith in his *Pensees*. However, he did not invoke natural theology as traditionally understood.

\(^{16}\)Given my construal of the situation we need not discuss the deeper ontological question of whether or not there are abstract objects or entities.
Do Theistic Proofs Prove the Wrong God?

In the original works of the Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal, there is a significant discussion about the nature of God. We know that the murderer is some kind of person, but do we have this knowledge of God, given the restricted scope of natural theology? Pascal explains the nature of the God in which he is interested in a section contesting natural theology. He emphasizes people’s subjective response to the biblical God that would not necessarily be entailed by abstract deities:

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of the Christians is a God of love and consolation: he is a God who fills the soul and heart of those whom he possesses: he is a God who makes them inwardly aware of their wretchedness and his infinite mercy: who unites himself with them in the depths of their soul: who fills it with humility, joy, confidence and love: who makes them incapable of having any other end but him.17

Pascal does not elaborate on the exact nature of his concern with the limits or misleading aspects of natural theology, but we can develop it, nevertheless. The God of natural theology might fall short of the biblical deity in at least three different ways.

First, natural theology might claim to establish the existence of a God that is more of a metaphysical principle than a personal being. This would contradict the orthodox claim that God is a thoroughly personal being who cannot be subsumed under any higher impersonal philosophical category. H. P. Owen notes that theists “differ from thinkers such as Sankara, Spinoza, Hegel, and F. H. Bradley for whom personal images of God are intellectually immature depictions of a suprapersonal Absolute.”18 For theism, God is personal all the way down. Proofs for an impersonal deity would not assist the theistic cause; they would contradict it.19

Second, natural theology could claim to establish the existence of a God that is the source of the universe but maintain that the question of whether God possesses any distinctly personal attributes (such as a moral disposition, reflective self-awareness, and a capacity for volitional agency) transcends its philosophical prowess. This is roughly Richard Taylor’s position as explained in his book Metaphysics.

Third, natural theology could argue that it demonstrates the existence of a personal source of the world but cannot tell us very much about what God’s personal characteristics might be. This is similar to an archaeologist who unearths a piece of ancient pottery that he discerns was made by a human, not by natural processes or by any animal; but he cannot determine very much as to what the creator of the pottery was like.

The first instance is the only case in which natural theology directly threatens Pascal’s theology. The last two cases of natural theology do not necessarily undermine any Christian notion of God; they simply underdetermine it.

17Pascal, 449/556.
19Although Pascal does not mention the problem of theological impersonalism specifically, he could have been concerned that Aquinas’ proofs, relying as they do on Aristotelian notions, might only prove an impersonal Unmoved Mover, and not the “I am who I am” of the Scriptures. This is a legitimate concern, whether or not Pascal had Thomas in mind.
Geach anticipates the problem of defining the attributes of the God of natural theology. He raises the difficulty of the natural theologian who, on the one hand, correctly proves the existence of God with attributes ABC, which are solely predicable of God, but who, on the other hand, predicates to God attributes XYZ, which God does not, in fact, possess. This, according to Geach, is the error of Spinoza, who falsely believed that “God produces all possible creatures, by a natural necessity of fully manifesting his infinite power.” In this case, Geach contends, the natural theologian has proved the existence of the true God (there is only one), but his conception of God is partially incorrect.

A critic can question Geach’s claim that the true God may be proved by those who significantly misdescribe this God. He might think that such an understanding is too charitable and wonder whether the deity derived can really be considered the true God. He might ask: Which deity has been deduced (by Spinoza or any other erring natural theologian)—the real God or another one? Can Geach accommodate the distressing contention that natural theology may “prove” false deities? Put another way, if the procedures of natural theology allow for conflicting theistic conclusions, then, by *reductio ad absurdum*, something is wrong with those procedures. It could be that the procedures are intrinsically defective.

Geach attempts to dissolve this problem by more carefully articulating what is at issue. The question, he thinks, is not “Which God has been proved to exist—the true God or some other?” Rather, the proposition “A God exists” does not predicate existence to one of several God-candidates (one real, the others illusory), but instead “affirms that something-or-another has Divine attributes.”

The situation could be put another way: the divine attributes ABC are uniquely predicated of X—whatever else X may be (in addition to ABC). Geach gives an example. Someone correctly believes that the President of France exists, but is mistaken as to who exactly holds the office—he might even think it is occupied by someone whose very identity was a muddle, such as Poincare, who was thought by a student to be an eminent statesman as well as a mathematician. Geach says:

And similarly, there is nothing to stop a natural theologian, or anyone else, from at once truly believing or even knowing that the Divine attributes belong to something, and making a false ascription of those attributes to an inferior or phantom object.

Geach seems to be saying that one might truly believe or know that divine attributes exist but falsely believe that, for instance, the Hegelian Absolute (which does not exist) is the philosophically discovered God that possesses them. This is

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20Geach, 114. Geach’s description of Spinoza’s God as “producing creatures” may be somewhat misleading, since the God of Spinoza was really God/nature, where God is not ontologically distinct from nature and so does not produce distinct creatures. But this is a minor point, since it is clear that Spinoza’s theology is at odds with orthodox monotheism at many pivotal points. See the following discussion on this.

21Ibid.

22Ibid., 115.

23Ibid.
what Geach likely means by “a phantom object,” in this case “the God of the philosophers.” On the other hand, if one takes the universe to be identical with God and so possessing divine attributes (pantheism), Geach could say that the universe in this case is an “inferior object” because, although it does exist (unlike the Hegelian Absolute), it has no divine attributes—attributes that only inhere in a God who transcends the universe and who is not identical with it.24

But perhaps Geach could also refer to a situation where a partially erring, but theistic natural theologian might correctly ascribe the divine attributes of omniscience and omnipotence and omnipresence to a being whom, the natural theologian wrongly supposes, also possesses an attribute not truly possessed by the extant Trinitarian God, such as the absolute and undifferentiated unity ascribed to Allah in the Koran. In this case of false unitarian ascription, the partially erring natural theologian’s concept of God is “inferior” to that which Geach takes to be the correct concept of the existing Christian God. However, the theological offense would not be as severe as ascribing divine attributes to the nonexistent Hegelian Absolute (“a phantom object”) or the existent but nondivine universe (“an inferior object”). Geach might describe the non-Trinitarian idea of Allah as an “inferior object,” but the order of theological offense would not be of ascribing divine attributes to an entity that possessed no divine attributes (such as the created universe). Such “phantom” and “inferior” objects taken to possess divine attributes raise the question of just what comprises the divine attributes. The Hegelian Absolute is metaphysically supreme, providential, and omnipresent (all attributes of the Christian God), but not a personal being (as is the Christian God). The same is true of the universe in a pantheistic view, although the purported divine object differs somewhat from the Hegelian Absolute.25

These reflections on Geach’s discussion help establish an important differentiation. Although he does not put it this way, Geach is drawing a distinction between (1) the word “God” as an office, title, position or set of capacities that is owned by one entity or another and (2) “God” as a proper name that can refer to only one person (a more rigid designator). This echoes the distinction previously made between “the murderer” as a position and the occupant of that position. To use another example, any number of people could be the president of the United States. However, all the recent presidents, by virtue of their office, have certain things in common such as being the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, being over thirty-five years of age, being limited to two terms in office, etc. Therefore, although someone could know that the presidency was occupied by someone, he could be mistaken as to who that person was. But one could not be so confused as to think that the presidency was occupied by a thirty-one-year old who was elected for a ten-year term. The American Constitution forbids this.

24I owe the germ of these insights to a perceptive comment by an anonymous reviewer.
25Hegel’s metaphysic is usually taken to be panentheistic (the Absolute encompasses the world but is not identical to it because it also transcends it) as opposed to pantheistic (the world and God are identical).
Geach states that only God can “draw the line” where a natural theologian stops believing in the true God because of the admixture of false predicates. It is certainly true that we often err in our beliefs about other people—many of whom we know quite well—without being mistaken about their essential identity. I know my wife truly, but I might hold a few false beliefs about her—if my past experience can serve as a guide. None of these errors have been serious enough to discredit my opinion of her completely, as would be the case if I discovered to my horror that she was an escaped serial killer. The discovery of her criminality would show my belief in her as a decent person to be radically erroneous and would reveal that I did not really know her at all. My wife, qua loving person through and through, does not exist.

But surely some determinate divine attributes must be properly identified if the claim can be sustained that the partially erring natural theologian has proven and identified the real God at all. Here Geach appears to be somewhat careless. Upon closer inspection, his example of Spinoza is not a case where substantial theistic attributes are properly identified but muddied up with additional attributes not possessed by the real God (who Geach understands to be the Christian God). Properly understood, Spinoza’s God is the one infinite substance that includes all existence (monism). He says in Proposition 14 of Book One of his Ethics, “There can be, or be conceived, no other substance but God.” This substance is, in his words, Deus sive natura, (God or nature), a pantheistic deity not ontologically distinct from nature; it is impersonal as well, as the previous quote by Owen noted. Therefore, Geach should say that Spinoza fundamentally misidentified what the “divine attributes” actually are because Spinoza includes important attributes that are antithetical to classically essential theistic attributes—even if he retains some attributes compatible with Christian theism, such as self-existence and omnipresence. This case is similar to the one where someone says that he knows that the present President of the United States is thirty-one-years old. Geach should recognize that Spinoza goes beyond misidentifying who occupies the title of God; he misunderstands what the title itself stipulates.

Geach’s distinction works better in cases where basic theistic attributes are defended by natural theologians, but, nevertheless, other attributes are falsely ascribed in addition to the necessary theistic core. In Geach’s case as a Roman Catholic believer, he could say that the Jewish natural theologian Maimonides as a monotheist correctly ascribed to God the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, but incorrectly denied the Trinity. Consider these six criteria necessary for any classical monotheism: (1) There is only one God (not many) who is; (2) Knowable through some means (not ineffable); (3) Personal, possessing a moral disposition, reflective self-awareness, and capacity for volitional agency (not impersonal); (4) Worthy of adoration, devotion, and worship (not indifferent); (5) Distinct from the world (not pantheistically or monistically identical with it); (6) Continuously involved in it (not deistically detached). Maimonides affirms 1-6. Spinoza unambiguously affirms only 1, 2 and 6; in any event, he falls outside of
theism, as the leaders of his synagogue rightly concluded before excommunicating him for heresy. Richard Taylor unambiguously affirms only 1, 2, and 5; he may accept 3 and 6; but he rejects 4 outright, a point crucial to Pascal. Similar criteria checks can be made for various natural theologians.

Despite the limitations delineated above, if natural theology could establish 1-6, it would at least narrow the theological field considerably because these divine attributes, if proved, would eliminate pantheism, polytheism, deism, and dualism as metaphysical challengers to theism—even though it would still permit a variety of monotheisms. If this was the case, additional argumentation or investigation could concentrate on which of the theistic religions is the true religion. Natural theology would have done some important prefatory work, albeit limited in scope. Even if the “God of the philosophers” ends up being abstract, at least some other abstract notions would be eliminated from theistic competition.

3. Is the Biblical God Abstract?

Pascal’s first premise that the biblical God is not abstract should also be assessed. The premise requires some unpacking, considering the various meanings of the word “abstract.”

First, the word abstract may concern general or basic descriptions lacking certain content. This is the matter taken up by Geach’s murderer example, and we need not discuss it more.

Second, another use of “abstract” that Pascal is concerned about, I think, is talk of God that is abstract in the sense of being philosophically abstruse and impersonal. In Thomistic language, to refer to God as “pure act” (*actus purus*) is abstract in that it says nothing about any personal traits such as love, mercy or justice; it also takes some thinking to understand just what *actus purus* means because we must master the Aristotelian categories of actuality and potentiality.

However, this objection to abstraction as abstruse language and impersonal can be rebutted through a consideration of different types of complementary description. God, as presented in biblical materials, is not described philosophically, but as a particular divine being with specifiable attributes often evidenced in relation to human beings. For instance, the living God of the Hebrews is never referred to as “aseic” or as “omnicompetent” (abstract epithets) used by some philosophers and theologians. Nevertheless, the biblical God, according to orthodox thought, possesses attributes that, when distinguished from particular claims about historical intervention, are abstract in the sense of being metaphysical or somewhat abstruse.

To say that God is self-existent or the maximally greatest being or the First Cause is to speak in abstractions, since we are not speaking of particular divine actions or intentions but of rather arcane (but not unintelligible) metaphysical concepts. Yet as understood within the theistic traditions, these abstract attributes do apply to the particular and personal deity described in Scripture. In that way, God
does possess attributes that can legitimately be seen as abstract (from one philosophical angle at least), but these abstract descriptions do not necessarily override or undermine the distinctively personal attributes of God.

John Hick seems to agree with Pascal’s concern when he speaks of the difference between the God of religion and the God of the philosophers. He says that the Hebrew-Christian God “was not a proposition completing a syllogism, or an abstract idea accepted by the mind, but the reality which gave meaning to their lives.”

Of course, no orthodox theist, philosophically inclined or otherwise, thinks that God is a proposition. God may be provable through an argument that concludes with the proposition “God exists,” but that is a different matter than God being a proposition. Caricature aside, Hick introduces a different aspect to the notion of an abstract God when he says that this intellectual view of deity is merely “accepted by the mind.” This might be called intellectualism, which means a purely cognitive recognition of certain theological facts that fails to affect existentially one’s innermost spiritual life.

Hick’s description does seem to fit the orientation of the biblical writers, but there need be no dichotomy between the philosophical and the devotional approaches to God. There is no necessary contradiction between believing God’s existence (or at least certain things about God) can be proved through argument and believing that this same God, understood from within a religious tradition, can give meaning and inspiration to one’s life. Also, as mentioned above, certain attributes of God can be “abstract” in the sense of being metaphysical qualities, such as aseity, and also be possessed by a living and personal God who acts in history. We should remember that Anselm’s rather abstruse ontological argument was situated—without artifice, I believe—within a prayer.

Natural theology offers arguments for a God who is self-existent, or the maximally greatest being, or the designer, or the source or the moral law, etc. Successful proofs provide an abstract framework for the divine being, but they do not fill in the specifics about that being’s character. Even an ontological argument—which, if successful, establishes a maximally great being—does not specify just what the good may be or how we should imitate it. For instance, if it is good to be both loving and just, how then are these two goods both maximized in the divine nature? Revealed religion answers this question by appealing to the doctrines of the Incarnation and atonement, but the ontological argument does not answer it because of its formal and abstract character. Nevertheless, this abstraction does not logically preclude the claim that God is a personal being who can be accurately, if inadequately, described in an abstract manner—and who could harmonize in his being both love and justice.

4. Conclusion: Natural Theology Unfettered

All in all, Pascal’s premise 1 is not clearly true since the God of religion can be understood in certain abstract ways without necessarily suffering any spiritual diminution in the philosophical process. Natural theology will, by its very nature, fail to demonstrate all the attributes of the Deity described in Scripture, but this need not cripple the endeavor. This conclusion frees the aspiring natural theologian from at least one theological fetter often applied to his metaphysical endeavors.27

27I would like to thank Professor Robert T. Herbert and an anonymous reviewer at Christian Scholar’s Review for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.
The McDonaldization of Protestant Organizations
By Dennis W. Hiebert

The practice of prefixing various nouns with “Mc” in reference to the McDonald’s fast food chain has become almost as common as their Big Macs. Though talk of McJobs, McUniversities, or McDoctors is no longer amusing, such talk remains a deliberate musing. The McDonald’s corporation has become a metaphor for the present age that has infiltrated daily language; a simple prefix will provocatively attach all that the corporation represents to any topic. Given McDonald’s economic success and resultant esteem, it is ironic that, while “Mc” connotes diverse meanings relative to its stem, the prefix nevertheless consistently carries a critical tone and conveys a negative affect. Use of the prefix “Mc” consistently transforms neutral words into pejorative terms.

At one extreme, the prefix is attached to notions as boundless, public, and objective as current human culture and society. Barber’s impassioned argument in Jihad Versus McWorld is that the planet is falling precipitantly apart and coming reluctantly together at the very same moment. Jihad is the holy struggle or “centrifugal whirlwind” of parochial retribalization, whereas McWorld is the “centripetal black hole” of global homogenization. Both possible futures are bleak. McWorld breaks down national borders, tying everyone together with technology, ecology, communications, and commerce, while simultaneously eroding community, identity, and independence. McWorld does not require social justice and equality, only orderly universalizing markets for standardized goods.

At the other extreme, “Mc” is also attached to notions as circumscribed, private, and subjective as personal religiosity. Spirituality so described is what Clapp terms “gnostic consumerism,” ministry as marketing and psychotherapy, propagated by either the individual or the group. Patterson laments the “McChristian mentality” that induces evangelicals to operate as “sovereign ecclesiastical consumers.” Colson deplores the “McChurch mentality” in which “the church be-
comes just another retail outlet, faith just another commodity,” and the aim is “support, not salvation, help rather than holiness.” 4 And Adeney bemoans the proclivities of McMissions, with their short-term “tourists for Jesus” who often do as much damage as good. 5 If a causal connection can indeed be established, a subtext of the discussion to follow is that McChurch organizations are as likely to have fostered individual McChristianity as vice versa.

Ritzer’s Thesis

When the “Mc” prefix is attached to any given word by any given writer, a concept is created that is relatively consistent in meaning and evaluation with other concepts created by use of the same prefix. But linguistically connected concepts alone remain particular to delimited discussions and carry limited explanatory power. George Ritzer has developed an elaborated sociological theory of McDonaldization intended for heuristic application to all manner of social phenomena. His “McDonaldization thesis” is not limited to a particular aspect of human life or segment of human society. Indeed, the full title of the fullest explication of his thesis is The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life. 6

First appearing as a journal article in 1983, 7 Ritzer’s thesis “has been widely employed in scholarly work, is an entry in at least one dictionary of sociology, and has quickly become a staple in textbooks introducing students to the discipline.” 8 As “essentially a work in social criticism,” 9 it has even been turned on itself by discussions of whether social theory in the United States, like other disciplines, has been McDonaldized. 10 Professional pressure in American academia, exported throughout the world to produce the standardized journal article, is some evidence for such an assessment. The inexorable spread of the process of McDonaldization is seemingly unstoppable, radiating to all geographical regions, all human enterprises, and all temporal realms of human existence—birth and its antecedents, death

1 Benjamin R. Barber, Jihad Versus McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Re-Shaping the World (Mississauga, ON: Random House, 1995).
8 Ritzer, McDonaldization, xiii.
9 Ibid., xix.
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and its aftermath. Understanding it may at least facilitate curtailing its excesses. Ritzer’s definition of McDonaldization is “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.” There are four primary principles or “dimensions” of McDonaldization:

First, McDonald’s offers efficiency, or the optimum method for getting from one point to another. . . . Second, McDonald’s offers calculability, or an emphasis on the quantitative aspects of products sold (portion size, cost) and service offered (the time it takes to get the product). . . . Third, McDonald’s offers predictability, the assurance that their products and services will be the same over time and in all locales. . . . Fourth, control, especially through the substitution of nonhuman for human technology, is exerted over the people who enter the world of McDonald’s.

The phenomenal business success of McDonald’s as a corporation shows that there are many advantages to organizations built on these primary principles. Yet there are even economists who contend that McDonald’s is “the embodiment of all that is vulgar in American mass culture.” In terms of human impacts, Ritzer’s primary criticism of the McDonaldization process is what he characterizes as “the irrationality of rationality,” the empirical fact that “rational systems inevitably spawn irrational consequences” and thereby become unreasonable. While there are great gains to be derived from McDonaldization, there also appear to be enormous risks, and frequently prodigious human and non-human costs.

Some may be able to write off such impacts as the risks and costs of doing business, but if the primary principles of McDonald’s have in fact “come to dominate more and more sectors of society,” are the positive consequences equally advantageous and the negative consequences equally tolerable everywhere? For instance, what happens if and when not-for-profit organizations adopt the modus operandi of McDonald’s? More particularly, what happens if and when religious organizations dealing in the realm of spirit become McDonaldized?

Ritzer has given scant attention to religion, making only minor mention of religion marketing itself through television. The question under consideration here is whether and to what extent the primary principles of McDonaldization have come to dominate North American Protestant organizations in particular, and with what effect. Addressing this question requires two preliminary considerations: the Weberian themes of rationalization and bureaucracy that serve as precursors to McDonaldization, and the current character of religious organizations.

12Ritzer, McDonaldization, 1.
13Ibid., 9-11, italics in original.
15Ritzer, McDonaldization, 13.
Rationalization and Bureaucracy

McDonaldization did not emerge in a vacuum, nor are its primary principles or dimensions new; it is merely the culmination of a series of processes that have been occurring throughout the twentieth century.

The seminal turn-of-the-century German sociologist Max Weber rejected the idea of a single causal agent in history, such as the economic determinism of Marx, yet came very close to advancing one of his own. At the center of Weber’s substantive sociology stands the process of rationalization, with which he explained the rise of modernity in the Occident.16 Many others have followed suit. In his studies of American evangelicalism, Hunter, for one, identified functional rationality as the core element of modernity, and found it to be “intrinsically inimical to religion at the level of subjective consciousness.”17 Because Weber’s own use of the term was inconsistent, four different types of rationality can be identified in his work: practical, theoretical, substantive, and formal rationality.18

Of these types, formal rationality is the most important, because of its uniqueness and dominance in the West with the coming of modernity. It involves a means-ends calculation with reference to universally applied rules and regulations in the context of larger social structures. Common to formal rationality “is its objectified, institutionalized, supra-individual form; in each sphere, rationality is embodied in the social structure and confronts individuals as something external to them.”19 The search by people for the optimum means to a given end is no longer guided vaguely by the substantive rationality of larger value systems like religion. For example, Christians in Western social structures no longer need to work out for themselves the most biblical manner of handling matters of harassment. Formal rationality will not just help them decide what to do; it will dictate what they must do: “An important aspect of formal rationality, then, is that it allows individuals little choice of means to ends.”20

Rationalization continuously informed Weber’s analysis on various fronts of his work. Regarding structures of authority, Weber contrasted the authority legitimized on rational-legal grounds with authority legitimized on the grounds of either tradition or charisma. Though both traditional and charismatic authority obviously have much to do with religion, the structural form that interested Weber most was bureaucracy, that literal “rule of officials” which he considered “the pur-

20Ritzer, McDonaldization, 19.
As an ideal-typical model of formal rationality, bureaucracies are a creation of the modern Western world, fundamentally different in structure than the organizations of traditional societies. In essence, bureaucracies are intentionally impersonal; relations are between office holders, not whole persons. Persons in bureaucracies are replaceable functionaries who do not perform their tasks on the basis of personal loyalty to their leader, nor are they subject to the personal whims of their leaders. As the military maxim puts it, they salute the uniform, not the person. The bureaucratic structure can be summarized as follows:

1. It consists of a continuous organization of official functions (offices) bound by rules.
2. Each office has a specified sphere of competence. The office carries with it a set of obligations to perform various functions, the authority to carry out these functions, and the means of compulsion required to do the job.
3. The offices are organized into a hierarchical system.
4. The offices may carry with them technical qualifications that require that the participants obtain suitable training.
5. The staff that fill these offices does not own the means of production associated with them; staff members are provided with the use of those things that they need to do the job.
6. The incumbent is not allowed to appropriate the position; it always remains part of the organization.
7. Administrative acts, decisions, and rules are formulated and recorded in writing.

These bureaucratic structures are so conventional, so assumed in current Western society, that alternatives are virtually inconceivable. Weber maintained that “The needs of mass administration make it today completely indispensable. The choice is only between bureaucracy and dilettantism in the field of administration.”

So it is that rationalization has engendered bureaucracy, which, along with Frederick Taylor’s time-and-motion scientific management and Henry Ford’s assembly line, forms the foundations of McDonald’s. According to Ritzer, McDonaldization “represents a quantum leap in the process of rationalization, . . . a sufficiently more extreme form of rationalization to legitimize the use of a distinct label.”

Religious Organizations

There is little reason to believe that religious organizations could be immune to these or any other social forces. Indeed, sociologists once thought religious orga-
nization itself to be a product of the larger social force of secularization, inasmuch as “religious sentiment, experience, or thought is expressed in regular and regulated forms of social interaction.” And upon examination, no significant characteristics that distinguish religious organizations from nonreligious organizations have been detected. However, the original consternation has given way “to a more sanguine acceptance of the importance of organization to the very existence of the sacred in the modern world.” After all, the West has become a “society of organizations” in which large organizations themselves can be at the heart of explanations of social change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with religion and even psychology considered as dependent variables.

The foremost religious organization is the local church or congregation, but few such parochial groups are independent. Some theologians have argued that “a failure on the part of Protestants to articulate a doctrine of the church adequate to provide a model for extraparochial structures has meant that models for them are borrowed from elsewhere—specifically from business organizations.” The result in North America has been the development of those ecclesiastical bureaucracies known as Protestant denominations, or what Weeks terms “the incorporation of American religion,” replete with managers, hierarchies of control, ownership by a minority of those involved in production, and vertical organization.

Church organizations are differentiated by level and include local, denominational, national, and international bodies. Para-church organizations on the other hand are differentiated by their special focus or purpose, such as domestic and/or foreign evangelism, discipleship, education, politics, or domestic and/or foreign relief and development. While the significance of denominationalism has been declining throughout the twentieth century, the growth of Para-church organizations has been spectacular, to such that the latter now greatly outnumber the former. Para-church organizations have undoubtedly revitalized North American Protestantism, but have also threatened to fractionalize it, and more to the point here, have added further layers of bureaucracy to the already highly bureaucratized structure of Western Christianity: “Increasingly, scriptural justifications [are] cited only for pastoral duties and for general statements of belief, while job

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26Ibid., 134.
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descriptions for other personnel [are] justified simply on the basis of organiza-
tional [flow] charts and the work of committees which [have] in general ways sought
divine guidance.”

White-washing current Protestant organizations as bureaucracies is admittedly
harsh, and may be too simplistic and superficial; bureaucracy alone may be too
rational a model to explicate organizations in other than government and busi-
ness. Members of complex Christian organizations have recently pleaded for a
more nuanced understanding of their raison d'être. Toward that end, Scherer has
eruditely proposed an analytical typology for organizations that articulates the
alternative models of market, clan, and mission to complement Weber’s predomi-
nant typeform. Though the typology is suitable for all organizations, its genesis
was the search for “forms which might better suit communal and value-affirming
organizations.” In the four-fold typology, a market emphasizes openness to envi-
nronment, a bureaucracy emphasizes efficiency and control, a clan emphasizes mem-
ber involvement and loyalty, and a mission emphasizes depth of vision of pur-
pose. Of course, all organizations must be concerned with all of these tasks to some
extent, and each model has its respective strengths and weaknesses.

Scherer makes immediate application of his typology to various individual
American denominations, including their patterns of historical sequence. Most
salient to our concerns is his empirical finding that “American denominations be-
gan as missions, grew through evangelistic market emphasis or internal reproduc-
tion, took on the character of religious clans through family transmission, and added
bureaucratic elements in the 20th century with expansion in size and attempts to
exert external mission within modern society.” Put differently, “all American
denominations have over time become less clanlike, less mission-oriented, and
more market-oriented and bureaucratic under American voluntarization in order
to persist as complex organizations.” As a case in point, Eby confirms that even
Mennonite organizations have bureaucratized, and calls them (back?) to what he
elaborates as “mission community.” But even when a Christian organization per-

In a book on managing Christian service organizations, Jeavons has identified three basic
organizational types: governmental agencies, which exist to consolidate and exercise power
in the public sphere; businesses, which produce and obtain economic goods; and private
not-for-profit organizations, which give expression to social, moral, philosophical or reli-
gious values. Thomas H. Jeavons, When the Bottom Line is Faithfulness: Management of Chris-
tian Service Organizations (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994). See also Kurt Klaudi

Ross P. Scherer, “A New Typology for Organizations: Market, Bureaucracy, Clan and Mis-
sion, with Application to American Denominations,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion

John W. Eby, “Mission Community: A New Image for Church-Related Institutions,” The
ceives itself as a mission instead of a bureaucracy, its mission tends to be displaced by inordinate emphasis on its “system” (survival) goal, or on either efficiency, control over its environment, or even growth. What T. S. Eliot observed of individuals in *Murder in the Cathedral*—first serving the cause, but eventually making the cause serve them—is doubly true of organizations. It often does “come down to pursuing mission at the cost of surviving, or surviving at the cost of mission.”

Whatever the sentiment attached, most current Protestant organizations appear to bureaucratize and must be examined accordingly. Beckford called for the study of religious organizations “with special reference to their relations with prevailing social forces and tendencies. . . . Is there evidence of an organizational counterpart in religion to secular processes of globalization in the late twentieth century?” Ritzer’s thesis in hand, we turn now to that task.

**Toward McDonaldization**

Evidence abounds for how and to what extent Protestant organizations have come to be driven by the principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. The challenge is to systematize and summarize it. Many recent critiques have developed similar themes in different terms, though none has teased out separate components of a coherent theory the way Ritzer’s McDonaldization thesis does.

Obviously, for many Christians, the four principles of McDonaldization are not points of criticism, but virtual tenets of the faith. Many find it logical and proper, even biblical and edifying, for Christian organizations to be governed by them, and cutting-edge techniques in doing so are earnestly taught in seminars and seminaries throughout the land. Recent dissertation topics include proposals for how better administrative process can produce renewed ministry practice, and how training in efficiency can transform church committee meetings into sites of loving God and neighbor. What is offensive to the purveyors of the McDonaldization of Protestant organizations is that such a pejorative term be attached to the net effect of that to which they are so devoted.

While most church and para-church organizations are founded by spiritual leaders, most eventually come to be governed by professionally trained corporate managers, bureaucrats with good intentions but bereft of what Weber meant by charisma. Nevertheless, these administrators are often regarded as ministers, by themselves or by members of the organization, wittingly or unwittingly, only because they hold bureaucratic power, not because they manifest spiritual leader-

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[Beckford, “Religious,” 134.]

[Stark, “Renewal at American Baptist Church through Pastoral Administration,” Ph.D. diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1995.]

ship. Meanwhile, pastors often function more as chief executive officers than as shepherds. Yet etymologically, administration means “toward ministry,” all those tasks that contribute to ministry and make it possible. Administration per se is not the care of souls, despite its proclivity to “spawn messianic pretensions and illusions about [its] own omnicompetence.”

All this is merely to observe again what Weber described more fully as the routinization of charisma within the larger process of institutionalization. In introducing his original five dilemmas of institutionalization, O’Dea remarked that “religion both needs most and suffers most from institutionalization.” His third dilemma is that of administrative order, the need for organizations to elaborate policy versus the desire of members that policy remain flexible and not become dysfunctional. Members of religious organizations frequently feel a profound need for concrete, clearly articulated guidelines for problem-solving and decision-making. But the more these proliferate, the more complex, unwieldy, uncomfortable, frustrating, and ultimately alienating the organization becomes. Yet attempts to modify or reform the organizational structure may run into sturdy resistance by those whose status and security in it are thereby threatened. Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy” and other sociological points of interest are found along this road toward McDonaldization.

Though the dilemmas O’Dea identified may have been influenced by his Catholicism, many Protestant organizations have also clearly been on this path for some time now. A closer look at each “dimension” of McDonaldization suggests how.

First, Ritzer defined efficiency as the optimum method of satisfying felt needs by getting from one point to another: “For consumers, this means that McDonald’s offers the best available way to get from being hungry to being full.” Physical or spiritual satiation comes more quickly by patronizing a McDonald’s, or a McDonaldized Christian organization, than it does by hunting and gathering for oneself, or even by home-cooking a meal with purchased raw foodstuffs. The structures, patterns, and methods are strikingly parallel.

Efficiency comes first by streamlining various processes. Assembly line production, limited menus to alleviate indecision, and easily accessible, even drive-through facilities are just a few ways in which the seeker can be hurried along. For example, one “packaged tour” with the annual youth missions outreach to Mexico will probably do some good before getting on with one’s life. Efficiency also comes by simplifying the product. Complex and richly textured nourishment for body or soul created by culinary craft is not served here, only simple but strong-tasting

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fodder, mass produced by standardized recipe, and easily eaten without utensils. This resonates with the proliferation of special purpose Christian groups who by definition have only one interest, focus, or service, all too often working a single formula, like the Four Spiritual Laws. Third, efficiency comes by putting customers to work doing the ordering, serving, and clean-up formerly done by paid employees. Christian publishers have served up a salad bar, no, a smorgasbord of books, videos, and other self-help materials, but have stopped short of offering free refills. Let there be no doubt that short-term missions, tract evangelism, and discipleship study guides sponsored by Protestant organizations have been used by God to build His kingdom. But let there be no self-serving assumption that all the effects have been purely salutary.

There are many more particular and concrete ways in which tasks, time, space, product, and people are all managed carefully according to consummate worth placed on efficiency. Even in small churches, computers have recast record keeping as information management, and have become a “pastoral tool” for increased efficiency, productivity, and creativity. Studies are conducted to determine which method of first contact with potential new prospects—door-to-door visitation, bulk mail contacting, or telephone contacting—is most efficient according to the hours and dollars invested. Small groups with their “custom-made community” and “domesticated deity” become the “real” church couched within the bureaucratic structure of a megachurch. The Ten Minute Gospel is born. In it all, the recurring goal is to be not just effective, but efficiently effective, to do more with less.

Second, Ritzer defined calculability as an emphasis on the quantitative aspects of products and services. Calculability is linked to the first dimension in that “the emphasis on things that can be counted makes it easier to determine efficiency.” More profoundly, it subsumes a “constant quest to render objective that which is subjective” so as to remove ambiguity and allow for comparability. Moreover, “quantity has become equivalent to quality; a lot of something, or the quick delivery of it, means it must be good.” Bigger is better, as is faster and more. What Christian would disagree?

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53Ritzer, McDonaldization, 59.
55Ritzer, McDonaldization, 9.
McDonaldized organizations pursue calculability first by emphasizing the quantity rather than the quality of products. The big event, like the Big Mac, is advertised as inherently desirable because of its size, not content—no notion of a McDelicious here. After all, there is something indescribably compelling (good?) about so many people herded but singing together in a stadium, or on a march. What “successful” Christian organization has not taken their (comparable) numbers as evidence of the (comparable) blessing of God on their products, as when Peter preached after Pentecost? Which one routinely and without reluctance reduces quantity for the sake of improving quality? Can modern organizational church growth, evangelism, or education even be imagined without paramount significance given to numbers? How many billion served? Calculability is also conspicuous by giving the illusion of quantity. Generous ice in beverages, containers designed to make fries overflow, and buns sized to make the patty protrude all create much the same effect as scores of counselors/confederates coming forward during an altar call in staggered time-sequencing from all corners of the auditorium. Third, calculability is inherent in reducing the processes of production and service to numbers. Worship services are now timed to the minute, and spiritual gifts can now be discerned quickly by self-administered, therefore more efficient, and quantified scales and inventories.

Altheide and Johnson provide a troubling example of calculability in their case study of counseling at a Billy Graham crusade.56 Collecting data covertly, they describe how “inquirers” were treated with “bureaucratic accounting procedures” and classified according to standardized categories for the purpose of tabulating hard statistical evidence. In a tightly scripted protocol, counselors classified inquirers as having either accepted Christ, found assurance of salvation, or rededicated their lives. Most disconcerting is that, in all interactions with researchers, the counselors checked the first category “despite our use . . . of the most explicit, unmitigated, decisive, and unequivocal statements to promote the other two categories to the counselors.”57 After much further data collection and analysis, the researchers conclude that “Weber’s observation that salvation is problematic is inapplicable to an organization dedicated to saving souls by procedure.”58

Third, Ritzer defined predictability as the assurance that products and services will be the same every time and everywhere. McDonaldized organizations are devoted to “discipline, order, systematization, formalization, routine, consistency, and methodical operation.”59 Visit any franchise in the chain, and one knows what to expect; there will be no surprises. What this relentless standardization of product and process creates is peace of mind for the customer, and absence of mind for the worker. What it does for spirit in both customer and worker is open to

57Ibid., 328.
58Ibid., 344.
59Ritzer, McDonaldization, 79.
McDonaldized organizations manifest predictability in part by the increasingly scripted interactions that occur between individuals; much of what is said and done is routinized, even ritualized. Core interactions are intentionally so in Christian organizations, founded as they are on sacred scriptures, sacraments, and liturgies. What marks these organizations as McDonaldized is when even casual, profane interactions become routinized role-related performances, when friendly smiles and hearty handshakes have less to do with friendship and heart than with the affective demands of providing “A+ service,” when caring is reduced to formalized care-giving, when the “God be with you” of goodbye is supplanted by the hedonistic “have a nice day.” Few believe such interactions express authentic affections, but few spurn the warm, safe solace they provide: “The fake friendliness of scripted interaction reflects the insincere camaraderie that characterizes not only fast-food restaurants, but also all other elements of McDonaldized society.”

Needless to say, predictability is also manifest in predictable products and employee behavior. Standardized, pre-packaged denominational or para-church programs and curricula delivered by properly trained personnel churn out cookie-cutter graduates, much like the “professors” at Hamburger University work from scripts prepared by their curriculum development department. One less obvious way in which predictability is fostered in Christian organizations is by the bureaucratic process of decision-making. Belief in the superior efficacy of objective, dispassionate decision-making conducted according to impersonal policy and criteria has the advantage of protecting against individual whim or caprice, and the arbitrary abuse of personal power. In the process, it also constantly yields rationally predictable decisions. This is problematic for Christian organizations inasmuch as it literally “rules out” spirit as a contributing, much less leading factor. And decisions of the head are not always spiritually superior to decisions of the heart.

The fourth and final dimension of Ritzer’s McDonaldization thesis is control, especially through the substitution of nonhuman for human technology: “A human technology (e.g. a screwdriver) is controlled by people; a non-human technology (e.g. an assembly line or a rule) controls people.” McDonaldized organizations control workers and customers through their machine and social-scientific technologies, rendering Spirit-controlled living unnecessary, and even potentially counterproductive when in conflict with organizational goals. Furthermore, direct, face-to-face control by people of power or principle gives way to control by technologies, because the latter are easier, less costly, and less likely to engender

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61Ritzer, McDonaldization, 84.
63Ritzer, McDonaldization, 11.
hostility in those subject to it.\textsuperscript{64}

Circumventing for the moment the Nietzschean notion of Christianity as the ultimate system of control,\textsuperscript{65} it is nevertheless noteworthy how and to what extent its organizations control their products and processes. In denominational life, Luidens documents that, in contrast to traditional Protestant rejection of ecclesiastical exercise of power, bureaucratic demands have led to perceptions of highly centralized patterns of control resting in the national staff of a sample denomination.\textsuperscript{66} In missions, multinational agencies have often operated like multinational corporations at the expense of national churches, seeking total control in their areas of influence.\textsuperscript{67} In Christian higher education, even more than in secular McUniversities,\textsuperscript{68} colleges tend to produce submissive, malleable students; creative, independent students are often, from the organization’s point of view, “messy, expensive, and time-consuming.”\textsuperscript{69}

“Once people are controlled, it is possible to begin reducing their behaviour to a series of machinelike actions. And once people behave like machines, they can be replaced with actual machines.”\textsuperscript{70} Hence Catholic confession can now be heard via the Internet. Nowhere is Protestant “faith in the saving power of technology”\textsuperscript{71} more evident than in televangelism and the electronic church. And “as their organizations grow [quantitatively], they believe, so does their power to redeem the world.”\textsuperscript{72}

In his trenchant analysis of “the surrender of culture to technology,” Postman coins the term “technopoly” to describe “the deification of technology, which means that the culture seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfaction in technology, and takes its orders from technology.”\textsuperscript{73} Building on Postman’s concept, Gay records the growing consensus that evangelicals in particular have become Postman’s “technophiles” who embrace the “invisible technologies” of social scientific methods, techniques and strategies: “Those who are most concerned to

\textsuperscript{70}Ritzer, \textit{McDonaldization}, 101.
\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., 17.
manage our churches today are often those who are least concerned with theology.” As illustration, Gay quotes the Christian executive who engineered the “I Found It” campaign for Campus Crusade for Christ in the mid-1970’s:

Back in Jerusalem when the church started, God performed a miracle there on the Day of Pentecost. They didn’t have the benefit of buttons and the media, so God had to do a little supernatural work there. But today, with our technology, we have available to us the opportunity to create the same kind of interest in secular society.

This “typically modern quest for technological control over the world inevitably boils down to control of some [people] at the expense of others.” Modern technological society is intrinsically and thoroughly manipulative, a fact postmodernists have now admitted in reducing human existence to the universal struggle to control one another.

It would be a blasphemer’s folly to suggest that all Protestant organizations are trading in nothing but “fast food and fast talk.” God continues to build His church universal through faulty though functional human constructions, or “earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7). It would appear rather that these enculturated organizations are nevertheless pursuing efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control to varying, but increasing degrees: “McDonaldization is not an all-or-nothing process.” This discussion has been a largely suggestive application of Ritzer’s heuristic theory. These perceptions await fuller empirical evidence, perhaps from case studies of particular Protestant organizations, before it can be determined to what extent a given organization has been McDonaldized, the “end-point of the rationalization process.” They also await a fuller theological critique than the remaining observations impart.

The Effects of McDonaldization

Weber’s personal ambivalence toward the rationalization process and its paradigm case of bureaucracy is well known. He held the highest regard for the efficacy of bureaucracy as “a means of exercising authority over human beings. It is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability.” He was also appalled by its “red tape” and its threat to individual liberty, lamenting that “the passion for bureaucratization drives us to
despair.”83 Yet he saw no way out; “the future belongs to bureaucratization,”84 and bureaucracies are “escape proof” and “practically unshatterable.” In his most familiar phrases, he described the inexorable force of rationalization in general as an “iron cage” bringing about the “disenchantment of the world.”

Because “most people have been exposed to little more than an unrelenting set of superlatives created by McDonaldized systems to describe themselves,”85 Ritzer counters by exposing the “irrationalities of their rationality.” For example, contrary to the corporate hype, home-cooked meals are often more efficient in time and effort, less expensive, and more authentic, creative fun than the vicarious experience of eating at McDonald’s. Comparing levels of fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar ingested, or trash generated, also leaves McDonald’s as an irrational choice.

For Christian organizations, each dimension of McDonaldization has its own irrational effects; any good principle, taken to the extreme, becomes grotesque. Unbridled efficiency results in both the goal displacement where preoccupation with the technical means displaces focus on the spiritual end-goal, and in what Veblen termed a “trained incapacity” to recognize and respond appropriately to new situations. Inordinate calculability that renders quantitative that which is irreducibly qualitative and spiritual diminishes human experience and impoverishes data; social scientists have long realized that measurement is inherently trivializing. While serving as God’s corporate headhunter, even Samuel balked at David’s candidacy for kingship because of rationally predictable criteria, and a McDonaldized bureaucracy would never anoint a David. And at every rung on the ladder of control, Christian bureaucrats, like others, bemoan “being regulated to death.”

The most alarming effect of combining these four dimensions into the process of McDonaldization is the sheer dehumanization of both worker and customer. Both become appendages of the machine, and mere fragments of persons in their engagement. Worker activity is deskilled as much as possible, customers are fed prefabricated interactions, and all contact with other human beings is minimized. Communality dissolves into commonality. Presumably, religious organizations would be the most sensitive and reactive to the first hint of dehumanization. When they are not, the dehumanization of McDonaldized Protestant organizations appears to take two classic forms, one social-psychological, the other spiritual, both equally debilitating.

The first is alienation. Though alienation itself comes in many forms,86 the estrangement manifest in McDonaldized organizations is grounded in the impersonality and individual powerlessness endemic to bureaucracy. As a matter of policy that is incapable of apprehending anything but virtue in detached “objectivity,” idiosyncratic personal characteristics, conditions, and meanings are ignored, and

83Ibid., liii.
84Ibid., 1401.
85Ritzer, McDonaldization, 142.
people are treated as “cases” of impersonal categories. At the same time, people are distant and relatively powerless in matters that nevertheless affect them. And when humans realize they are mere resources to be managed for the purpose of an organization, “the self is placed in confinement, its emotions controlled, and its spirit subdued.” This diminishment of the person is antithetical to the care and nurture of souls by the Good Shepherd or any pastoral surrogate. What passion being managed engenders, when roused out of its normal disaffection, is only the fear of humankind, not the fear of God.

So it is that alienation is linked to the second way McDonaldized Protestant organizations dehumanize, which is through secularization. As implied throughout this essay, the banishment of a meaningful, living spirituality that leaves persons less than fully human is the gravest threat posed by McDonaldization. Many social theorists have maintained that it was rationalization that wrought modern secularization in the first place. O’Dea for example, locates secularization in the historical shift “from mythos to logos” in which “mysteries are replaced by problems,” and in “the desacralization of the attitude toward persons” that allows people to treat others, and themselves, as manipulable objects of human technology and engineering. Gay opines that evangelical attraction to and fondness for social scientific techniques and strategies indicates that they “are fairly thoroughly secularized already.” The breathtaking irony is that naively McDonaldizing is potentially disastrous for personal Christian faith, yet as Neuhaus puts it, “institutional growth is the last refuge of ministries that are spiritually sterile.”

McDonaldized Christian organizations essentially go about their business as if God does not exist, even while they believe in God and ostensibly do what they do as service for Him. While social scientists are “methodological atheists” in that their method of knowing proceeds as if there were no God, managers are “practical atheists” in that their practice, the application of social science, proceeds as if there were no God. On their own, both quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19) and are blatantly secularizing. Which is more pernicious calls up the debate over which is more formative of human experience, the ideas, beliefs, and values of culture, or the forms of organization in social structure. The insidious effect of the practical atheism of McDonaldized organizations suggests that the rationalization process does more than “corrode the believability of the religious meaning system,” and is intrinsically inimical to religion at a social structural level deeper than the mere subjective consciousness that Hunter discussed. What Christian organizations say

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they believe may be superfluous in light of the principles that guide what they do. Gay is blunt about the prospects:

The future cannot be very bright for a humanly engineered church. . . . [McDonaldization] may suggest that we have secretly lost faith in the power of the gospel, and are hoping that “science” will provide us with more success and security than prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that we are, as the apostle Paul put it, holding on to the form of godliness but denying its power (2 Tim. 3:5). . . . At best, the next generation will probably find very little encouragement for real faith in a managed and engineered church; and, at worst, our use of modern methods and techniques will simply confirm the suspicion that the church is really not fundamentally different from other humanly-constructed organizations. . . . [W]e have contributed—albeit unwittingly and unintentionally—to the erosion of the church’s primary mission in the world, which is simply to bear witness to Immanuel, God with us.93

Responses to McDonaldization

Like Postman, Ellul before him, and most social critics, Ritzer is long on analysis and short on corrective solutions. Clearly not all Christians are disillusioned with McDonaldized Christian organizations—such organizations are nothing if not contextualized—but for those who are, Ritzer advocates resistance and offers some meager, less than compelling alternatives. Both the response of resistance and the response of creating intentional alternatives are best envisaged as limited methods of coping available to individuals who refuse to be passively resigned to a McDonaldized society, or naively committed to overthrowing it. “The struggle itself,” Ritzer insists, “is ennobling.”94

Some hope for Postman’s “loving resistance fighters” comes from Norsworthy’s finding that Southern Baptists were able, in the 1980’s, to reverse a century-long rationalization process and its bureaucratic model of organization in their denomination.95 Control of the denomination’s central agencies by a bureaucratic elite was wrested away by a reactionary fundamentalist counter-elite favoring dominance by autonomous pastors and trustees: “What Weber termed patrimonial domination refers to a system of authority involving a dependency relationship, broader than patriarchy but still based on loyalty and fidelity to a master. This traditional system . . . is possibly being renewed today.”96 Of course, it is also “open to being overwhelmed by the personal force of even a single individual.”97 McDonaldization may be social-psychologically and spiritually perilous, but there may be less personal safety in its antipode.

More palatable alternatives to, or at least modifications of, McDonaldization do exist, though most bear the vagaries of the traditional. For example, the Amish

94Ritzer, McDonaldization, 203.
96Ibid., 87
97Ibid., 85.
Mennonite Fire and Storm Aid Union continues to thrive even though “most members cannot articulate why the Aid Union works.”98 Ritzer cites the bed-and-breakfast as a welcome respite from McBeds and McBreakfasts, while acknowledging that the B&B industry is now developing standards, inspections, ratings, guidebooks, etc. Independent house churches may be the religious organizational equivalent to B&B’s, in that most are intentionally structured to be collectivist organizations. Their emphasis on the consensus decision-making of direct, radical democracy, their commitment to minimizing rules and procedures, their maintenance of primary group relations, and their absence of specialization and status distinctions all mark them as non-bureaucratic. A collectivistic ecclesiology may seem to some to be more biblical than a bureaucratic ecclesiology, but again, gains in holistic personal development and ownership are countered by losses in individual expertise and organizational efficiency. Still, collectivistic Christian organizations provide a modicum of hope for what Brubaker called an ethic of responsibility, “the passionate commitment to ultimate values with the dispassionate analysis of alternative means of pursuing them.”99

The alienation and secularization intrinsic to McDonaldization are, in the broadest light, simply twin evils of modernization; McDonaldization is born of the Enlightenment, modernism in extreme. Yet these are purportedly postmodern times, celebrating the return of the non-rational. Ritzer’s “Weberian view of social reality conflicts directly with the view of social theorists like Bauman, Beck and Giddens that, in a risk society, the world is increasingly contingent, uncertain, deregulated and out of control. Is social reality with or without surprises?”100 Are we heading toward Barber’s Jihad or McWorld? Is the present epoch late modernity or early postmodernity? Ritzer draws extensively on Jameson101 to argue that there is no discontinuity between modernity and postmodernity. A new cultural logic of postmodernism may have been spawned, but the underlying social structures of modernity are thriving, and in fact driving a prodigious expansion of “capital” into areas until now uncommodified. The character of McDonaldized Protestant organizations will be shaped by the modernism of their social structures regardless of the postmodernism of the ideas they may come to espouse.

Ritzer closes by linking Weber’s appraisal of modernity—“the polar night of icy darkness and hardness”102—with Dylan Thomas’s plea for resistance: “Do not go gentle into that good night, /Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”103 Evi-

99Brubaker, Limits, 108.
103Dylan Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night,” The Collected Poems of Dylan
dently, the night of modernity will itself not go as gentle as postmodern theorists would have us believe. All things considered, neither should Christians go gentle into the deeper night of McDonaldization. They need to engage in a holy struggle of their own, if only the struggle to light a candle, which has always been better than gently cursing the darkness.

Introduction: Medieval and Modernism

For most Americans—both academics as well as non-academics, Christians or non-Christians—things medieval evoke a mixture of images ranging from the fantastic to the anachronistic, but rarely do we consider these relevant to contemporary culture and society.1 “Medieval” is regarded by most as exotic, strange, in the domain of the “other.” Therefore, as an American medievalist and a historian of western culture, I find myself in a fascinating triangulation between things medieval, modern, and postmodern. From this vantage point I have observed some interesting connections between the medieval and the postmodern as they relate to the normative modernism of American culture. In particular, postmodernism has in some significant respects returned to the Middle Ages for its deconstruction of modernist epistemology. I will explore this thesis by comparing how medieval and postmodern approaches to reading texts and assigning authority to texts share affinities in opposition to modernist methodology. Then I shall make some conclusions about what the return of the Middle Ages means for Christian academics regarding their teaching and research opportunities in the emerging postmodern world.

An important aspect in the emergence of western modernity was the creation of the “Dark Ages” as a foil for modern cultural self-identity. This is particularly true for American culture, since it was born as a child of Enlightenment modernism with no medieval grandparents. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment movement nurtured the West with a new cultural vocabulary, which created a teleological metanarrative of radical newness and continual progress from ignorance to

Joseph P. Huffman examines the cultural affinities between the medieval and the postmodern as alternatives to the modern Enlightenment project. He concludes that medieval and postmodern approaches to textual authority in particular reveal the epistemological limitations of modernism. He therefore encourages Christians to cease privileging modernism and to recover their neglected medieval Christian legacy as a valuable resource for speaking with relevance to the postmodern world. Mr. Huffman is Associate Professor of History at Messiah College.
knowledge. Where the modern age and its first-born son, the United States, were defined as dynamic, progressive, inventive, enlightened, and scientific, the medieval age was by contrast static, backward, unresourceful, unenlightened, and unscientific. In addition to Enlightenment rationalism, American Protestant Puritanism required an era of “dark, Catholic superstition” in the Old World juxtaposed against its new “city on a hill” in the New World. Such optimism was fueled by the Enlightenment belief that a scientific application of human reason to the natural order (for economic and technological development) as well as to the human order (for social and political reform) would produce the best of all possible rational worlds. This was the early self-definition and promise of the modern era—which we shall call modernism. This western ideology grew in strength throughout the nineteenth century, when both the profession of historical study and an historical interest in the Middle Ages began; thus the modernist vision of the Middle Ages was embedded into the medieval past as scholars wrote their national histories.

Such a view of the “Dark Ages” was bound up in the Enlightenment self-definition and still maintains strong vestiges in the United States down to the present day, so much so that the average American collegiate thesaurus includes the following synonyms for the word medieval: “antiquated, outmoded, antediluvian, prehistoric, archaic, unenlightened, quaint, and extinct.” A tour guide at the Carnegie Museum of Art recently informed a colleague of mine that the medieval era was: “The time when religion took over and nobody could read.”

This “Dark Age” vision of medieval Europe has suited modern American culture particularly well. Americans have always been ambivalent toward the Middle Ages, perceiving it as both the land of beautiful ladies and noble knights as well as the land of pervasive ignorance and material degradation; the age of Camelot and of faith as well as a time of theological tyranny and oppression. Cultural historians have begun to ask what the origins of these contradictory visions of medieval Europe were. What they are finding often links the Middle Ages to the postmodernist critique: namely, these visions are medievalisms—modern intellectual constructs that

1Lee Patterson, “The Return to Philology,” *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies* ed. John Van Engen [Notre Dame Conferences on Medieval Studies 4] (Notre Dame: 1994), 237: “The isolation of medievalists from the mainstream of humanistic study is an oft-remarked phenomenon that needs little demonstration. Equally obvious is the lack of interest in medieval studies of the vast majority of humanists, for whom both medieval studies and the Middle Ages remain *terra incognita*. In part this sequestration is a function of the defensive self-enclosure of medieval studies itself; in larger part, however, it derives from the role that the Middle Ages, as both historical object and disciplinary subject, has played in the development of modern thought.” In this essay I shall be distinguishing between ideologies (medievalism, modernism, postmodernism) and historical periods (medieval, modern, postmodern).


tell us more about modernity than about the Middle Ages themselves.4

The most archetypical cases involve the transformation of Joan of Arc from a peasant girl to a defender of liberty and nationalism and Arthur of Avalon as the progenitor of adventurers found as far afield as the Prince Valiant comics, Gothic romances, and the ever-popular Dungeons-and-Dragons genre of games and entertainment. Every American knows that the Magic Kingdom’s medieval world is found in Fantasyland, where “Distory” replaces History.5 And all Americans recognize instinctively the heroism of Robin Hood as one who struggles to bring equality between rich and poor and to protect individual liberty from that dreaded dragon called government, which seeks “taxes, taxes and still more taxes” for its treasure trove. The most remarkable fusion of modern America with medieval Europe is the Excalibur Hotel and Casino—a Fantasyland for adults—where one is encouraged by the marketing of things medieval to quest after the Grail of instant riches and the opportunity to succeed Elvis as the king of Las Vegas. Both prince and pauper alike are exhorted to rest periodically from the battle and dine at restaurants like “Lance-A-Lotta-Pasta.”6 It soon becomes clear that these visions of the Middle Ages are part of an invented past suitable for the cultural forms and values of the modern age, in short a medievalism.7

One could explore the use of medieval mystics by nineteenth-century American Protestant evangelists, or the ante-bellum South’s utilization of the Middle Ages to justify a social order dominated by chivalrous aristocratic Christian men who comprised a landed elite and subjected the laboring class as their social betters, or even attempts to expropriate Chartres cathedral for the cathedral of St. John the Divine (New York), the National Cathedral in Washington D.C., or even in that monument to American televangelism: Robert Schuler’s Crystal Cathedral in California.8 Of course, these modern romantic medievalisms do not include the

4A “medievalism” is a modern construction of the medieval past based on modern cultural categories and needs, as opposed to reconstructing the medieval past based on its own historical realities and cultural categories (the latter being the goal of “medieval studies” scholarship). See Morton W. Bloomfield, “Reflections of a Medievalist: Americanism, Medievalism, and the Middle Ages,” Medievalism in American Culture [Papers of the 18th Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies] ed. Bernard Rosenthal and Paul E. Szarmach (Binghampton: State University of New York, 1989), 13-30.
6See Susan Aronstein and Nancy Coiner, “Twice Knightly: Democratizing the Middle Ages for Middle-Class America,” Medievalism in North America, 212-231.
Lee Patterson, “On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies,” *Speculum* 65:1 (Jan. 1990): 99: “. . . the Middle Ages serves as premodernity, the other that must be rejected for the modern self to be known and know itself . . . the Middle Ages is not a subject for discussion but the rejected object, not a prehistory whose shape can be described but the history—historicity itself—that modernity must reject in order to be itself.”

Medieval and Postmodernism

This Enlightenment-based cultural confidence in the progress and rational emancipation of the modern West from its Dark-Age past was devastated, however, by the horrors of the twentieth century; two incomprehensibly destructive wars foisted upon the world by the very makers of modernism, the unspeakable irrationality of the Holocaust as well as other mass genocides, and the specter of atomic self-annihilation more than humbled the European sense of cultural superiority by mid-century. Add to this experience the growing awareness of the limitations to scientific certainty and comprehensibility and the following post-war trends: technological transformations in medical ethics and the information explosion, the dehumanization of the individual amid globalization of both corporate economics and cultural life, the realization of ecological limitations in a world of unmitigated nationalist competition, the growing “virtual” workplace where employees are hired in a new “putting out” system of production with no social contract between employer and employee and where workers are considered less of a permanent company asset than the computer hardware, and finally the current unparalleled global emigration pattern. The late twentieth century is no longer the rational world of liberating technology and individual freedom envisioned by the Enlightenment. The historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, herself a harsh critic of postmodernism, nevertheless has summed up so well the resulting loss of confi-

in American Culture, 251-287.

9Lee Patterson, “On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies,” *Speculum* 65:1 (Jan. 1990): 99: “. . . the Middle Ages serves as premodernity, the other that must be rejected for the modern self to be known and know itself . . . the Middle Ages is not a subject for discussion but the rejected object, not a prehistory whose shape can be described but the history—historicity itself—that modernity must reject in order to be itself.”

10When referring to the limitations to scientific certainty and comprehensibility I am thinking of the New Physics of the 20th century (Einstein’s relativity, quantum physics, and recent discoveries about the fundamental structure of matter: leptons, quarks, muons, photons, anti-matter), Heisenberg’s principle of indeterminacy, and the complexities of astro-physics. Such limitations have not been universally acknowledged to date, and the modernist belief in the absolute authority and objective certitude of science still holds much sway in American culture. In a recent edition of *Time* (July 8, 1996) the following statement is reported: “One scientist said it was high time that history was taken from the historians. History was guesswork, but science will set us free” (76).
The experiences of this century hardly dispose us to any complacency about the present, still less about the future. A pessimistic, even apocalyptic, view comes more naturally to a generation which has learned at great pain that the most impressive scientific discoveries may be put to the most grotesque use; that material prosperity sometimes has an inverse relationship to the ‘quality of life’; that a generous social policy may create as many problems as it solves; that even the most benign governments succumb to the dead weight of bureaucracy while the least benign ones are ingenious in devising new and horrendous means of tyranny; that religious passions are exacerbated in a world that is increasingly secular, and national passions in a world that is fatally interdependent; that the most advanced and powerful countries may be held hostage by a handful of primitive terrorists; that our most cherished principles—liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, even peace—have been perverted and degraded in ways our forefathers never dreamed of. At every point we are confronted with shattered promises, blighted hopes, irreconcilable dilemmas, good intentions gone astray, a choice between evils, a world perched on the brink of disaster—all the familiar clichés, which are all too true and which seem to give the lie to the idea of progress.11

Clearly the western historical metanarrative has changed dramatically in our century. The result has been a growing sense that the Enlightenment experiment of the modern era has reached a cultural cul-de-sac, and that we are entering a postmodern global historical era. European thinkers have been sensing this since World War II gave birth to the Cold War, as evidenced in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s writings.12 But Americans have only gotten wind of the changes from the 1960s onward, as Gordon-Conwell professor David Wells indicates in his book *God in the Wasteland*:

... the Enlightenment project collapsed in the 1960s. The assumption among the Enlightenment’s proponents that meaning and morality could be discovered simply within the bounds of natural reason and without reference to God has, even in our very secular age, become ever more empty. Their naive faith in inevitable progress has been torpedoed by the brutality and the manifold frustrations of the twentieth century. And their belief that knowledge is always good, that knowledge is salvific, is mocked by our deep fears regarding scientific and technological achievements, many of which can easily be used to thwart human well-being as to promote it. By the end of the 1960s modernity had lost its Enlightenment soul. Thus it was that postmodernity began to emerge in the 1970s.13

Many Christian intellectuals have long been critics of modernism, and some have begun to see the transition toward a postmodern age at hand.14 As early as

12 Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, “A World Split Apart,” *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard* ed. Ronald Berman (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980), 9: “If the world has not approached its end, it has reached a major watershed in history, equal in importance to the turn from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.” For Solzhenitsyn this means the turn from medieval to modern eras.
14 H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951) as well as Paul Tillich’s
1949 Chad Walsh wrote a remarkably forward-looking yet little-read book entitled *Early Christians of the 21st Century*.15 The thrust of his book is an exploration of how Christians could be relevant and engaging in the postmodern world to come. Since the late 1980s David Well’s work, along with titles like *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* by Gene Edward Veith, Jr. (Wheaton 1994) and *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville 1989) by Diogenes Allen have appeared amid a raft of new publications by Evangelical thinkers trying to come to terms with postmodernity. Thus the awareness that a postmodern historical era is dawning, and that a postmodernist cultural response is also underway, can be found everywhere by the close of the twentieth century.16 We are left with the troubling uncertainty about whether the Middle Ages were really any darker than the modern era after all.

**Textual Readings: Modern and Postmodern**

History, like any field in the humanities or social sciences, has been affected by the postmodernist intellectual movement, which is challenging long-standing assumptions about both modern and medieval culture. In tandem with scholarship on the modernist/postmodernist debate17 a growing body of literature is appear-

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15Chad Walsh, *Early Christians of the 21st Century* (New York: 1950; rpt. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), 9: “…‘modern civilization,’ which dates roughly from the Renaissance, is now on its last legs. This glum conviction is less startling than it would have been a few decades ago, when the doctrine of inevitable progress still had many adherents in both low and high places. Today the funeral bell is being rung by a whole army of philosophers and social scientists. I join their ranks not out of the desire to be in step or from a perverse love of the pessimistic, but simply because the facts seem to support their somber diagnosis.”

16Closest to home is a recent volume of *Christian Scholar’s Review* (XXVI:2) which contains a symposium on “Postmodernity and Christians in the Academy.” See also Diogenes Allen’s article, “The End of the Modern World,” *CSR* XXII:4 (1993): 339-347, esp. 340: “But if you are a Christian, the end of the modern world means the collapse of a secular creed, the creed that has dominated university and research centers. The end of the modern world means that Christianity is liberated from the narrow, constricting, asphyxiating stranglehold of the modern world.”

ing which investigates the medievalisms of the modern age.\textsuperscript{18} Medieval Studies scholars are thereby striving to end the modernist marginalization of the Middle Ages; and the postmodernists among us are doing so by employing medieval culture as a foil against which to study modernism as a cultural construct.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, just as the Middle Ages had been used previously by modernists as a foil for extolling the virtues of Enlightenment modernity, the medieval world is currently being employed by postmodernists to critique modernism.\textsuperscript{20} In both cases the medieval era has functioned as a mirror into which both modernists and postmodernists have gazed to find their own reflections, and thus the actual Middle Ages have been a means to self-reflection, not an end in themselves. Such cultural narcissism does little, however, to help us look beyond ourselves. Yet these gazes directed toward the Middle Ages have ironically helped to clarify the nature of both modernism and postmodernism as cultural constructs. In particular, they also


\textsuperscript{19}Terry Eagleton, “The End of English,” \textit{Textual Practice} 1 (1987): 7: “In the so-called postmodern condition what was previously displaced to the margins returns to haunt the very center.” Thus medieval studies joins ethnic studies, feminist studies, film studies, and cultural studies of all types.

\textsuperscript{20}For example, Jeffrey M. Peak, “‘In the Beginning Was the Word:’ Germany and the Origins of German Studies,” \textit{Medievalism and the Modernist Temper} uses the modern study of medieval philology to critique modernist methodology: “...disciplines are like texts in so far as they are constituted for very compelling reasons at particular historical moments, which set them on a course that continues to shift direction and assume different meanings as their function changes. Institutional interests, national and patriotic urges, academic and scholarly philosophies intermittently erupted and converged to shape the course of a discipline which, as part of philosophical practice, would significantly influence what constituted scholarship, research, and learning...” (128).
provide a valuable opportunity for Christian scholars to participate in the dialogue between the modernists and postmodernists concerning textual authority.

The differences between modernism and postmodernism are most striking in their approaches to reading texts as either written documents or cultural artifacts, and thereby in assigning authority to these texts. Postmodernism has challenged what counts for knowledge and the epistemological foundations for knowledge, which hitherto have been based on modernist Enlightenment categories. Historians of all sub-disciplines have been caught in the crossfire, since the discipline of history (like other disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences) was founded on modernist understandings of textual philology and natural science research methodology. Even more to the point, the enterprise of historical study itself is based on the value and meaning of texts as documentary evidence of the past; therefore, whichever texts are assigned authority will define what history is written.

In order to explore the modernist/postmodernist debate over textual authority, I have chosen for our case study what may seem to be a most unlikely genre of texts: medieval forgeries. I have done so for two reasons: firstly, because the medieval period is often labeled by modernists as the “Age of Forgeries,” and secondly because forgeries by definition raise obvious questions about textual authority. The great forgeries of our century, like the much celebrated Piltdown Man or the Hitler Diaries in 1983 have done nothing to alter modern belief in the uniqueness of medieval credulity. From the remarkable Donation of Constantine to the hundreds of forged royal, clerical and aristocratic charters, from the many relics of the true Cross to “forged” saints like St. Christopher, the medieval penchant for creative imitation has been duly noted. Many otherwise illustrious and respected...
clerical and secular leaders were involved in countless medieval forgeries, to the 
amazement and confusion of modern scholars who began the study of medieval 
manuscripts. This led them to conclude that the Middle Ages were forgery-prone, 
deficient in critical sensibility, and morally dim—hence the “Dark Ages.” This judg-
ment, of course, tells us more about the cultural values of modern scholars than it 
does about why medievals were so apt to produce forged documents. How did 
this mis-reading of medieval textual conventions come about? In the fifteenth-cen-
tury Renaissance a tradition of humanist scholarship emerged from the growing 
late medieval study of Greek and Hebrew. Such language-based learning, when 
coupled with Latin literacy, produced a learned culture emphasizing the textual 
and philological, and a zeal for the “pure text” uncorrupted by centuries of hand-
made copies. The discovery of medieval forgeries at the Vatican and elsewhere in 
the course of the humanists’ research drew linguistic studies into the fray of the 
Reformation, and thereafter served Protestants well for many centuries in their 
disagreements with “deceitful Rome.” But this was still learning in the service of 
faith. A secularized version of this philological approach to truth emerged during 
the Enlightenment, which rejected both Catholic and Protestant ways of reading 
texts as still essentially medieval since they were religiously motivated—what the 
Protestants had wrought on Catholics was now wrought on themselves. By the 
nineteenth century philology-based scholarship (known by its German creators as 
Quellenkritik) became the basis of professional historical research—that is, a critical 
textual basis for truth and knowledge became the backbone for historical truth. 
And here is the modernist philology of truth in a nutshell: a document is consid-
ered either true or false based on whether or not it contains the formal authenticity 
it claims to possess. Just as the scientists of the seventeenth century proved the 
medieval cosmos false/inauthentic in its formal structure (and thus a forgery) by 
the scientific method, so too texts that did not have the correct formal structure 
were equally false/inauthentic. Indeed, an entire professional discipline of 
diplomatics was created with methods of discerning the authenticity of a given 
historical text based on formal, textual, and linguistic elements. These signifiers of 
authenticity helped one date and localize a document in order to verify its sup-
posed legitimacy. Therefore, as the modern era continued, it became fundamental 
to the viability of a text that it be formally accurate—it must be “true” in form 
before the truth or accuracy of its content could be seriously considered. If the form 
(that is, claims to origin, authorship, authenticity) was rejected as not genuine, the

26 Actually, this was a revival of a much older tradition of humanist philology begun by Alex-
andrine scholars of early Hellenism who preserved the intellectual inheritance of Greek ant-
iquity. This method was transfused into Italy in the fifteenth century by refugee scholars 
from the Byzantine empire, which collapsed in 1453.

27 As one of many such examples, German Protestants like Wilhelm Kammeier (1889-1959) in 
the 1930s accused the Roman church of removing “pure Germanness” from real medieval 
texts and replacing them with an entire “romanized” corpus of forgeries in the 15th century. 
Such ethnocentric, nationalistic propaganda was gladly taken up by the Nazis to attack Catho-
lic clergy in Germany.
content (that is, remaining claims to truth) was thereby rejected out of hand. Formal accuracy then became the *discrimen veri et falsi* (distinction between true and false).

While this approach to textual authority served well the needs of public administration in terms of legal and property matters, such administrative literacy, which valued formal accuracy above all else, had other cultural consequences. Not only did it undermine traditional religious authority substantially, but replaced it with a new “scientific” (or positivist) approach to truth for the humanities mirroring the natural sciences. The “truth” discovered by this scientific approach to texts—that is, that so many medieval texts were not formally authentic—gave as much cultural authority to modern philology as the seventeenth-century discoveries about false notions of the universe’s form had given to the scientific method. A “Textual Revolution” or “Textual Enlightenment” had occurred, and truth would never be the same. Historical truth now meant only the “facts,” which could be verified by rational examination of the texts and tested by investigative analysis of the evidence—the “literal truth” of form became superior to the traditional medieval mode of identifying truth in the content of a text. The latter was disparaged as coming from an ‘age of faith and superstition’ rather than from the modern, enlightened age of reason, wherein truth was equated with a formalist and literalist view of accuracy. This was cultural shorthand for “our truth is superior to your truth.” As a sign of the shift from medieval to modern modes of reading texts, the Latin term *bona fide* lost its original medieval meaning (literally, something done “in good faith”) and came to mean “genuine, real, without fraud” in an Enlightenment sense.

Postmodernist scholarship, however, has been raising doubts about the traditional modernist approach to textual authority. (I shall restrict my comments here to the ways in which postmodernism has entered the discipline of history, though I am sure those in other disciplines will recognize the fingerprints.) Postmodernist historians—generally those in the New Cultural History movement—assert that the Enlightenment-based modern definitions of and the distinction between fact and falsity are culturally constructed and thus limiting factors in doing history or any other of the “human sciences.” For postmodernists the external form of a given text (be it written, monumental, or artistic) is no more important in understanding a culture than the internal content of the text. In fact the form (or external structure) of the text can actually interfere with our understanding of its internal content: the heart of the matter for the new cultural historians is therefore located in the dis-

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28Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 126: “Every discipline . . . is, as Nietzsche saw most clearly, constituted by what it forbids its practitioners to do. Every discipline is made up of a set of restrictions on thought and imagination, and none is more hedged about with taboos than professional historiography.” Lee Patterson, “On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies,” 90: “. . . precisely the recognition that the natural, universal, given, transcendent, and timeless is historically constructed—and therefore alterable—is the great, liberating insight of postmodernism.”
course contained within the text. Since language itself is understood as a formal metaphor or verbal signifier that contains truth beyond its mere textual form, the labeling as non-factual and fictitious (or forged) by the modern philological method is based merely upon formal concerns. Postmodernist historians are reemphasizing the value of the long-ignored content of documents hitherto alienated from the canon of legitimate historical texts (like forgeries).

This so-called “New Philology” is also calling for scholars to allow such texts to speak on their own terms. Dominick LaCapra in particular, who traces his approach to Bakhtin and Derrida, has challenged historians to listen more than categorize:

The historian’s task, then, is to develop a “dialogue” in which the autonomous past is allowed to question our recurring attempts to reduce it to order. “It must be actively recognized that the past has its own ‘voices’ that must be respected,” LaCapra writes, “especially when they resist or qualify the interpretations we would like to place on them. A text is a network of resistances, and a dialogue is a two-way affair; a good reader is also an attentive and patient reader.”

Such an approach encourages us to let medieval forgers and forgeries speak to us on their own terms, rather than to categorize them according to our standards because they seem to make no sense to us otherwise. But this comes with a price: it places medieval people at the center of history (in this instance) and displaces the ahistorical presentist thinking so prevalent in modernism. Uncomfortably, we are no longer at the hub of human history nor the focal point toward which all things tend—so long to the modernist historical teleology of “progress to us.” Another epistemological revolution has thus occurred, and other historical eras no longer revolve around us. We are now just one of many other eras in the historical cosmos. Indeed, the modern age is increasingly understood as just another historical period between the ancient and postmodern epochs.

31Stephen Nichols, “Modernism and the Politics of Medieval Studies,” Medievalism and the Modernist Temper, 31: “A history in the service of the present, which believes in the superiority of the modern age for understanding the past, is a history that will inevitably place great weight upon the archaeological of historical details, the individual facts, as proofs of its superior ability to recover and interpret a past hidden from itself.”
32Umberto Eco, “Living in the New Middle Ages,” Travels in Hyperreality trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1986), 73-85 identifies some striking social and cultural similarities between the dawning of the Early Middle Ages amid the collapse of the western Roman empire and the dawning of the Postmodern Age amid the exhaustion of western Modernism: for example, growing insecurity and a resulting millenialism, Robin Hood justice as the gap between rich and poor expands, the removal of the socio-economic élite from the cities to suburban estates while the cities decayed, the massive influx of non-Roman emigrants from the provinces, the mixture of and conflict between cultures, the poor quality of manu-
Others have encouraged us to think of historical research and writing not in modernist scientific (or positivist) terms but rather in pre-modern humanist terms more akin to literature, language, philosophy, and the arts. Hayden White, an advocate of Foucault, has told historians, “Only a willful, tyrannical intelligence could believe that the only kind of knowledge we can aspire to is that represented by the physical sciences.” This approach encourages us to leave aside the “scientific facts” and consider medieval forgers in their own historical context as producers of cultural documents which had a specific social function and which reflected their conceptions of truth and textual authority. This represents an important shift from a “fact-based” positivist science that emphasizes narrative causation but neglects purpose; in terms of reading texts this requires us to move from what the text says to how it functions, and to emphasize the meaning of a text inscribed by contemporaries over the modernist historian’s concerns with historical causation. So we must investigate the medieval meaning and function of a forged document rather than factually identify its constituent parts and pronounce it a lie.

Therefore, the epistemological and philological redirection inherent in a postmodernist reading of texts rejects the modernist polarity between absolutely true and false texts, allowing for the possibility that, even though in its form a text claims false authorship or authority, it is still a valid text to be studied for its content. It is no less an authoritative text and potentially contains no less historical truth than a formally authentic text. In fact, this view of texts merely reminds us why forgeries are so often taken as genuine—they contain enough truth in content to be considered legitimate and authoritative.

Textual Readings: Medieval

Now that we have considered modernist and postmodernist readings of historical texts, let us finally give the medieval world a chance to explain its forgeries. We ask again, how could an “Age of Christian faith” produce such a series of forged documents? To begin with, we must consider what forgery means. Today forgery is a crime. We live in a world of established and objective law, issued and enforced by law enforcement agencies and courts. However, in the medieval world, forgery was not necessarily viewed as a criminal act. In fact, some medieval scholars believed that forgeries could be legitimate and authoritative.

Factured goods, an art “not systematic but additive and compositive,” centers of intellectual retreat (the American university and medieval monastery), wandering youth, emigrants, and tourism along pilgrimage routes, and I would add the increasing weight and cost of the state and military.

Traditional historians like Lawrence Stone have also decried the predominance of the New Social History and called for more of a literary history; see Stone, The Past and Present Revisited (London: Routledge, 1987).


by the sovereign state. To forge documents infringes on the very law that empowers the state by privatizing public authority and prerogatives (for example, printing money). This was the legal context in which modern philologists read medieval forgeries, and their conclusions are not hard to comprehend. But until the twelfth or thirteenth century such was not the case in medieval Europe. Law was not understood as established by humans on the basis of earthly utility, but as established in a higher sense by a righteousness independent of human statute—God was the source of justice. A law was legitimated by the justice inherent in it, not by the statutory authority of a state. Thus, injustice contained within law was an absurdity for medievals, and if individuals ever encountered it they were obliged out of a sense of justice to act in conformity with the divine order instead. Many modern Christian traditions still maintain direct historical ties to this medieval sense that justice is not created by the state but by God and that institutionalized injustice should be resisted.

This sense of justice moved the highly respected bishop and reformer Burchard of Worms (1000-1025), for example, to reconstruct texts in his collection of church canons to reflect the way the purer early church must have been organized in contrast to the deterioration of his day caused by a century of Viking and Magyar invasions. He often strengthened the authority of his collection by inserting at points the authorship of St. Augustine to synodal decrees, since the texts were consistent with the ideas and truth the great Church Father had taught. Burchard was giving the originator of an idea credit for it, even though it had been mediated through later church synods. Of course moderns would consider this simple plagiarism, but Burchard and many others drew up such writings with strong faith in their essential truthfulness, which could not be restricted by as-yet uninvented modern rules of textual etiquette.36

Again, this understanding of textual authority did not come from a lesser intellectual capacity; rather, the text was understood as a formal foreground or surface for the transcendent truth. Hence truth and justice were realities that were only incarnated into textual form, but they were not restricted by the form: the text was pliable instead of the truth it announced.

Such a sense of truth and text comes from an age of oral culture. Europe during the Early Middle Ages (fifth-tenth centuries) was a preliterate society (meaning the majority of the population had no practical use for literacy). In such an “oral community,” truth and authority were not considered to be contained merely in texts. Those few texts that people encountered were highly respected, especially the Scriptures. But since the vast majority of people could not read them, for all practical purposes textual truth and authority were the private preserve of a small minority—the “textual community.”37 Therefore, truth had to be negotiated in oral

37See M. T. Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307 2nd ed. (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993). Brian Stock has also produced seminal works in the under-
language and custom—whether or not it was written down was secondary and derivative. The truth was literally preserved among the people, and writing it down did not usurp the communal sense of truth and authority.

It did not, that is, until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The reintroduction of Roman Law (a text-based, statutory-based system of law) and successful royal efforts at increasing governmental centralization during the High Middle Ages (eleventh-thirteenth centuries) gradually transformed medieval ways of discourse about property rights and legal jurisdiction. The upshot was a massive increase in the production of written documents to verify such claims to power. The care for an authoritative, accurate text was now in vogue among the expanding “textual community,” and both the papal chancery as well as the growing universities developed sophisticated procedures for identifying forged charters and corruptions in manuscripts of the Bible effected by years of hand copying.

Monarchs, too, as a means of extending their legal authority throughout their realms, began to demand documentary evidence for property and jurisdictional claims. How then, does a largely oral culture respond to the demand for documentary evidence of their traditional claims? There were two options: the sword and the pen, both of which were employed in defense of the traditional sense of justice. The sword was used by nobles. The story is told of a nobleman, who when asked by English royal officials by what warrant he held an estate, replied by unsheathing an ancient, rusty sword and saying, “Here, my lords, is my warrant!”

But what was a monastery or bishopric to do when royal legal authorities began to demand documentary evidence that their institutions exercised authority or possessed property in a given locale? The pen was also drawn with a sense of justice: some enterprising monk or cleric merely produced a charter—a fraudulent, forged charter according to modern philological standards—which confirmed the truth that customary rights and authority had been exercised by his religious house for as long as anyone could remember. Although the document’s form was forged (and quite well done in most cases), the legal claims it made in the content were true and thus the document reflected a righteous truth as far as the monastic or clerical community were concerned. Once again, the ultimate, over-riding truth resided in God’s righteous order in the community rather than in human forms such as written texts. We might call this a kind of “extra-textual” view of truth. The monk would not only have had a clear conscience, but would have felt that he had done a good


deed by “telling the truth” in a form suitable to the new needs of governmental jurisdiction. He was thereby justified before God, who is Truth, when he created the text for his community.39 There is no superstition operating here, just a different cultural attitude toward the role of texts and proving the truth in society. In fact the monk has done his work bona fide—“in good faith,” which served to vouch for the integrity and veracity of his efforts.40 This medieval mode of thought about truth is not antiquated or old-fashioned. Such “medieval déjà vu” crops up all the time: for example, in the statement by mathematician Douglas R. Hofstadter in his best-seller Gödel, Escher, Bach that provability is (even in mathematics) a weaker notion than truth “no matter what axiomatic system is involved.”41 That is what our monk is trying to tell us: the means of provability (that is, the text) is a weaker notion than the truth the text proclaims.

Medieval authorities certainly saw the formal and historical errors of forgeries as modern scholars do (for example, charters claiming to be older than they were, or with the wrong author cited) and even commented on them. But their remarks maintain the traditional medieval attitude toward texts. St. Bonaventure (died 1274) concluded about a forged document, “Although it is false, nevertheless it contains much of high truth.” Vincent of Beauvais in the thirteenth century concluded about canonical forgeries in general: “Be they authentic or false [in form], they can be believed and read without danger for the soul” since they contain truth in their content.42 Only heretics produce real forgeries, since their errors are found not so much in the form as in the content of their texts. Heretical texts were inauthentic and fraudulent, because their content was rooted not in truth but in error. Hence an authentic text (in modern terms) written by a heretic was a forgery (in medieval terms) because of its error-filled content that claimed to be true, while a forged text (in modern terms) asserting truth was considered a truthful and accurate document. For medieval thinkers, this was not irrational but most eminently rational and accurate as an understanding of truth: reality operates according to the divine order and is merely mediated through language. So the form of the language (the formal text as opposed to oral transmission) is of secondary consequence. Reality is found not in the structure but in the discourse of a text, as the postmodernists might say.

The classic example of such an attitude toward textual truth is the eighth-century Donation of Constantine. Those who composed it centuries after Constantine’s age were sure that the pope’s jurisdictional authority around Rome, the city having been abandoned long ago by emperors, must have been derived from imperial gift. How else could such a political state of affairs have resulted?

42As cited in Furhmann, Einladung ins Mittelalter 207, 216.
Thus Constantine must have given the pope political authority when he moved to the new Rome (Constantinople), and a charter was drawn up which reflected the ancient but lost truth. When Arnold of Brescia (died 1155), the Waldensians, and later the Hussites rejected the Donation, they were seen as heretics and indicted—because they had used formal, historical, and philological criticism of the document? No, because they put its truth into question and thereby threatened the ecclesiological and material foundations of the Roman church—they argued that such a donation drew the church away from its apostolic life of voluntary poverty and therefore was not righteous before God. Hence the entire Donation was judged false based on extra-textual reasoning.

When formal, historical, and philological criticism of the document itself did come, the results might be surprising. Lorenzo Valla (died 1457) proved with primarily linguistic arguments that the Donation of Constantine was a forged charter. A bit earlier the Cardinal-Bishop Nicolaus of Cusa (died 1464) came to the same conclusion, and moreover had pointed out the inauthenticity of widely dispersed papal decretals. What happened to these two men? Both continued to enjoy careers in high church office and incomes from church benefices. The difference between the heretical and the orthodox critics of the Donation? While the former rejected the content of the text as false, the latter rejected only the form of the text as false. Nicolaus of Cusa and Lorenzo Valla continued to accept the supposed truth of the Donation while rejecting the document defining it. For these medieval thinkers both heresy and orthodoxy were based on extra-textual notions of truth.

The Medieval in a Postmodern World

Now let us bring this matter full circle. The cultural paradigm-shift away from the modernist understanding of textual truth and authority recommended by the postmodernists shares some striking affinities with the older medieval view. First of all, postmodernism sheers away the Enlightenment-based modernist/positivist assumptions about textual authority, which have served for so long to label medieval culture as irrational and Christianity in particular as a peculiar superstition fashioned during the pre-rational “Dark Ages.” And like the medieval understanding of texts, postmodernism emphasizes the meaning of a text as a marker of social and cultural practice rather than as a mere record of historical facts. In all this, both medieval and postmodernist understandings of textual authority sever the modernist connection between form and truth: truth is not bound by form, which is something merely designed for its social and cultural usefulness. To this extent

postmodernist notions are not really new, then; but they do open new possibilities—especially for Christian scholars.

I share some of the criticisms of postmodernism and do not present myself as a proponent but rather as an observer of this late twentieth-century movement. Surely the centrifugal tendency of postmodernism to decenter the modern epistemology of truth in Foucaultian fashion without replacing it with another can have nihilistic results—it often produces idiosyncratic, topical scholarship with no conceptual framework that justifies and integrates a given discipline. And if all modes of discourse about truth are mere cultural constructs detached from objective correlates beyond the discourse and are equally privileged, the only principled commitment left to the intellectual lies in deconstructing the “blind dogmatism” of all others who disagree with you and your politics.44 The new historical metanarrative then becomes whatever you wish it to be, and history in particular becomes “historiographic metafiction”—just another genre of fiction writing liberated from concerns about “fact.”45 Indeed, literary theorists have been roundly criticized for imaginatively rewriting historical texts by way of allegorizing their meaning (and I thought only medieval people read texts allegorically).46 The endeavor to comprehend human history must incorporate the literal, historical meaning of the text as well as the metaphorical: this is something by the way that medieval exegetes already knew so long ago.

While these concerns are valid, the problems are less apocalyptic than is often asserted. To my mind postmodernism is not a revolutionary intellectual movement, but rather the culmination of modernism. I would agree with the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who once called Foucault and Derrida “Young Conservatives” because, although their “irreconcilable anti-modernism” had served as a solvent for modernism, they replaced it with no revolutionary agenda once deconstruction was complete.47 The postmodernist movement is the logical con-

44Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Can Scholarship and Christian Conviction Mix: A New Look at the Integration of Knowledge,” (an unpublished paper delivered in 1996) 26: “Whereas for a long time now it has been the calling of the Christian scholar to emphasize that Christianity offers a distinctive perspective on reality, the time may be coming when it will be at least as important to emphasize our shared humanity and the importance of mutual listening. If what emerges from the overthrow of the hegemony of Eurocentric bourgeois white males is not speaking and listening in dialogue but hard-of-hearing multiple power constellations, then nothing has been gained.”


46Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 58: “The discredit into which interpretation has fallen is thus at one with the disrepute visited on allegory itself.”

clusion of modernism’s cultural entropy and is part of a long heritage of other anti-modernist movements stretching back to the early nineteenth century. Romanticism’s use of the Middle Ages as an antidote to scientific, mechanical modernism has been well documented. It was followed by other challenges to the Enlightenment social and cultural world crafted by European male property owners: Marxism, the anti-slavery movement, the women’s movement, labor movements, the civil rights movement, avant garde modern art movements, Neo-orthodoxy, and so forth. The Postmodernists are reminding us, as their many predecessors have, that the emperor’s modernist new clothes are, shall we say, “culturally constructed” and thereby not universal or absolute sources of truth.

Many Christian intellectuals have been saying the same thing throughout the modern era, and nowhere have we had a better opportunity to participate than in the dialogue to come. Whereas modernism has marginalized Christianity as superstitious and irrational, postmodernism offers a relegitimation of the Christian voice as one of the many “communities of conviction.” Many Christians agree with postmodernists that modern western culture has reached its teleological end and has found that it is without a transcendent or universal foundation at its center. Gradually an awareness is emerging that the evacuation of purpose bound up with modernization is hardly bearable. Now that postmodernism has pointed out the “forgery” of modernism, the search for a transcendent and universal center has begun, and Christians should be engaged in the quest rather than segregating themselves in academic and religious subcultures. We could learn a lot from those medieval Christians who helped invent a new culture amid the confluence of the old Roman empire and the new world of Germanic immigrants.

Our participation will require us to search for ways to speak to the human condition in the twenty-first century that are not solely from the culture of western modernity. The global conditions will require it, and the majority of Christians will be doing it (since they will come from the non-western world). In recent

Rabinow’s response, “What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on ‘What is Enlightenment?’”: 109-121.


Wells, God in the Wasteland, 47: “Post-modern thinkers are the vanguard of a profound reaction to the failure of the Enlightenment project, giving expression to a deeply held suspicion that modernity is in fact the enemy of human life.” He too sees postmodernism as a logical extension of modernism; see 26ff. and 220.

I should also point out here that the Bible itself is not a production of western modernity (though some interpretations are), and so it is eminently suitable for this task.

According to recent editions of the Mission Handbook (a yearly publication of the Mission Advanced Research and Communication Center) there are already more Christians in Africa or Asia than in North America. Christianity is rapidly becoming a non-Western religion, with Evangelical Protestants comprising only about 3-4% of the world population of Christians. For specific statistics on this trend see David B. Barrett, ed. World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, AD 1900-2000 (Oxford:
decades missionaries have taught us a great deal about distinguishing between the gospel and culture; perhaps it is time to apply this approach to Modern western culture. Lesslie Newbigin, a lifelong missionary in India, has published a fascinating study of western modernism based on his Warfield Lectures given at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1984.\textsuperscript{52} He sees Enlightenment-based western culture as a missionary frontier, where Westerners need to be reached with the Gospel from a biblical perspective of non-western cultures. One could say in fairness that he, too, is deconstructing modernism as a cultural strategy for missionary work in the West.

Collaboration with colleagues, both Christian and non-Christian, who either come from or study non-western regions of the world has taught me a remarkable thing: that the traditional cultures and societies they describe have a great deal in common with pre-modern western society and culture. So it has occurred to me that we might also look to the real Christian Middle Ages as a source for speaking to an increasingly global culture that shares more affinities with the pre-modern than the modern West. Evangelical Christians should move beyond the debates of modernism and begin preparing themselves and their students for the postmodern global era. They could begin by joining a growing number of Protestant Christians who are embracing medieval Christianity as part of their heritage, as Catholic scholars have done for a long time.\textsuperscript{53} Evangelical Protestants have instead embraced modernism much more fully in a cultural sense; indeed they have been having a love-hate relationship with it since the Reformation.\textsuperscript{54} Perhaps Evangelicals could begin to see the Middle Ages as a rich source of intellectual life and spirituality ready and relevant for current scholarship. Just ask any academic philosopher how “hot” the revival in medieval philosophy is at the current time.\textsuperscript{55}

The implementation of a medieval hermeneutical orientation, however, will challenge us to reconsider our modernist understanding of issues in the classroom.
at Christian colleges. For example, in missiology might we not study the first great post-Pauline missionary movement of the Church led by Celtic and Anglo-Saxon monks in order to learn their strategies for indigenization of the gospel? Or might we revive the medieval Christian notion of a moral economy when teaching about the nature of free-market capitalism? And what results would we get if we subjected modern (and postmodern) politics, advertising, news, and entertainment paradigms to the medieval standard of truth in content rather than an emphasis on formal image? In the postmodern age where video representations of reality are fast replacing textual literacy, we would benefit from studying how the medieval textual community translated their knowledge into images accessible to the majority non-textual community. How might the medieval sense of Christendom soften our divisions and overcome the modern force of nationalism, which has so often violently pitted modern Christians against each other for the sake of loyalty to state and ideology? Finally, what more multicultural civilization does one need than that formed in medieval Europe by a fusion of Roman, Celtic, Germanic, Greek, Slavic, Scandanavian, Arabic, and Jewish peoples?

An even more fundamental question for the Christian college is this: should we in the twenty-first century continue to think of the practice of integrating faith and learning in a modernist paradigm wherein the rational intellect and religious faith are mutually exclusive and must be intentionally forged together like opposite ends of magnets? Or might we reacquaint ourselves with the medieval Christian understanding of a harmonious unity between these two in the soul? And shall we still need to join the “Modernist-Fundamentalist Battle for the Bible?” Or would a renewal of the medieval Christian understanding of textual authority free us from requiring formal scientific proofs of scriptural “authenticity” in order to believe in the truth spoken therein? Obliging our religious faith to be based on scientific proof of form suggests more faith in modernism and the scientific method than in the truth expressed in the text. The fundamentalist notion of inerrancy is itself in this respect a peculiarly modern construct.

Ceasing to privilege (but not destroy) Enlightenment categories of discourse on truth and textual authority in particular enables a return to an originally Chris-
Christian understanding of these subjects, one stripped from the false polarity that has historically been at the root of the Fundamentalist-Modernist conflict over Scriptural authority and the subsequent need to integrate one’s faith and intellectual life as if they were opposing forces in one’s soul. A holistic appreciation of truth emerges that is not bound by modern western textual rules, and allows the Word once again to operate beyond the bounds of the page. We thereby cease limiting “God off the page” merely to “God on the page.” As Christians who worship a God whose truth transcends cultures and written texts of all sorts and yet who has chosen to be manifested through just such forms, we should be able to understand the postmodernist (read medieval) perspective on culture and see the opportunities therein for celebrating anew the ancient vitality of religious life and scriptural truth.

Having said all this, however, I wish to close by making it clear that I am not calling for some sort of cultural war. That is the stuff of the modern age. Nor am I suggesting the adoption of the medieval worldview in its entirety. Rather, as C. S. Lewis wrote in his consideration of the medieval “Discarded Image,” “I hope no one will think that I am recommending a return to the Medieval Model. I am only suggesting considerations that may induce us to regard all Models in the right way, respecting each and idolising none.”

We should, as Christians, refrain from absolutizing any cultural model—including modernism—lest we act as the Judaizing Christians of old. Rather, we ought to take that great medieval saint, Bishop Augustine of Hippo, as our guide. He wrote during an age of cultural transition and yet was not apocalyptic, and he distinguished clearly between the City of God and the City of Man. He did not look to the Roman Empire and its culture for security, but to the spiritual kingdom God was fashioning in the midst of the cultural transformation. Indeed, he was so careful not to conflate the two cities that he offended his contemporaries by asserting that God could fashion a new civilization just as well with the barbarians who were at the gate as he could with Christian Romans. He was right—the future of western Christianity and culture lay with the Germanic barbarians. And yet, he reminds us, whichever barbarians are at the gates of the City of Man—be they Goths, modernists, postmodernists, or whoever you please—these are not entirely our gates. Let us not confuse Camelot with the Crystal City, our Heavenly Jerusalem.

Faith in the *Heart of Darkness*: What Conrad Intended with “the Intended”

By David L. Rozema

**Introduction**

In a letter to William Blackwood, the editor of *Blackwood’s Magazine* where *Heart of Darkness* was first published (serially), Joseph Conrad writes that “. . . in light of the final incident, the whole story in all its descriptive detail shall fall into its place—acquire its value and its significance.”¹ In an excellent essay, Juliet McLauchlan² takes this passage as a point of departure, defending Conrad against those critics, like Daleski, who claim that Conrad “bungled the [last] scene.”³ McLauchlan ably argues that Conrad did not bungle the last scene; that the scene was successful “in Conrad’s terms” (VS 175). So far I am in agreement with McLaughlan, but I do not agree with her understanding of what those terms were. In this essay I will argue that the “value and significance” of *Heart of Darkness*, as revealed in the last scene between Marlow and Kurtz’s Intended, lies in the essential difference between the kind of faith by which Marlow lives, and the kind of faith by which the Intended lives. Marlow’s faith, which is similar in many respects to Kurtz’s faith, is essentially faith in the potential power of each person not only to recognize moral good, but also, more importantly, to attain it. The Intended’s faith, on the other hand, is essentially different. Although Conrad does not directly indicate in *Heart of Darkness* what it is that the Intended has faith in, there are plenty of clues to indicate this essential difference. I will explore the (admittedly capricious) idea that the Intended’s faith is faith in God as the only means by which a person can hope to attain moral righteousness. I maintain that a close reading of the story’s “descriptive detail” reveals that Conrad thinks Marlow’s kind of faith ultimately ends in despair. Thus, the reader is left to wonder whether the alternative—the Intended’s faith—is the means to righteousness. This, I believe, is the

David L. Rozema explores the idea that the “value and significance” Joseph Conrad saw for *Heart of Darkness* lies in the essential difference between the kind of faith by which Marlow lives and the kind of faith by which Kurtz’s Intended lives. A close reading of the story’s “descriptive detail” reveals that Conrad thinks Marlow’s kind of faith ends in despair, leaving the reader to wonder whether the Intended’s kind of faith ends in hope. Mr. Rozema is professor of philosophy at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.
“value” Conrad intended *Heart of Darkness* to have for his readers.

The “significance” of the story, however, lies in Conrad’s use of Marlow as the narrator in order to show his readers how someone (like Marlow) might be under the illusion that these two kinds of faith are, after all, not essentially different. This illusion blinds Marlow to the deeper difference between his kind of faith and the faith of the Intended, so that, ironically, Marlow completely fails to understand her, thinking all the while that he does understand her. By using Marlow as a narrator, Conrad displays to his readers the common illusion under which so many of us live: the illusion that Christian faith is just a specialized variety of the more generic, ordinary, common kind of faith. Conrad also shows us two effects this illusion has upon those (like Marlow) who do not see that it is an illusion: (a) the belief that Christian faith is an infantile, blind, naive faith, something anyone with more experience and intelligence can (and ought to) go beyond; and (b) the belief that, since Christian faith is just a peculiar species of a more generic faith, it is rather easily attained by any who desire it.

I. The Illusion of “Having Faith”

If I am right that Conrad was concerned to show the power of this illusion and its dangerous effects, then it is both natural and beneficial to conceive his task much as Kierkegaard, writing fifty years earlier, conceived his. In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard says,

>The contents of this little book affirm, then, what I truly am as an author, that the whole of my work as an author is related to Christianity, to “the problem of becoming a Christian” with the direct or indirect polemic against “the monstrous illusion” we call Christendom, or

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2 Juliet McLauchlan, “The ‘Value’ and ‘Significance’ of *Heart of Darkness*,” in the Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness*, edited by Robert Kimbrough (third edition) (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 375–91 (reprinted from *Conradiana*, 15 [1983]: 3–21). It is unquestionably presumptuous for me to raise serious criticisms of Juliet McLauchlan’s work, given her immensely insightful and invaluable contributions to Conrad scholarship. I am and will remain in her debt in many ways with respect to my reading of Conrad’s works, and I will always admire her work, especially the essay cited here. Nevertheless, I will proceed, perhaps incautiously, but for the sake of (at the very least) continued discussion, to take issue with some aspects of her interpretation of the last scene in *Heart of Darkness*. In what follows, I will cite from her essay as it is reprinted in the Kimbrough edition, using the letters “VS” followed by page numbers in that volume.
Conrad, I believe, is concerned with a similar illusion: the illusion that Christian faith is not essentially different from any other sort of faith; that the only difference is a difference in object—that faith in God is not essentially different from faith in oneself. Bouwsma says that, for Kierkegaard, this change [of becoming a Christian] “is conceived as a radical change. The illusion is seen in the man who has scarcely changed at all or who has changed in a superficial way and who is under the impression that whatever is now different in him is the change described by Kierkegaard as that of becoming a Christian.”5 Similarly, Conrad wants to show that Marlow is under the impression that his encounter with Kurtz has saved him and that it has changed him in some radical way, when in fact it has not. In order to further clarify this illusion, as well as to identify the point of difference between McLauchlan’s reading of *Heart of Darkness* and the one presented here, it will be of help to look at one of Kierkegaard’s literary works, the *Philosophical Fragments*.

Kierkegaard, in the voice of his pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, begins the *Philosophical Fragments* with the question, “Can the truth be learned?”6 But what realm of “truth” does he have in mind? Climacus says that the question is a Socratic one, related to the question that opens the dialogue between Socrates and Meno, “Can virtue be taught?”7 Thus, it is a question about virtue, or, as Climacus says, about *insight*: insight into not only the truth of what sort of life is the most excellent one, but also into the truth of how such a life can be attained. For as important as it is to know what constitutes a good life, it is at least equally important, and perhaps even more important, to have insight into how one might come to live such a life. This is the Socratic question, and it is the question for which Climacus presents to his readers two possible answers: (a) the (apparent) answer Socrates gives (that is to say, that the truth is recollected), and (b) the answer Christianity says God gives (that is, the answer found in the Christian Scriptures). Climacus does not, per se, discuss the question of what constitutes a good life, because he does not see any major difference between the Socratic answer to this question and the Christian answer. Piety, justice, wisdom, love, generosity, courage, moderation, kindness, gentleness, honesty—all of these are virtues common to both the Socratic and the Christian conception of a good and righteous life. Any Christian can admire and approve of Socrates’ words to the jury that convicted him of “corrupting the youth” of Athens:

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Gentlemen of the jury, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practise philosophy, to exhort you and in my usual way point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: Good sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul? . . . Be sure that this [examining and exhorting others in this way] is what the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god. (Apology, 29d–30a)

Likewise, Socrates would no doubt approve of and agree that he ought to submit to Christ’s commands to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength; and love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30–31); “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33); “Love your enemies, do good to those that hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27–28); or to St. Paul’s instruction: “See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men” (I Thess. 5:15). Socrates would heartily say “Amen” to the words of the prophet Micah: “He has shown thee, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of thee? Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:8).

The difference Climacus points out in the Fragments between the Socratic seeker of good and the Christian seeker is not in their respective answers as to the constitution of virtue or the good and happy life, but rather in their respective answers to the question of how such a life can be attained. And if there is any difference at all in their answers to the first question (“What constitutes a good life?”), it is only because the answer to the second question is different, and may require that the Christian possess (or at least place more significance upon) virtues not found in the Socratic seeker, in as much as these virtues are necessary for the attainment of a good and righteous life. They are the virtues of salvation: faith, hope, and love.

Socrates, of course, would not disagree that these are virtues—and neither would many others; they would not disagree because they do have a use for these words, and that use shows that they value and praise these characteristics. But that does not mean that the Christian uses these words in the same way, nor that the Christian’s conception of these characteristics—faith, hope, and love—is the same as that of others who use these words. So it can be difficult sometimes to see this difference, and that is why Climacus writes the Fragments as he does: in order to point out the difference between the Socratic conception of “learning (possessing) the truth,” and the Christian conception of “knowing (receiving) the truth”: and to explain the difference between Socrates as a teacher and Christ as the Teacher: to explicate the difference between the Socratic idea of evil as “ignorance” of virtue

Ibid., 34.

and the Christian idea of original sin.

This brings us back to *Heart of Darkness*, in which Conrad is clearly exploring the question of what happens to a man—even a supposedly virtuous man—when he takes himself to be a god. So there is good reason to think that Conrad, like so many of his literary predecessors, is concerned to show not only the importance of living a morally righteous (rather than a morally depraved) life, but also to give some indication of an answer as to how such a life might be achieved. If Conrad is concerned with questions about how a morally good life is either acquired or missed, lost or found, and not only about what such a life and its opposite consist of, then we would expect to find him portraying characters who not only differ in their moral characteristics, but also differ in their understanding and their practice with respect to how these characteristics are attained. That is, we would see characters who differ in their way of seeking the truth—that is, insight. And we would expect to find that one or another of these ways of truth-seeking would be portrayed darkly, as part of what it means to have a heart of darkness.

This, however, is just what we find in the last scene of *Heart of Darkness*. McLauchlan claims that the last scene is successful “in Conrad’s terms” (VS 375), and she thinks that his “terms” are these: that “[a]lthough he [Kurtz] is ‘hollow’ in that he has been false in practice to his ideals, ideas, and words, he can never reject human values or deny their worth. They make possible his ‘moral victory’; they ‘survive’ in his Intended as an ideal . . .” (VS 391). So, even though Kurtz fails to live out those lofty ideals—just as we all inevitably fail to live such ideal moral lives—he is still more human than the Manager, who has rejected moral ideals altogether. McLauchlan thus explains Marlow’s “choice of nightmares” in this way: “He [the Manager] is at one extreme. At the opposite extreme is the Intended” (VS 390), who represents a pure, morally righteous soul. In between these two extremes are Kurtz, Marlow, and most of us: those who must choose which direction to go. But, says McLauchlan, this is precisely the “insight” that Conrad intends to convey. Neither extreme—neither the Manager nor the Intended—is an accurate image of a truly human life. The Manager is a possibility, but an abomination; the Intended is a perfection, but an impossibility. The Manager is a devil, the Intended an angel, but both are inhuman. Still, if we must choose between them, let us choose the ideal, even if we must lie about its attainability. McLauchlan says that “[w]ithout Marlow’s lie, all ‘light of visionary purpose,’ any ‘slender ray of light’ would be extinguished and, with these, the whole concept of humanity’s upward potential” (VS 391).

We can see from this that McLaughlan’s interpretation is, in every way but one, thoroughly Socratic, in the sense Climacus presents the Socratic. She understands Conrad’s concern to be with “the truth”—with “insight” into what constitutes a morally good and righteous life—and she understands him to be pointing his readers to the Ideas of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty as they exist “potentially” within the human heart and mind. She even understands Conrad to espouse the idea that there is a “tremendous power” in “the capacity of the human soul, with-
out religious sanctions of any sort, to struggle with itself, to *find within itself values by which it can and must judge its actions*—and condemn them” (VS 382, my italics). It was to represent this “potential capacity” that McLauchlan thinks Conrad intended to use the Intended. And, like the words Socrates uses for his Forms, “Intended” is capitalized. In all of this, McLauchlan is quite Socratic in her understanding of Conrad. And if she is interpreting *Heart of Darkness* correctly, then Conrad too is Socratic in his understanding of the human condition and the ways by which moral goodness can be attained.

There are two problems that I wish to note about this interpretation of *Heart of Darkness*. The first is a textual one, and it goes beyond *Heart of Darkness*; it affects *Lord Jim* and *Youth* as well. McLaughlan assumes that Conrad’s character Marlow speaks for Conrad himself. Yet if this is the case, why does Conrad have another character narrate to his readers the narrative of Marlow? Why this bi-level narration? There are, of course, several possible answers to this question, but one very plausible possibility is that Conrad does not use Marlow as his own mouthpiece because he *does not agree with Marlow*. The use of Marlow as a distinctive character in his novels may, in fact, indicate that this disagreement is not just a disagreement over particular issues or moral/social problems, but rather a much deeper and broader disagreement in terms of a whole way of life—that is, a disagreement in their respective philosophies of life. And it is at the end of the story that we clearly see two characters who ultimately differ in their understanding and practice of how they think insight (that is, moral righteousness) is attained; and one of those ways is portrayed very darkly. The difference is disguised, however, by what appears to be agreement: agreement between Marlow and Kurtz’s Intended (also known as “the girl”) that faith is the means to moral righteousness and insight into the good life. As I will show, the difference between what Marlow understands to be faith (and a life of faith) is essentially quite different from the Intended’s understanding (and practice) of faith. Furthermore, Conrad indicates that he is aware of this difference himself, and that it is *Marlow’s* understanding that he both condemns and laments. For Conrad both begins and ends the story in gloom, describing it through the voice, not of Marlow, but of one of Marlow’s listeners. It is this same listener who describes Marlow’s stance, both at the beginning of his (Marlow’s) narration and at the end of it, as Buddha-like, thereby indicating a concern with not only the content of a morally good life, but also the means to its attainment.

The second problem with this interpretation is that, from a Christian understanding of history, it is no longer a possible one. It was Dante who reminded us that after Christ there could no longer be a special place in the cosmos for virtuous pagans. The first circle in the *Inferno* was filled with those who sought the good, who strove after virtue without the revelation of Christ as the Way. But after Christ, a man could no longer be excused for believing that the way to righteousness lies

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10I have no doubt that McLauchlan gives the correct interpretation of Marlow’s view. See below.

in himself. The first circle is full: no new members can be added. With Christ comes the revelation that no one but God is good, and no one apart from Christ can become good. To deny this revelation is to deny Christ himself. So, within Christendom, one must either be virtuous or a pagan, but one cannot be both anymore. This means that one either sees the Ideal as an illusion and hence as a goal not attainable by human means, or one sees the Ideal as a reality attainable only by means of the Ideal itself—that is to say, the person of Christ. This is not to say that others cannot recognize the good—they certainly can (a doctrine known in Christian theology as “general revelation”)—only that, apart from Christ, a life of true goodness is not possible. One reason Heart of Darkness has such broad appeal and stands as a literary classic is the very thing that McLaughlan emphasizes about Marlow: he does strive after the ideal, he does recognize the life-giving power of moral obligation (“There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies . . .” and the life-destroying power of unrestrained desire (“They [the heads on the stakes] only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts . . .” [HOD 133]). Marlow, unlike the Manager, is at least human, and therefore from him shines some light of truth. The illusion Conrad is concerned with, however, is not the illusion that Marlow knows what it is to be humanly virtuous (for that’s not an illusion—he does know), but the illusion that Marlow has somehow come as close as anyone possibly can to actually attaining this virtue.

And this is precisely the problem that is inherent in the very way McLaughlan expresses her interpretation. She says that Conrad invents the Intended to represent the “saving illusion” of the Ideally good person: but if it’s an illusion, it cannot save, and if it does save, it must be real. She says that without Marlow’s lie to the Intended, “the whole concept of humanity’s upward potential” would be extinguished (VS 391). Yet it is a “potential” that she thinks Conrad knows no one will ever reach. This is also why, on McLaughlan’s reading, “[t]here is no strong positive hope at the end of Heart of Darkness. Mere survival is assured” (VS 391). But this “survival” is desperate, indeed, and hardly commensurate with what many readers of Heart of Darkness (including myself) sense is a great work of literature. In the modern world, McLaughlan’s interpretation of Conrad’s “humanistic and ethical” basis in answering the question of how a morally righteous life can (or cannot) be attained (VS 381) has led to a common (though admittedly naive) postmodern conclusion that there is no such thing as a morally righteous life; that, in some possible world, any given way of life is “morally righteous”; that “morally righteous” or “moral good” can mean whatever you want them to mean.

It should now be clear what the illusion is. It is the illusion that faith in Christ is not essentially different from faith in one’s self; that the former is just an idealization of the latter. What remains is to show that this is, indeed, the illusion Conrad

12Cf. Canto IV of Dante’s Inferno.
is concerned with. Since, ex hypothesi, most readers of *Heart of Darkness* are under
the same illusion as Marlow, the method of demonstration here must be indirect. It
is not sufficient to simply say, “Look, this is an illusion. Here is how it works . . . ”;
for the illusion is not an optical illusion, but an intellectual one. Mere argument
will not dispel the illusion. Marlow’s illusion—that his is a mature, saving faith—
cannot be shown to be inconsistent with the ideal of humanism; for Marlow is, as
McLaughlin argues, realistically human. The best way to dispel an intellectual illu-
sion is, perhaps, to shock a person with the consequences of a life lived under the
illusion. This may open the way to doubts about what the person always thought
she understood, but never really did. Kierkegaard often uses this as a means to
dispel the illusion he was concerned with, the illusion of being a Christian14: Conrad
uses it, too. Certainly, Marlow, as well as most readers, is shocked by Kurtz’s de-
pravity, but the litmus test of a reader’s way of life lies in whether she is equally
shocked by Marlow’s lie to the Intended. In this way, Conrad uses Marlow to flush
out the truth in the reader of *Heart of Darkness*.

There is, however, another way to dispel an intellectual illusion: to ask the
question, “how did I learn this thing which now I take to be the reality?” and then
compare my answer to the answer given by others. If I find these answers to be
significantly different than mine, then perhaps, despite the appearance that we are
talking about the same reality, we in fact are not. This is the illusion-dismissing
approach Kierkegaard takes in the *Philosophical Fragments*, and, since Conrad is
concerned with a similar illusion—the illusion of “having faith”—I want now to
use this illusion-dismissing method to show how Conrad, in *Heart of Darkness*, ex-
poses those who live under this illusion.

II. The “Humanistic” Conception of Faith: Marlow

Can faith be learned?15 With this question we shall begin. Insofar as faith can
be learned, it must be assumed not to be naturally present in the one who is to
learn it. But if it is not naturally present, then there remains the question of how it
can be learned, for faith is necessarily faith in *something*, and must therefore pre-
suppose the faith of the learner in whomever (or whatever) it is that teaches her
faith. If faith is learned, then it is learned *somehow*, admitting from the very begin-

14*Fear and Trembling* is perhaps the best example (among Kierkegaard’s works) of the shock
method.

15What follows is said by one who is uncertain how the questions raised here originally came
up. I therefore offer this short piece as just a small and perhaps fragmented idea. I know very
well that it is very thinly disguised and shameless plagiarism. My apologies to Johannes
Climacus. But in defense of myself I offer these two thoughts. First, most of the best ideas
have already been thought up, so I see no special merit in trying to come up with a new one
unless one has a great deal more time and ingenuity than myself. Secondly, it cannot strictly
be called plagiarism when one first thinks a thought for oneself, even if someone else has
already thought it for himself. Perhaps the most telling criticism one can offer of me, then, is
that I am just a little slow in thinking these thoughts so late in my life.
ning the requirement that the learner have faith in the teacher and, likewise, that the teacher have enough faith in the learner to try to teach her. Thus (after just a few sentences), we have this paradox: in order for faith to be learned, it must already be present in the one who is to learn it. But if it is already present, then it cannot be said to be learned. So faith cannot be learned.

But perhaps we move too quickly. Let us consider: what might it mean to “learn” faith? Couldn’t we resolve the paradox—that is, get rid of it—by making a distinction between the capacity for faith and the actual learning of faith? We might say, accordingly, that the former is, in fact, a condition for the latter: a person might not naturally “have” faith—she cannot, at least, be said to have learned to have faith in either this Who or that What—while still having the capacity to learn it. This “capacity” would operate somewhat like many child psychologists say “intelligence” does. They say that “intelligence” is an indicator of “potential.” But it is a kind of “active potential,” because they have some means of “measuring” it. Thus, through a sort of indirect test in which the person whose intelligence is being measured is asked to solve a series of problems and answer a series of questions, that person’s “I.Q.” is determined. The test is “indirect” because what they are testing for (and what they are interested in) is not the person’s store of knowledge on any particular subject, but rather the person’s capacity for gaining and/or using this knowledge. Psychologists test for this—intelligence—even though the questions and answers themselves are directly tied to specific subjects. The idea is that a person’s capacity (or potential) for excellence in any given intellectual enterprise is necessarily limited only by her “I.Q.” If the person does not work up to the level of her “I.Q.,” she has (as they say) “failed to reach her potential.” In any case, there is a distinction drawn here between “showing your potential” and “reaching your potential.” The former is an active capacity, while the latter is an actualized capacity. (Such is the language of contemporary social science.)

In a similar manner, we might understand faith to consist of an active capacity and an actualized capacity, with the former being a condition and a necessary limit for the latter. Thus, while it is true that the one who is to learn faith must, in a sense, already “have” it—she has faith in the teacher—this is a “blind faith,” because she has not yet learned that there ought to be sound bases for faith, and she has not yet considered the faithfulness of her teacher. The learning of faith will come when she realizes that she must decide for herself who and what she will have faith in. It is only here, we might say, that the struggle begins, for now she must decide. Prior to this, she only has a capacity for faith (should we perhaps follow the lead of the investigators of intelligence and call it a “Faith Quotient”—“F.Q.”?), but after this, she either reaches or fails to reach her potential for faith.

So here we have a solution to our paradox of faith, or, more precisely, a dissolution. The condition for faith is a kind of faith—a “blind faith”—which is itself present in the one who is to learn faith. How important it is, then, that the teacher of faith be faithful to the concept of faith! The teacher of faith, under this conception of faith, will only be as good as the teacher’s word. In order to teach another to
have faith, and teach such faith faithfully, the teacher must teach the other that faith comes not from hearing only, but from the weight of evidence, collected over the years; for the learner learns what faith is only when she bases her faith on expansive experience. This teacher of faith must therefore be the practicing exemplar of faith, not the victorious gold-medallist of faith, and this is because the race is still being run. No exemplary teacher of faith, on this account of learning faith, would ever presume to have reached the point at which that teacher’s practice of placing faith in this or that person, this or that thing, based on the weight of finely sifted accumulated experience is no longer necessary. The teacher of faith is thus also always a learner of faith, just as everyone else always is.

On this view of what it means to learn faith, the capacity for faith is presupposed as an essential part of being human. Blind faith is present in everyone, and everyone makes this faith more or less a sight. And how does one do this? Certainly not by having the teacher do it for one, for the teacher knows that it is the learner’s inherent capacity for faith that is to be developed in the right manner and direction, not the teacher’s own. What then is the means by which faith becomes a sort of reliable sight? Since the decision of who or what to have faith in, on this view of what it means to learn faith, lies in the judgment of the learner, the learner becomes her own finisher of faith. The teacher is neither author nor finisher of any faith but her own; she is but an occasion for the learner to learn her own faith. Whether or not, in any given situation, one has placed her faith in what one ought to place faith in, depends upon one’s capacity for faithfulness, upon one’s faithfulness to her own judgment. Ultimately, this is where the trusted authority resides, in the heart of the individual. On this view of what it means to learn faith, the heart of everyone is a heart of light, not of darkness.

Let us now consider a particular man with this conception of faith. We will call him Marlow. Marlow is a man of wide experience. He has seen the world and nearly all the kinds of people that inhabit it. He has seen the subtle workings of the ego, both in himself and in others, as it cleverly provides to each man a convincing costume behind which he can pursue the desires of his oft-deceitful heart. He recognizes, even in his own closest friends—one a lawyer; another an accountant, yet another a company executive—the usually quite effective attempts to disguise some of these more primitive and vicious desires under the cloak of “efficiency” (HOD 69). And yet, in a profound way, Marlow has become convinced himself that the only sure means to a life ultimately free of sorrow, regret, and self-imposed suffering is to rid himself of these desires of the heart, to bury them under a load of work, unfocussed on any particular end, because all ends prerequisite a desire and all desires might mislead. So, whereas the efficiency of his friends may serve merely to hide (and thereby strengthen) the lust of their hearts, his own devotion to work is the means by which he hopes to bury his lusts. He seeks, by devoting himself completely to a goal-less (that is, endless) vocation, to overcome (by elimination) the desires of his heart. He has the kind of faith that is exhibited most clearly when, in the absence of the “warning voice of a kind neighbor,” he “falls back on [his]
The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells too, by Jove! . . . and not be contaminated. And there, don’t you see? Your strength comes in, your faith in your ability for digging unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in—your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business. (HOD 122)

We might hear in this the echo of the words of Gautama the Buddha:

This is the truth of pain: birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful . . . Contact with unpleasant things is painful, not getting what one wishes is painful. This is the truth of the cause of pain: that craving which leads to rebirth, combined with pleasure and lust, namely the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for existence, the craving for nonexistence. This is the truth of the cessation of pain: the cessation without a remainder of that craving, abandonment, forsaking, release, non-attainment.16

Likewise, in Buddhism the path to salvation involves a wholehearted devotion to non-attachment, to a completely unfocussed meditation upon Nothing.

So, then, Marlow sits before us like a meditating Buddha17 and tells us this story, all the while trying to determine a way to detach himself from it, but never quite succeeding, like a Buddha without the lotus flower (HOD 69,157). Through the mysterious determinism of destiny, Marlow comes in contact with a man like himself, one who has learned to trust himself only as long as he is working, working, working. He sees a kindred soul, one who understands the deceitfulness of the lusts of the heart, the desires for wealth, status, social acceptance, and power. He feels himself drawn to this other, this double of himself, as a fellow initiate in the necessarily small group of those who have learned to navigate the twisting, treacherous river of the human heart—the fog of anxiety about reaching your desire, the snags of conflicting desires, the dangerous submerged rocks of unseen consequences, the surprise attacks of opposing desires from others, the long, brooding reaches of an uneasy satisfaction, and the frailty of the vessel called “the will” that is supposed to carry these desires to their fulfillment. All of these features undermine the safety of a soul ruled by the lusts of the heart. But Marlow knows these dangers and is prepared for them by his devotion to efficiency, and so, it appears, is another, a soul like his own, a man who has developed a healthy faith through expansive experience, learning to trust his own disciplined judgment.

The revelation of this man (let us call him Kurtz, for short) to Marlow is slow, almost methodical. First Marlow learns of Kurtz’s efficiency to his work, his unparalleled success; but he learns of it from one—an accountant—who is efficient

17See P. K. Saha, “Conrad’s Heart of Darkness,” The Explicator 50 (Spring 1992), 155–60, for an interesting discussion of the significance of Marlow’s being described as a meditating Buddha.
for precisely the wrong reason. This accountant, it is clear, is a slave to his passion for luxury, and shows deference to Kurtz only because of the favor he expects from him when Kurtz’s efficiency will earn him the position of manager. Later Marlow learns of Kurtz’s strength. It seems that Kurtz is feared even by those above him; the local manager of the company fears him enough to seek his elimination, risking boat, crew, and wilderness to do the dirty deed. But this manager, who “manages” his agents through fear, fears Kurtz for precisely the wrong reason. This manager, it is clear, is a slave to status, and fears Kurtz only because of what Kurtz might do to his reputation and standing. Marlow then learns of Kurtz’s insight and his sense of justice. He hears Kurtz’s voice of judgment through the imagery of Kurtz’s painting of “a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a torch,” against a “background that was sombre—almost black” (HOD 92). In this painting Marlow sees Kurtz’s judgment of the blind ambition of the manager and those who follow him; the way they use the ideals of social Darwinism as a veil for their own profit and vainglory; and the inevitable destruction and injustice that lies as a darkness surrounding the feeble glow of the benevolent image they portray of themselves. Marlow learns, too, of the tremendously compelling rhetoric that seems to be the special gift of Mister Kurtz. His eloquence fills the pages of a report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, taking the reader into idealistic flight. Marlow hears more of Kurtz’s eloquence—and sees more of its powerful effects—from a young, adventurous soul who has been caught by its power. The confident severity of Kurtz’s pronouncements (on many various topics ranging from who has a right to the treasures found in the jungle, to “love in general”) were spoken from a position and a character of authority. But it is clear that this young adventurer’s admiration and devotion to Kurtz are given for the wrong reason. Like a young lawyer envious of the persuasive powers of those whom he idolizes, this youth is driven by the lust for glamour. “Glamour urged him on, glamour kept him unscathed,” Marlow tells us (HOD 129). Such self-sufficient judgment as Kurtz’s can hardly but be the object of Marlow’s loyalty, since it is so close to—nay, the very fulfillment—in another soul of—his own version of salvation through what he understands to be the highest form of faith. This Kurtz, he thinks, might be someone with whom he can share the privileged pleasures of vocation: knowing that with a task clearly set before you, you can save yourself from the deceitful lusts of the heart. In Kurtz, Marlow sees himself reflected.

For Marlow, these lusts speak in the form of lies: they say that in their satisfaction lies happiness. They say that a vocation is never an end in itself, but merely the means to another end, that soon the work will be all over and the desires of the heart finally satiated without restriction. But the man of mature faith, in this understanding of what it means to learn faith, will not be deceived by such lies, even in the vacuum created by the absence of civility. The voices of the lusts of the heart are never so seductive as in the absence of your fellow man, but the man of mature faith ought to be able to silence them with his hard-won belief that the lustful desires of the heart are lies unto death. Clinging to this belief constitutes the high-
Simultaneous with this slow revelation of a nearly identical sort of faith in Kurtz as in Marlow, however, is a correspondingly profound revelation of the devilish danger such faith presents; just when a man might think he has overcome the most vicious lusts of his heart—just when he has every reason to think he is out of danger from himself and demonstrates this to all who can see—just then he may commit the greatest evil of all: he may think himself a god. Kurtz thus becomes for Marlow worse than just another man’s failure to save himself from the pain and evil caused by his own desires; he is Marlow’s own future failure; indeed, Kurtz’s temptation is the greatest peril for the most faithful of persons, and his hollowness the darkest of all.

What now can be said for the kind of faith by which Marlow lives? Is it a groundless faith because of its failure in such a man as Kurtz? No, we are told by Marlow, for Kurtz comes through in the end. He sees, too late for himself but not too late for Marlow, that he is not free of himself, his own deceitful desires. In a last supreme effort, he justifies faith in the capacity of one’s own judgment: he pronounces judgment upon himself, “The horror, the horror” (HOD 147). This pronouncement, Marlow tells us, is a “moral victory” (HOD 149). Kurtz, in the last moment of his life, saves Marlow from the despair of seeing a soul more capable of faith than his own fail to save itself from its own base desires. Marlow says of this last pronouncement of Kurtz’s that,

He had summed up—he had judged. ‘The horror!’ He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth—the strange commingling of desire and hate. And it is not my own extremity that I remember best. . . . It is his extremity that I seemed to have lived through. True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. (HOD 149)

All of which now brings us to the last part of Marlow’s story—the test of his own faith. “That is why,” Marlow tells us, “I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond, when a long time after I heard once more, not his own voice, but the echo of his magnificent eloquence thrown to me from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal”: the soul of Kurtz’s Intended (HOD 149).

Let us consider again what learning faith entails in this view of faith. The height of faith will come when one learns to base one’s trust on one’s own enlightened judgment. This enlightenment is not the gift of the gods, however (though it wouldn’t be entirely misleading to put it this way), but rather the fulfillment of the potential of the human soul to separate itself from itself, to render judgment upon its own judgments, and to learn from its mistakes by recognizing them as such. We now have before us, in Marlow’s story, a most severe test of this capacity for self-judgment. Marlow has been warned: even the wisest of us may fail. But he has also been shown that failure need not be the last word: “He [Kurtz] had judged.” Now he must decide what to say to this unknown woman.
On the one hand there is the matter of her desire. It is obvious to Marlow that she desires to hear what Marlow finally tells her: his lie that “The last word he pronounced was—your name” (HOD 157). If he understands that such a lie in accordance with her desire simply gives her a means by which to perpetuate her self-deception and keeps her from a truth that Marlow knows to be a “moral victory,” then he robs her of an opportunity to bury her own ignorance. He becomes an accomplice to her own self-inflicted pain. And Marlow does understand it this way. He wonders, after his lie, if the heavens would have fallen “if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due” (HOD 157).

On the other hand is the subtle danger he is now acutely aware of—the danger of too quickly placing himself in the position of a god. Hadn’t Kurtz become hollow to the core precisely by relying too readily upon his own moral superiority? As well-grounded as it was in the facts about the lack of moral integrity in others, hadn’t his conviction that his own judgment could not easily go wrong led him inevitably to the most harmful conclusion of all? And wouldn’t this lesson from Kurtz teach Marlow to be ever skeptical of his own deepest convictions about what was right and what was wrong? Couldn’t these convictions of Marlow’s be simply the subtle deception of his own desire to show his moral superiority over others? Perhaps it would be better for him to dissociate himself from this lurking desire by burying it along with his other desires. One way to dig a grave for it might be to see it—manifested in his decision to lie to her—as ultimately trivial: “The heavens do not fall for such a trifle” (HOD 157).

It follows from the view that the height of faith is a kind of enlightened dissociation from all desires, that this height can only be reached by relying upon your own capacity to decide what else (if anything) can be trusted. Since the final court of appeal is always your own judgment, the darkness of a misplaced or blind faith can always be overcome, at least in principle, by the light of an informed faith. But this principle, when put into practice, manifests itself as moral skepticism: an unwillingness to see any decisions in this life as black or white, good or evil. Such decisions, as faithless as they seem to be, are really the expression of a deep faith in one’s own capacity for judgment. After all, the moral injunction of such a view is that we ought not make too much of the distinction between good and evil.

It would seem, then, that even if we cannot pass judgment upon Marlow’s lie—given the dilemma he’s in and the realization that he knows best how to exercise his own peculiar capacity for faith—we, at least, can guess how he must view this poor woman’s capacity for faith. She would have to appear to him very much like the poor young woman in the example given earlier: a woman whose faith is still blind, still naive. She could not help but appear to Marlow as one whose active capacity for faith has not been actualized, for she seems so utterly caught up in the idealized image she has of Kurtz that she simply will not believe anything Marlow might say that would contradict it. This does not, of course, give Marlow an excuse to lie to her, but, as we have already seen, his decision to lie to her is based on a completely different consideration than this. He does not consider her own atti-
tude towards Kurtz to be of any significance at all: “Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh she is out of it—completely. They—the women I mean—are out of it—should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it” (HOD 121). With the woman “out of it” we would therefore expect that the story would have an ambiguous ending. And as far as Marlow is concerned, it does: “Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha” (HOD 157).

### III. The Christian Conception of Faith: What’s “Intended”

Marlow, however, is not the primary narrator, and this is a story within a story. Conrad gives us Marlow’s story through the account of one of his (Marlow’s) listeners, one of his close friends. This narrator (and Conrad himself) does not end the story with Marlow’s narration, but has more to add. The addition, however, cannot be meant to shed more light on Kurtz—only Marlow himself can do that, since only Marlow knew Kurtz—but, rather, it is meant to show us something important about Marlow himself. This narrator, by describing Marlow’s attitude, posture, and expression of his tale, as well as the setting for the telling of it, gives us a reason for wondering whether Marlow’s story is Conrad’s story, for wondering whether Marlow’s conclusions are the conclusions Conrad considers to be of value or significance. In the same letter (that is, the one in which he says that, “. . . in the light of the final incident, the whole story in all of its descriptive detail shall fall into place—acquire its value and its significance”), Conrad explains that in writing *Heart of Darkness* he followed a deliberately chosen method—one he followed in writing both *Lord Jim* and *Youth* as well—such that

[T]he last pages of *Heart of Darkness* where the interview of the man [Marlow] and the girl [Kurtz’s Intended] locks in—as it were—the whole 30,000 words of narrative description into one suggestive view of a whole phase of life and makes of that story something quite on another plane than an anecdote of a man who went mad in the Centre of Africa.18

Here Conrad suggests that the significance of *Heart of Darkness* lies not in the character of Kurtz, per se, but in the common characteristics of both Kurtz’s and Marlow’s “phase of life”—that characteristic way of life, that characteristic moral viewpoint that assigns “your own capacity for faithfulness” as both the object and the subject of faith.19 It is in the last pages of *Heart of Darkness*, in the conversation

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19Without arguing the point here, I will simply suggest that the same identification of character, the same common “humanistic” conception of faith and the means to virtue, exists between Marlow and Jim in *Lord Jim*, and between Marlow and Mahon (or perhaps Marlow’s own younger self) in *Youth*. So it is no surprise to also find a similar ambiguity in both the acts of these characters (Jim and the youth) and in the moral judgments Marlow makes of them. But in both of these stories Conrad also utilizes the bi-level narrative as a device to indicate that Marlow may be as culpable as the men whose stories he tells, and he may share their disease (if that is what it is). Does anyone doubt, for example, that Marlow is as much
between Marlow and Kurtz’s Intended, that this characteristic moral viewpoint manifests itself most clearly and shows the inevitable conclusion of a life lived accordingly: Marlow lies to her, even though, for him, lies have “a taint of death, a flavor of mortality” (HOD 94), and he cannot say whether he has done good or ill. For him, it is forever undecidable, utterly ambiguous. But if seeing this common “phase of life” is what is significant, the value in seeing it lies in the possibility of another conclusion, a different “phase of life” that transcends this one that Marlow is in. Conrad tells us where to look for this other possibility: at the end of the story, in the “final incident.” So let us now turn again to a consideration of the end of Heart of Darkness.

First, notice that even though Marlow’s story ends in moral ambiguity, the book itself begins and ends with fairly unambiguous moral imagery. Marlow’s story has these bookends: before he begins to speak we read, “And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars” (HOD 67). And after he is finished we have this: “The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness” (HOD 157–8). There is no hint of any moral victory in these words. They leave no room for comfort, no gap in the clouds through which a ray of light might fall. Marlow’s own so-called progress toward a more enlightened way of life is itself contradicted by the narrator’s description of the setting for Marlow’s story, as if this supposed enlightenment is itself a kind of utter(ed) darkness.

And then there is the matter of the girl herself, the incongruous impression Marlow gives of her, as if he cannot believe his own eyes. Despite his conviction that “she is out of it,” his first impression of her is that “she had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering” (HOD 153). He says that he saw in her glance a woman who was “guileless, profound, confident and trustful” (HOD 153). He says that he “perceived that she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time” (HOD 154). Now it may be that Marlow is here recording only a first impression, one that he later came to doubt. But there is no indication that he does come to question this impression, and the only indication that it may be a false picture of her is the apparent naiveté of her devotion to Kurtz.

So let us consider again the possibilities, in particular, the possibility that Conrad wants us to see that the conception of faith thus far given—Marlow’s kind of faith—is not true faith, but only a conception of a sort of pseudo-faith. Perhaps faith cannot be learned in the way so far described. Let us consider the possibility (as a sort of metaphysical caprice) that perhaps faith can only be given to an individual soul; that what it means to learn faith is to undergo a personal, historical moment of transformation—a moment prior to which one does not even possess

the “romantic” as Jim? He may not be as vain, nor succumbed to the temptation of pride quite as often or as far as Jim has, but this is a difference of degree, not of type.
the capacity of faith, but after which one possesses both the capacity for faith and
the active exercise of it. In fact, if this story were true (and if this is what Conrad
intended to show indirectly at the end of *Heart of Darkness*), someone (like Marlow)
might mistakenly think that faith is properly described in the previous way—as a
latent potential within the capacity of everyone—unless or until one underwent
the acquisition of true faith, after which one would look back in wonder at the
utter despair of one’s previous understanding (as the description at the end of
*Heart of Darkness* suggests). If not even the capacity for faith lies within the one
who is to learn faith—that is, if it is not a condition for the learning of faith—then
the learner of faith cannot even have faith in the teacher unless the teacher himself
provides this condition. But if the teacher provides the condition for the learning
of faith as well as the faith itself, then would it be proper to call this teacher any-
thing less than the Author and Finisher of faith? The teacher of faith, on this con-
ception of faith, would have to be more than just as good as his word; he would
have to be the Word himself, for he would bring faith to the learner only by means of
becoming faith himself. That is, if the teacher of faith is both its author and finisher,
then no other could learn faith except by recognizing this teacher to be faith incar-
nate. However, since it would take faith to recognize this teacher as faith incarnate,
the learner of faith could not possibly know what it means for a person to have
faith unless the learner comes face to face with the One who establishes by his very
life the meaning of faith. The problem that such a teacher must overcome is the
mistaken tendency of the learner to think that she does not need to learn what faith
is, since she is under the illusion that she already understands what faith is. Being
under this illusion, and having become habituated to living a life under such an
illusion, this learner will seek to determine the trustworthiness of the teacher by
weighing the evidence for and against the teacher, trying to determine for herself
whether to trust such a man or not. But this, under our current suggested possibil-
ity, would be utterly futile, for we are supposing the learner to not yet be in posses-
sion of either the capacity or the actuality of faith. Thus, the learner who has not
yet been given faith cannot possibly exercise it.

And now, if that’s not enough of a problem, consider this. If the teacher—that
is, the Teacher as Author and Finisher of faith, as the Word incarnate—is to give
faith to the learner at a specific moment in history, then the Teacher must thereafter
continually give it. This is because true faith is not natural to our being, being a
condition and an exercise that we must receive from outside of us. Thus, this Teacher
must be the Sustainer of faith as well as its Author and Finisher. Furthermore, the
Teacher must be unrecognizable to the learner of faith until that learner has re-
ceived the faith that the teacher bestows upon her. This must be so, for otherwise
there would have to be enough evidence for the teacher being the Teacher for the
learner to recognize him as such; but this, again, is to deny our supposition that the
learner, prior to being given both the condition for faith and the faith itself, does
not have the capacity for faith.

And so how will such a Teacher appear in the eyes of those who have not had
him revealed to them? That is, how will faith appear to those who have it not? Would he not appear as one who is blind, foolish, an incredible? It is, of course, impossible for such a teacher to appear as having no faith at all, even to those who have only an illusory concept of faith. For an illusion to work, there must be some similarity to the truth. So this teacher’s faith, and the faith he gives rise to in others, will appear to those who live under the illusion as a blind faith, a naive trust, like that of little children and inexperienced lovers. It will appear as a foolish, uninformed faith, indistinguishable from what they consider themselves to have transcended. It is a faith that will believe the impossible; it will claim to know what all the evidence shows to be, at the very least highly unlikely, and at the very most clearly contrary; it will be a trust that goes beyond what their own experience as well as the experience of others says. And when the Teacher of such faith comes to the learner, offering this gift of faith, it will be—it could only be—in the form of a promise: a promise that simply, and without proof or evidence, must be embraced. The Teacher comes, then, as one who Intends himself for the learner: he seeks to become engaged to the learner, for that is the only way for the learner to become a learner. The Teacher, true to his own incarnation, therefore lives for the learner, remaining faithful to the learner, even when the learner is unfaithful to the Teacher. Again, to those under the illusion of faith this will appear to them as foolishness on the teacher’s part, for there is no good evidence or reason for the teacher to have such confidence in the learner, and maybe even ample evidence for the contrary. Nevertheless, since this Teacher is faith incarnate, his faithfulness to the learner is in actuality a faithfulness based upon himself, for he is the author, Finisher and Sustainer of the learner’s faith.

So how does this possible conception of faith—even though I cannot say what makes it a possible conception—provide a solution to the interpretive questions about the end of *Heart of Darkness*? First of all, if this conception of faith underlies the narrator’s understanding of Marlow’s story, and, hence, the narrator’s understanding of Marlow himself, then I think we can see right away why this narrator would notice the impenetrable gloom within which the story is told and ends. This darkness is but the continuation of the darkness within Marlow’s own soul. Clearly, Marlow has not been freed unto this understanding of faith. If anything, the darkness in which we hear Marlow telling his story is deeper and more tragic than the darkness of Kurtz’s jungle. And secondly, if this latter conception of faith underlies what we learn about Kurtz’s Intended, we can come to some understanding of how to rectify Marlow’s description of her with his final decision to lie to her. As already noted, she appears to him to have a naive faith; she believes the unbelievable; she trusts what Marlow knows to be false and untrustworthy; she hopes beyond reason. Her image of Kurtz flies in the face of what Marlow has seen with his own eyes. But what if he is wrong about her? What if her faith, her hope, her trust, and her love for Kurtz is not founded upon her unwillingness to believe reports of the kind Marlow could give her, but rather it is the promise she has made to him to be his Intended, a promise which looks beyond all human shortcomings to the
divine power that each marriage vow is intended to reflect? If this is her faith, then Marlow cannot help but see some of its glory—hence his first impressions of her—while at the same time dismissing it as a naive, blind faith. On one score at least Marlow is right: such faith is from a different world, and its adherents are not citizens of this earth.
Introduction

From curing factions’ mischiefs to balancing government budgets, from checking and balancing to term limits, the 1990s have witnessed a steady undercurrent of experimentation with governmental design as an alternative to personal choice in the American political tradition. But this current has been so dammed and diverted, it has become more and more a backwater. The Gingrich revolution was fascinating in many respects, not least for the tangled epistemology that cut government in the name of personal freedom but simultaneously freed government from the impact of personal choice to operate as a machine that would run of itself. The main currents of American public discourse trap the state in negative images of abusive power and inefficient bureaucracy, inviting both an older language of rights against such government and a more recent, increasingly discredited, rhetoric of entitlements to its resources and power. These images, and the scholarship that has failed to lay them to rest, create a fragmented and contradictory theory of government’s role, nowhere more so than in the courts where government must prove a compelling interest before it is permitted to place restrictions on fundamental rights but need only demonstrate a rational basis for expansionist social and economic programs—reasoning which has imposed considerable strain on the separation of powers. American public and scholarly discourse succeeds in being anti-statist despite the presence of a large state apparatus. Lost in the shuffle, so to speak, is the state itself, its authority either defied or dissolved in notions of

Rehabilitating the State in America: Abraham Kuyper’s Overlooked Contribution

By Timothy Sherratt

The political thought of Abraham Kuyper offers a theory of the state better suited than liberalism to critique and defend it in the contemporary climate of government downsizing. Despite its elegant formulae for the protection of individual liberties, the liberal tradition has failed to contain the American state. Theodore Lowi’s juridical democracy fails to correct these deficiencies from within. By contrast, Kuyper’s view of the state, grounded in his “sphere sovereignty,” holds greater potential for securing public justice—a state limited enough to protect the basic liberty of persons and social institutions but energetic enough to arbitrate justice between and among those persons and institutions. Timothy Sherratt is Professor of Political Studies at Gordon College.
social contract and popular consent, its executive powers diluted in pluralist theory.

If Theodore Lowi (1979) is right, there is not even the consolation of success to
smooth over the contradictions. The American state has expanded despite the rhe-
toric of rights and the warnings about power, despite the separation of powers and
the Bill of Rights. Its regulatory reach is pervasive, but its real authority is qualified
by the practice of democratizing administration of the majority’s will. Thus, liberal
leaders “do not wield the authority of democratic governments with the resolute-
ness born of confidence in the legitimacy of their positions, the integrity of their
institutions, or the justness of the programs they serve” (1979, 295). This paper will
make considerable use of Lowi’s well-received analysis and prescriptions; taken
together, they lay important groundwork for the contribution neo-Calvinism might
make to resolve the dilemma of the state in American politics and political science.

The rehabilitation of the American state appears to be linked to the disentan-
gling of the institutionalist, republican tradition from the quasi-libertarian language
of rights and minimalist government. The “overlooked contribution” of the writ-
ings of Abraham Kuyper in particular, and of neo-Calvinism in general, lies in its
theory of the internal design of the state, its juxtaposition of the state to personal
and group liberty, its religious view of life and resulting respect for religious lib-
erty, and its embrace of pluralism. The neo-Calvinist state is limited in function but
morally purposeful, responsible for sharing authority with differentiated societal
institutions and for interpreting the relationship between those institutions and
the persons who occupy them. While the neo-Calvinist state is to a degree con-
tained both by American-style checks on its authority, the principal “checks and
balances” are structural arguments asserting the irreducible grounds of that au-
thority. Finally, the scholarly orientation reflected in the neo-Calvinist conception
of the state finds questions of the positive state and of church-and-state closely
connected, whereas American political science has typically kept them separated.

Theodore Lowi and the State in America

Although it conforms in most respects to the received view of the evolution of
the state in the United States, Lowi’s treatment of the subject is noteworthy for its
development over some three decades. Indeed, the received view owes much to his
scholarship, which has had a profound effect on the study of American govern-
ment, from public policy analysis to the presidency to the state of the discipline
itself.1 But in singling out Lowi’s analysis of the American state, I am in a sense

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1The principal works are: “American Business, Public Policy, Case Studies, and Political
The Personal President. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1985; and “The State in Political Sci-
ence: How We Become What We Study.” American Political Science Review 86, no. 1: 1-7.
also invoking several generation’s worth of scholarship seeking to mobilize effective authority and administration within and in the service of liberal democracy, what Seidelman and Harpham (1985) term the “Third Tradition” in political science. Lowi’s contribution lies principally in his call for juridical democracy (Lowi 1979). His insistence that the crisis of the republic under an uncontrolled interest-group liberalism should be met by attention to the basic internal design of the republic brings him into fruitful contact and even limited agreement with the Kuyperian view of the state. It does so in three respects. First, it applies a remedy where Kuyper had most to offer, not where he had least for Kuyper identified the state’s purpose and limits by laying alongside one another the roles, or divine callings, of the state, social institutions and individuals rather than pursuing the Anglo-American emphasis on limited government as a corollary of pre-social individual rights. Second, Lowi’s remedy is in some respects much clearer than Kuyper’s and sheds critical light on the latter; specifically, the principles Lowi recommends for checking the positive state operate with less ambiguity than the principles one must infer to justify state intervention in a Kuyperian polity. Third, however, Lowi’s remedy reveals the weaknesses inherent in the general tendency within political science to consider the issues of the welfare state separately from questions of religious liberty and, indeed, innocent of the “religious” presuppositions which guide them. Here, the integral Kuyperian approach is demonstrably superior.

The Federal Constitution of 1787 established a central government with exclusive functions in the area of foreign policy making, and with control over subsidies, tariffs, public lands disposal, patents, and coinage domestically. These domestic powers had been hewn from the much larger set of functions held by state governments, which retained almost all regulatory functions like judicial and criminal procedure laws, public health laws, and banking and credit laws (Lowi 1985, 24). Left obscure in the Constitution was the federal-state balance of power and function in respect of commerce, because while the Constitution granted Congress power to regulate inter-state commerce, it did not accompany that grant with a corresponding prohibition on the states. The early Federal state was a “patronage state,” in Lowi’s words. Though it was the largest institution in American society and its activities significantly influenced commercial development, investment, and productive population distribution, the Federal government in no sense coordinated a national policy—unless one credits Chief Justice Marshall with doing so. Instead, it brokered countless individual decisions and distributed its patronage in jobs and policies.

The patronage state was first supplemented by elements of a regulatory state
in the late 19th century. At first the agitation for government regulation of industry barely touched the Federal government, but the inability of states to tackle the whole problem precipitated national legislative action (Lowi 1985, 42). Supreme Court decisions restricting the reach of early federal regulations perhaps retarded national regulatory efforts, notably the decision in *Hammer v. Dagenhart* in 1918, so the patronage state survived as the dominant form into the 1930s. Indeed, Lowi regards this as a settled matter within the discipline:

There is no need to document for political scientists the contention that the American state until the 1930s was virtually an oxymoron. The level of national government activity was almost as low in 1932 as it had been in 1832 (1992, 1).

The nationalization of political focus brought about by the Civil War and industrialization, by the mass media, and by social movements did, however, precipitate the emergence of a national state.

With the coming of the New Deal, the now-expanding patronage role was broadly supplemented by regulatory and redistributive functions that respectively imposed obligations directly upon citizens and set up the programs that earn the redistributive function the title of “welfare” state. These developments were supported by the Supreme Court from 1937 (*NLRB v. Jones and Laughlin Steel Corp.* ) and then given wholehearted encouragement in 1942 (*Wickard v. Filburn*). In Lowi’s words, if Filburn (a small farmer growing wheat for private consumption in excess of his federally allotted quota) can be reached by Congressional act, then “economic federalism is dead” (50).

For Lowi, the development and endorsement of the regulatory and welfare states constitute a revolution making the federal government responsible for citizens’ well being and steering popular expectations of good government away from its representativeness towards its capacity to deliver services. But crucial to the analysis is Lowi’s charge that Court and Congress together perverted the framers’ design for a separation-of-powers system and erected in place of the original balance a presidency equipped with unchecked, delegated powers of enormous reach. Despite the American tradition of individual rights and limited government and a rhetoric to match, America got a state that strained the definition of limited government and became the authoritative deliverer of rights as well as their natural enemy.

The new state, what Lowi terms the Second Republic of the United States, was a positive, interventionist state, centered on the executive branch; it began life having been granted unqualified validation by the Court concerning national economic power and the separation of powers; it controlled aspects of the electoral process traditionally left in private hands; it assumed these controls at the expense of the political parties; it rapidly acquired an autonomous bureaucracy; and its epistemology looked to economics rather than to law (1992, 2-3). It is the breakdown of

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3Specifically, Lowi associates the Second Republic with a new emphasis on science, with statistics leading the way and flowering as the public opinion subfield. As he recognizes,
the rule of law and its replacement by bargaining that Lowi finds to be the distinguishing feature of the Second Republic and the focus of his proposals for reform.

Lowi’s indictment of this American state is his familiar critique of interest-group liberalism. Liberal governments undermine popular decisions by democratizing their administration, decline to set standards, fall short of justice by failing to make policy on the basis of prior moral rule, and substitute bargaining for formal (legal) procedure. His response is to call for juridical democracy, in its simplest form a return to predictable and accountable government under the rule of law, a form rejected by the Supreme Court at the very moment the United States embraced a federal state in earnest. Under juridical democracy, governments would have to define policy goals with precision, that is, they would have to write laws that leave minimal discretion to administrators. As Lowi had observed long before (1964), implementation of policy under loosely written laws involves not mere administrative rule-following but genuine decision-making power. Where that early work concentrated on analysis alone, The End of Liberalism was openly critical of the delegation of power, the broad discretion it gave bureaucracy, and the failure of the courts to contain delegation within a clear and workable principle conceived within the structural intent of the Constitution. The centerpiece of his remedy is a return to the rule of law.

When in the American republic a political scientist reaches for internal solutions of this kind rather than further external checks on the scope of governmental authority, and when the solutions reached for are principles to govern the distribution of power and functions among the branches of a system of separated powers, then we can move beyond the stale rhetoric of more versus less government that has cramped public discourse for decades back towards the language of America’s internal design. And that is to move back towards the republican foundations behind liberal-democracy. Here, Kuyperian approach has much to offer.

**The State in the Political Theology of Abraham Kuyper**

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) was variously a pastor, newspaper editor, parliamentarian, founder of a university, and prime minister of the Netherlands. His political thought emerges from writings over a long period and reflects all of these roles, yet McKendree Langley cautions that Kuyper was “unable to articulate a systematic Christian theory of the state” (1984, 151). In place of such a theory, Kuyper seems to have worked out the main lines of a perspective having the virtue of ongoing application in his journalistic and political work. Kuyper’s approach to the state may be understood as practical, with the proviso that his practicality’s hallmark is its consistency with a Calvinist confession. That confession, and with it developments of this kind were anticipated in the field of Constitutional law at least as early as *Lochner v. New York* (1905), in which social science asserted an independent authority distinct from the republican political science of the founders. See Paul W. Kahn, *Legitimacy and History* (Yale, 1995).
Kuyper’s political thought, begins and ends with the sovereignty of God.

The Juridical State and Sphere Sovereignty

Kuyper defined sovereignty in juridical terms, as “authority that possesses the right and duty, and wields the power to break and punish all resistance to its will.” And he appealed to the inner voice of conscience for the view that such a power can only be God’s—intuitively we are to recognize limits on the exercise by human beings of this sort of power: “And does not an ineradicable conscience also speak within you, telling you that original, absolute sovereignty cannot reside in any creature, but must coincide with the majesty of God?”

When human offices exercise an authority divine in its origins, they simultaneously gain legitimacy for that authority and acknowledge limitations to its exercise. Divine authority in human hands is limited authority both because its source is God and because its manifestation is multifaceted: there are sovereignties of state, society, and church. Not only does this threefold organization restrict the reach of each sphere into which it is organized, each of these is also subject in turn to internal qualifications. Sin, the fundamentally disintegrating force in the cosmos, thwarts the realization of world-government, the polity befitting our human nature, for we are all of “one blood.” Nation-states therefore do not harmonize with our human nature. Their status is temporary, artificial. Unlike some contemporary Reformed thinkers who derive the authority of the state directly from the “cultural mandate” (God’s command to man in Genesis to subdue, cultivate, and replenish the created order), Kuyper wrote somewhat ambivalently on this subject. In his Lectures on Calvinism, he argues the state may only derive authority directly from God, a strictly juridical authority that would be moot in a world without sin. Here the state is one of enumerated rather than implied powers, as Augustinian as it is traditionally Calvinist, whose authority is both justified and exhausted in response to the disintegrating effects of sin: “When sin tears man apart, and when sin reveals itself in all manner of shame and unrighteousness, the glory of God demands that these horrors be bridled, that order return to this chaos that a compulsory force, from without, assert itself to make human society a possibility” (Lectures on Calvinism 82).

The true picture appears somewhat more complex, however. In his writings on the doctrines of particular and common grace, Kuyper clearly, if implicitly, embraces the cultural mandate. Particular grace is the saving grace of God; common grace reflects God’s willingness to sustain the creation. The two are both related and “antithetical”—S. U. Zuidema (1971) writes of them as polar in a magnetic sense, simultaneously attracting and repelling. Thus, common grace has to do with creation (nature—for Kuyper these were synonymous), particular grace with re-

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4 Sphere Sovereignty (Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring) (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1930 (1880)).

creation. Ipso, particular grace is superior and common grace is ultimately dependent upon it, for the creation itself is under judgment and awaits the fulfillment of God’s purposes in history, purposes that cannot be reached through (fallen) nature: “By its inner nature, (common grace) . . . aims at its own creaturely end, which as such has no real connection with the hereafter and no real connection with the mystic life of the souls that are saved” (quoted in Zuidema, Communication and Confrontation 69).

Kuyper always insisted that his was not an Anabaptist position that wrote off creation and led to world-flight but one in which the very relationship of attraction and repulsion between particular and common grace clarified and underscored the distinct callings of social institutions and the church. Since the principles on which Kuyper’s political theory rests invoke these callings and the requirement not to violate them, we can see that the particular/common grace distinction sharpens the role of the state. The state is an agency of common, not particular, grace. Thus its task is to sustain creation, not to redeem it. In Kuyper’s biblical perspective, sustenance is not a neutral life-giving: sustaining a fallen creation is largely a matter of one act of correction after another—for unredeemed humanity abuses God’s creation—and in that sense the state exercises an exclusively juridical authority. All the same, his position remains ambivalent, for the cultural mandate suggests elements of sustenance other than correction. Perhaps Kuyper viewed other elements as exclusively the province of God. Whether he was right to claim that the common grace juridical calling of government has “no real connection” to redemption is a major point of theology that I will not attempt to take on!

A state that exercises only a derived, creational authority and exercises that authority especially on account of sin can claim none of the traditionally liberal or democratic foundations for exercising governmental power—consent, majority rule, social contract and so forth, albeit democratic elections select a governing party. Indeed, Kuyper draws an explicit set of contrasts between the popular sovereignty of the French Revolution, which expressly rejected existing human and divine authorities in favor of popular sovereignty, and the state sovereignty of the Germans, which claimed that the state embodies the most perfect relationship between man and man, and this theory of derivative sovereignty. He commends Calvinism for its “two-fold insight” into the state’s dark side (a potential despotism) and its light side (the only alternative to a “veritable hell on earth”). Kuyper’s formulation rejects both popular and state sovereignty but preserves the legitimacy of the state without discounting the threat governments pose to human freedom: “We have gratefully to receive from the hand of God, the institution of the state with its magistrates, as a means of preservation, now indeed indispensable. And on the other hand . . . we must ever watch against the danger which lurks, for our personal

Just as creation and regeneration are related and disconnected at the same time, so the church is not natural (creational) but supernatural (regenerational). Kuyper does not allow the church to seek to construct the kingdom of heaven on earth for this reason—an error of the radical anabaptists in his opinion (see Zuidema, 71-74).
liberty, in the power of the State (Lectures 81).

The Kuyperian state is grounded in and bounded by three principles: only God possesses sovereign rights because God is the nations’ creator, maintainer and ruler; sin has broken down God’s direct rule, thus the exercise of authority has been vested in men for a mechanical remedy; and man never possesses legitimate power over fellow man in any other way than by an authority which descends on him from the majesty of God. That this is a limited state is obvious in the first principle—no human being can claim the status of creator, maintainer and ruler of the nations, even if the task assigned to her office is to participate in sustaining the creation. The second principle appears illogical on its face: if human disobedience has broken the personal rule of God, vesting authority in humans seems to be exactly the wrong response. Kuyper resolves the apparent contradiction by reasoning that the only kind of authority reconcilable with God’s sovereignty is an authority that leaves little discretion in the human hands that will exercise it—it is a “mechanical” authority. The third principle Kuyper justifies on the grounds that any right to rule over a fellow man will become the right of the strongest (Lectures 82).

To justify the broad division of divine authority into spheres, Kuyper offers two sorts of arguments. The first is to maintain, as Herman Dooyeweerd was to do later, that such a division is ontologically sound, deriving as it does from the ordinances of God. Kuyper argued that the independence of spheres was logically required to demonstrate that they have “nothing above themselves but God, and that the State cannot intrude here, and has nothing to command in their domain” (Lectures 91). We have seen that Kuyper qualifies the common Calvinist justification that state authority derive from the cultural mandate by assigning it the principal task of counteracting the effects of sin. Accordingly, in his Lectures, Kuyper treats the state as a special kind of sphere, more mechanical than organic in character. The social spheres represent organic life; the family, for instance, is

The spheres in question are identified in quasi-functionalist fashion, for each links a function, its matching institutions and the requisite authority to give effect to both. Kuyper first distinguishes the social spheres from the sphere of government. The distinctions between spheres and institutions becomes somewhat blurred but the social spheres include the social, where differential personalities prevail, the corporate (universities, guilds, associations, churches), the domestic (the family, married life), and “communal autonomy.” But in a use of the term that does not entirely fit with this, Art is described as a sphere where “genius is a sovereign power.” In other uses, Commerce is a sphere, but so, too, is labor. Benevolence and philanthropy are described as a “field,” and so on. Despite these inconsistencies, a view of society as differentiated by organic function and personal vocation and talent emerges quite clearly. Kuyper found little equality in the social spheres, but this did not concern him, for though “dominion is exercised everywhere . . . it is a dominion which works organically; not by virtue of a State-investiture, but from life’s sovereignty itself” (Lectures, 95). For example, the extraordinary competence of the mathematical genius is not a threat to society but a positive benefit. Citing approvingly “the dominion” of Aristotle, Plato, Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Kant and Darwin, Kuyper asserted that such is “a gift of God, possessed only by His grace. It is subject to no one and is responsible to Him alone Who granted it this ascendency” (95).
natural, innate, spontaneous, biological. Though sin intrudes into every area of life, its worst effects on the social spheres are blunted by common grace, the action of God that operates to benefit everyone, believer and non-believer alike, restraining sin and preserving the created order.

Kuyper described this central Calvinist dogma as God’s intervention in the human condition to prevent the total annihilation of his own work, which would have led to a “total degeneracy of human life.” Common grace arrests “the complete effectuation of sin . . . partly by breaking its power, partly by taming [man’s] evil spirit, and partly by domesticating his nation or his family” (124). Common grace, Kuyper claims, lends coherence to history, flowering both in classical thought and modern scientific knowledge. By its action, all things are shown intuitively to be worthy of investigation.

By resorting to an argument from common grace for the organic and relatively unsullied character of the social spheres and contrasting this with the mechanical character of the state, Kuyper further buttresses his conception of limited government. Given the ontological status of the social spheres, the state never confers authority upon them or grants them freedom(s) but “merely recognizes” the unique authority which descends on each directly from God.

The second argument is less pejorative in regards to the state. Kuyper finds the distinction among the social spheres and between them and the state marked by two antithetical “sovereignty credos.” The unbeliever separates faith and sovereignty and vests the latter exclusively in the state, which confers, or if it is weak, allows, the social spheres to possess what freedom they enjoy. By contrast, the believer links the two, vesting human freedom in God and recognizing that the state is “marked by an authority derived from Him” (Sphere Sovereignty 7). Yield the Christian revelation, Kuyper argues, and under whatever “hybrid theories” you hide it, Caesarism emerges:

Thus the ancient history of the world confronts us with the ignominious drama of how, despite stubborn and sometimes heroic resistance, freedom within the various spheres dies out and the power of the state triumphs, turning eventually into Caesarism.

Rights and the State

Kuyper deduces the rights and liberties of social life from the same source from which the high authority of government flows, the “absolute sovereignty of God.” And if rights and state authority come from the same source, “these two must therefore come to an understanding,” for “both have the same sacred obligation to maintain their God-given sovereign authority and to make it subservient to the majesty of God” (Lectures 98). This juxtaposing of rights and state authority as derivative sovereignties will not allow their permanent situating in opposition to each other—even though Kuyper recognizes that the “battle of the ages” is the battle between authority and liberty—but points to a symbiosis by which the assertion of the one or the other may be obligatory for the good of all. Thus, Kuyper
describes the struggle for liberty as “not only . . . permissible, but is made a duty for each individual in his own sphere. . . . The very innate thirst for liberty . . . proved itself the God-ordained means to bridle the authority [of the state] wherever it degenerated into despotism” (Lectures 80).

All political authority, then, whether in the hands of individual persons, social institutions, or the state, is derivative authority. Nor is the divine grant of authority unconditional; what was ordained (Romans 13) may be taken away by a God ever active in the affairs of humankind. Under certain conditions God plants his sovereignty in the people, Kuyper acknowledges, only to deny that this justifies an assertion of popular sovereignty “as was atheistically proclaimed in Paris in 1789.” But, “(e)ven a Calvinist gratefully recognizes . . . the divine judgement which at that time was executed in Paris.” The point he seems to make is that the right way to comprehend events like the French Revolution is through the lens of divine judgement, not the lens of natural rights; and an occasion for divine judgement does not translate into a grounds for popular sovereignty. Kuyper insists that the “desirable condition” of popular rule can be removed, or never bestowed, as a matter of divine judgement “when a nation is unfit for it, or, by its sin, has utterly forfeited the blessing” (84). What he fails to explain is how one recognizes such a bestowal or removal of sovereignty. When is a military coup judgement, and thus legitimate in some limited fashion; when is it to be resisted without any moral self-examination on the part of the people or their democratically elected government? Can the legitimacy of the judgement be affirmed independently of Calvinist theology—a vital requirement for a pluralist polity one would think? The theological point being made is much clearer than any practical principle to be derived from it.

The requirement that all human sovereignties derive from God appears to circumscribe the state rather more than it does the individual. When Kuyper describes the sphere of government as supplying a mechanical remedy, he asserts that state authority is both justified and exhausted in correcting the disintegrative effects of sin. By contrast, the social spheres are organic and innate; that is, they enjoy the sustaining power of God (common grace) relatively unsullied by the debilitating effects of sin. The state is restricted by necessary deference to the “innate law of life” at work in the social spheres and by the limits of its own mandate:

The sovereignty, by the grace of God, of the government is here set aside and limited, for God’s sake, by another sovereignty, which is equally divine in origin. Neither the life of science nor of art, nor of agriculture, nor of industry, nor of commerce, nor of navigation, nor of the family, nor of human relationship may be coerced to suit itself to the grace of the government. (Lectures 96)

I remarked above that the doctrine of vocations was the implicit ground on which Kuyper’s political thinking rests, implicit enough at any rate to be largely unremarked in his treatment of politics in his Lectures. Contemporary neo-Calvinists allow the doctrine more force in their political theory. Discussing the doctrine of vocation as it appears in Calvin’s Institutes, Hancock (1989) distinguishes the
Calvinist official, a “conduit of the will of God, which he cannot possibly em-
body”(68) from the Aristotelian aristocrat whose virtue embodies what is good for
man. For Hancock, Calvinist calling depends directly on God’s sovereignty. One
might be called equally to service of the state as to ministry in the church, yet
“equality under God’s will binds men to their respective callings; it does not liber-
ate them as political actors”(70). Here is the mechanical character of office in an
older, Calvinist guise.

Contemporary neo-Calvinists sometimes write as though vocation does in-
deed liberate one as a political actor, or at least lend further validity to the view
that the state possesses some independence from the social spheres. Zylstra (1982),
for instance, argues that the norm of justice “requires social space for human per-
sonality. By personality I mean the human self whose calling lies in love of God
and love of neighbor.” Zylstra lists the social spheres as valid domains for fulfill-
ing one’s vocation and includes public office along with them, without reference to
the organic/mechanical distinction by which Kuyper divides them. This is mis-
leading on account of the individualist motives it allows to attach to the perform-
ance of governmental office, which for Calvin and Kuyper is not a sphere in
which to practice creative individuality, but obedience to the cultural mandate. In-
deed, Zylstra himself recognized public office as unique, divinely established to
“maintain a public realm in which the rights of persons and institutions are recog-
nized, protected, and guaranteed” (Zylstra 1991, 321). On this reading, contempo-
rary neo-Calvinism would seem to want to broaden the role of government to in-
clude a directive function along with the juridical function.8

A more far-reaching interpretation of Kuyper involves the marriage of sphere
sovereignty with the concept of rights, which also emerges in Zylstra’s writings,
especially in respect of religious liberty (Zylstra 1991). Such an interpretation is not
without warrant given that Kuyper asserts the rights of people to control their own
purses and insists that law, not the magistrate, must decide rights. But what is
striking about Kuyper’s treatment of rights is how sparse it is. Acknowledging
that popular assemblies now protect rights, resisting the notion that any person
possesses a right over any other, speculating on the need for a “corporative right of
franchise,” in Kuyper’s treatment public justice depends to only a limited extent
on individual rights. Perhaps the process of re-expressing Kuyper’s political theory
using conventional rights language robs it of its structural focus, turning Kuyperian
political theory away from its continental center of gravity as a structural represen-
tation of state, individual, and differentiated society in the direction of an Anglo-
American scheme for limiting government in the name of individual liberty. This

8Zylstra’s “departure” from Kuyper does appear more marked if one takes the “mechanical”
view of the state prominent in the Lectures as the point of that departure. Conversely, the
implicit embrace of the cultural mandate discussed by Zuidema in his discussion of Kuyper’s
views on common and particular grace may allow for such a role as an aspect of the organic,
and thus changing, nature of creation itself. As I pointed out, however, and as Zuidema
acknowledges, Kuyper became too preoccupied by the magnitude of the abuses of common
grace, of creation’s rich potential, to allow government much of a long leash in this respect.
interpretation must be treated cautiously if it seeks to identify itself as Kuyperian for Kuyper is never as individualist as he is personalist. At best it focuses on a secondary aspect of his political thought, at worst it distorts the latter’s salient features.

The State as an Agent of Public Justice

Kuyper’s juridical conception of government’s essential functions did not permit him to legitimize a patronage state along the lines of Lowi’s model of the first federal regime. Subsidizing private activity to achieve governmental aims would have been suspect, I think. Sphere sovereignty permits the state to intervene to enable the social spheres to do what they do best, to prevent violations of individual freedoms within these spheres, and to maintain parity between spheres, but such intervention could never be for “positive state” reasons. It is hard to imagine Homestead Acts and railroad land grants emerging from a Kuyperian state in that these did not represent neutral governmental encouragement of private enterprise for its own sake. Sphere sovereignty principles restrain government in this way chiefly to check imperialism or other manifestations of Caesarism, but they may also unintentionally thwart economic development. Only if state encouragement of economic development can be interpreted as an expression of public justice could such intervention be justified.

Kuyper contemplated the rise of the positive state, especially the development of direct cash welfare programs, and sharply criticized it. Writing in 1891, he insisted that state and society each possess its own sphere. The class strife brought on by the industrial revolution elicited from him a restatement of sphere sovereignty principles, not a new venture in public policy. Such ventures, he warned, were the mistaken undertakings of social democrats and state socialists, both of whom erased the distinction between state and society and forfeited the free society ordained by God. What Kuyper objected to in the positive state was a distortion of divine ordinances epitomized by the presumption that men had to design governmental solutions to the social problem de novo. “We do not have to organize society,” he maintained, “we have only to develop the germ of organization that God himself has created” (The Problem of Poverty, 1891). Here, finally, Kuyper resorts explicitly to the cultural mandate. Man is to “preserve and cultivate” the natural world because barbarism will ensue when human society is left to nature without higher supervision. Kuyper acknowledges the general contribution of human governments to resisting barbarism while noting the unhealthy consequences of government action originating in false, that is, non-Christian, principles. Such governments permit the powerful to exploit the weak, or to co-opt government offices and turn government’s powers against the weak. By contrast, a Calvinist government is to move cautiously in the area of social experimentation, refusing “to erect any structure except one that rests on foundations laid by God” (1891, 64). Once again, as he was to do in more abstract terms in the Stone Lectures.
but here in an applied setting, Kuyper turns to the cautionary tale of social democracy and state socialism, the one allowing society to swallow the state, the other permitting the state to absorb society:

Against both of these, we as Christians must hold that state and society each has its own sphere, its own sovereignty, and that the social question cannot be resolved rightly unless we respect this duality and thus honor state authority as clearing the way for a free society (65).

Although the terms and examples in which he expresses his reluctance to engage in social experimentation might mark Kuyper as a conservative pure and simple, they do lay the foundations for qualified intervention. Rejecting individualism on the basis of common human guilt and “the mystery of the reconciliation on Golgotha,” Kuyper commends the “interconnected wholeness of our human society,” rejects both an absolute property right as a violation of God’s sovereignty and a community of possessions as a violation of the right of rule “in the context of the organic association of mankind,” and identifies the problem of poverty as a clash between social spheres where government intervention is warranted.9 The clash in question is, of course, the class struggle, the conflict between business and labor. Compelled by the ordinances of God to stay out of the social spheres but equally compelled to uphold justice equitably (which Kuyper extends to withstanding the physical superiority of the strong, presumably because this falsely advances a right to rule), the state must act even-handedly: “A code for business . . . calls also for a code for labor” (71).

Coupled with cautious advice about direct cash payments to the poor or unemployed—he opposed them—Kuyper’s prescription for the social crisis of his day is a strengthening of the structures of pluralism. The state and only the state is positioned to bring this about, hence the principle of intervention to restore balance among the spheres. In other respects, however, the problem of poverty lies beyond its reach, for state intervention of any other kind risks sapping the natural resilience of the poor. Instead, Kuyper appeals to individual Calvinists to “place life eternal in the foreground of both rich and poor.”

In conjunction with his other writings, The Problem of Poverty sheds especially clear light on the Kuyperian state. Unlike its Lockian-American protagonist in its libertarian guise, it is not minimalist or morally neutral; quite the contrary, its role vis-à-vis individuals and social institutions is irreducibly moral, stemming as it does from the ordinances of God. Unlike the Lockian-American state in its interest-group liberal guise, it is not a positive state. Moreover, the will of the people provides precious little grounds for justifying social or economic experimentation. Its

9And warranted as much for the employer as the employee when the circumstances demanded it. When a railroad strike threatened to disrupt the national economy in 1903, Kuyper as prime minister provided strong support for the railroad company, condemning the strike as an illegitimate severance of contract. Subsequently, he introduced bills to prevent such strikes in the future, to explore criminal wrongdoing by the strikers, and to establish a State Commission to investigate the grievances of railroad personnel (Langley 1984, 91-101).
center of gravity lies in divinely ordained structures, not in political goals. Henig (1969), writing of a related Christian Democracy, remarks that it supplies “a framework for politics, not a set of objectives.” He might have added, “nor a rule-based approach to guiding and limiting public policy.” His observation captures Kuyper’s preoccupations with respect to the state well. The Kuyperian state stands over against the liberal state by virtue of the juridical calling to which it is confined and the new relationships among state, individuals, and social institutions that it formalizes. Its objectives turn out to be the protection of structures that secure public justice—an architectonic project in statecraft, not a prudential one in decision-making.

**The Problem of State Intervention**

The society which emerged from Kuyper’s theological wrestling with divine and human sovereignty is a community of communities, and the state a special sphere in which divine authority is exercised to promote justice. However satisfying this juridical formulation may be structurally, it lacks an operationalized principle or set of principles that justify state intervention in a wide range of common situations. To put it somewhat crudely, differentiating state, society, and individuals is not the same thing as relating them. For example, it is well and good to argue for the protection of communities—families, schools, churches—from the coercive power of the state. But when is state intervention justified? Should parents be permitted, in the name of the state, to withhold essential medical treatment from children? What if schools inculcate hatred and undermine the state? In what body is that determination finally vested? What rules may courts reasonably develop for making these determinations?

Kuyper did not develop in detail the principles upon which state intervention must rest, apart from the equality principle discussed in *The Problem of Poverty* (see above), if we mean by principle the operationalizing of a value. The basic Kuyperian principle is, of course, for persons and offices to respect the substance and limits of their respective callings. It will be useful to refer parenthetically, therefore, to Herman Dooyeweerd, who explored the “inner nature” or basic character of the state, albeit in rather abstract terms. I am relying heavily on R.D. Henderson’s work *Illuminating Law* (1994) for the points that follow, a noteworthy contribution for its discussion of the dependence upon Kuyper Dooyeweerd acknowledged. Dooyeweerd agreed with Kuyper’s distinction between the “organic” social spheres and the “mechanical” legal sphere, in large part because to depict the state as organic was to hinder it in its special task of doing justice. Organic views of the state lead to a form of state autonomy whereas Dooyeweerd insists that the state and its legal institutions must continually adapt themselves to development in other spheres. To render the state in anthropological or organic terms earns it loyalty derived from blood ties, which place other spheres in a subordinate position to it. And to justify a “concrete legal system (positive legality) in terms of a goal (for example,
the general good or will of the people) negates its sovereignty as a distinct sphere” (Henderson 169). Instead, the “mechanical” character of the state directly reflects the character of legality itself:

Legality is characterized by a permanent principle, viz, the principle of retribution, taken in its most general and objective sense. . . . It is the essential reaction of the divine legal order against those who violate it in a way which demands punishment (167).

The principle of retribution operates in two senses to limit the role of the state. First, it lays claim to an exclusive operation in its sphere. Thus, Dooyeweerd asserts, it is not a teleological, reform-oriented, or purposeful principle that would allow reform or deterrence to be proper considerations in law’s administration. Liberal approaches to criminal justice are severely curtailed. Second, it operates in a mechanical fashion because it is constrained by the presence of ethics, a sovereignty grounded in love, from exacting revenge: “Retribution should be carried out in connection with the violation of a distinctly legal and not a typically ethical norm” (Henderson 168). Both these modes of operation of the retribution principle take on greater significance given that Dooyeweerd considered retribution not to be the operative principle of criminal law alone, but of all good laws (169).

If Dooyeweerd can be said to clarify neo-Calvinist principles for state intervention, it must be concluded that the result is much more continental than it is American with respect to the mechanism that secures the intervention. As the inclusion of the Bill of Rights as a condition for ratification of the Constitution nicely illustrates, Americans have not been satisfied with the argument that the structure of government alone can guarantee liberty; they have insisted on listing their liberties (with the additional qualification of Ninth Amendments) to keep government at arms’ length from their consciences, their houses and effects, and their persons. And surely, for reasons that have much in common with Protestant suspicions everywhere: you cannot trust people with power. If the principle determining when government may intervene is not to appear abstractly lodged in the internal makeup of the state (“retribution is the meaning of the law sphere”), it must be situated in a discourse that treats the state as something other than the natural enemy of liberty (or the friend of the “interests” for that matter). It must be possible to have confidence in a set of values underlying such a state and such a theory of state intervention. What must come into view alongside the suspicion of people with power is the confidence that there are common human commitments holding civil society together. These are not absent from the American political tradition, as a reading of the framers makes only too plain. But from the triumph of the Federalists on, those common commitments have tended towards only nationalistic expression (Elshtain 1988). Right across the political spectrum in the 1990s the nationalistic tendency remains: even among those countering individualism, the collective nouns deployed are marked by nationalist overtones—“family” and “community” are applied to the entire society. Neo-Calvinist discourse can help to remedy this situation by putting forward the language of differentiated society, a soci-
ety of persons, families, churches, communities of various kinds, businesses, and voluntary organizations.

The Role of the State: Kuyper and Lowi Compared

Can neo-Calvinism ever compete with liberalism in application of a rule of law? In an American context, probably not. The liberal set-up of pre-social rights ranged against government authority contained by consent is pretty straightforward when it comes to working out how you attain a balance between the rights of the individual and the authority of government. Rights generally limit government. Fundamental rights impose especially strict limits. Liberalism’s post-Lockian focus on external checks on government yields more accessible principles and, therefore, rules for determining when government may intervene. By contrast, the continental preference for internal checks, while expressible in structures of government is a good deal harder to express as a set of rules for resolving dilemmas. Kuyper’s state will not take revenge or reform or deter by virtue of its calling, Dooyeweerd’s by virtue of its structure—not because of a Bill of Rights. There is no equivalent to the relatively elegant liberal formula of fundamental right triggering strict scrutiny demanding evidence of compelling state interest—or non-fundamental rights resulting in milder standards of review permitting the legislature to satisfy the courts with only a rational basis for its laws.

But the crucial point here is that external checks are only as good as internal design. The two are mutually dependent in the American tradition. What liberal polities need to see, Lowi argues (though not in so many words) is that external checks alone are not enough. The United States got a state, positive, directive, relatively autonomous, and it got it despite a tradition of individual rights and limited government, despite simple rules and lucid logic! But rights themselves are flexible notions, as Glendon (1991) laments in an era dominated by the conversion of so many issues into rights talk. Once the legitimating force of right could be attached to economic status, the state could become rights’ principal agent. The liberal polity failed for this reason to contain the state not because it did not possess external checks but because the mechanism of external checks turned out to be only as good as definition of its component parts. The industrial revolution wrenched rights out of their largely political context as restrictions on a government assumed to be liberty’s chief foe and threw the burden of protection back towards internal design. If Lowi is right, virtually no one noticed that this had happened, hence the resistance to Lowi’s call to revive the rule of law to restore the internal design of the separation of powers (specifically the Schechter rule forbidding delegation of power from Congress to the President “without sufficiently defining the policy or criteria to guide the administrator”).

Lowi is not as much interested in rolling back the positive state as he is in making liberal democracy a coherent form of government, however. It is actually far from clear that Lowi’s juridical democracy would greatly clarify the role of the
state, though it would equip it with greater authority within a more limited scope. A clearly defined rule of law would, it is true, encourage a new public philosophy, a new climate for politics and policy. By way of example, Lowi cites the Dagenhart decision as chilling new federal regulatory initiatives in the 1920s on the grounds that Members of Congress then assumed such national economic powers would be unconstitutional. His call for revival of the Schechter rule could create a similarly chastened climate in respect of delegation of powers. But isn’t the point of The End of Liberalism the revival of liberalism? And are not the accompaniments to liberalism in America a thin atmosphere in which the rich web of civil society dissolves in the acid of nominalism? We must go beyond liberalism to reclaim proper relationships between state, individual, and society, and thereby to clarify the proper functions of government.10 Lowi’s juridical democracy is juridical in a procedural sense only. Structurally, the building blocks of the positive, liberal state remain in place. At best, a course correction, albeit a very welcome one, would result from implementation of Lowi’s procedural recommendations. Success, however, would be defined as a liberal government that could plan and could exercise meaningful authority, a government that could achieve the justice that democracies can best deliver—public policy reflective of public opinion within the framework of individual rights. The positive state would be reined in, not subjected to rethinking of the presuppositions on which it rests. In Seidelman and Harpham’s observation, Lowi’s research is a lengthy discovery that liberal hopes must be dashed because his formalist remedies for liberalism’s contradictions are impossible to attain within liberalism (1985, 200-213). Or to put it more bluntly, in the words of Paul Kahn (1992), “[t]he break between contemporary [constitutional] theory and practice is a consequence of the ultimate impossibility of uniting self-government and the historical state.” Lowi’s juridical democracy falls short, then. Because he will not transcend the liberal state, his prescriptions remain contained by its rhetoric.

Return to the State: the Role of Religious Presuppositions

Oddly enough in view of the foregoing, no one more than Lowi has grasped the extent of the interrelationship between political science and the state, and no one has expressed greater concern that the relationship has made political science flaccid and public discourse toxic (Lowi 1992, 3-6). The discipline has undergone in recent years a soul-searching transformation from behavioral hegemony towards a quasi-pluralism of method and ideology (Almond, 1990, 1988; Seidelman and Harpham, 1985; Ricci, 1984; Easton, 1981). In that kind of atmosphere, the neo-Calvinist perspective can emerge from the marginalized obscurity11 that has

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11Donald Tewksbury’s (1965) classic study of American higher education showed how domi-
shrouded evangelical scholarship for decades. A rapprochement unthinkable in the behavioral era is now a possibility.

Despite the gulf which now appears to separate political scientists in the liberal progressive “third tradition” of Wilson, Ward, Beard, Merriam, Easton, Truman, Lowi et al., from Reformed evangelicals critical of liberalism, they share a concern for articulating a theory of the state in democratic politics. As Seidelman and Harpham point out and as I have attempted to describe in reference to Lowi’s magnum opus, the Third Tradition has met severe obstacles in its attempts to defend the administrative state against charges that it threatens the liberal tradition. Neo-Calvinist (Reformed) scholarship is equally concerned that a theory of the state be constructed, and with its emphasis on a limited (but not morally minimalist) state, structural (and confessional) pluralism, and consociational democracy, may be better placed than the Third Tradition to defend it. Paradoxically, the gulf

nant were denominational colleges in the United States prior to the Civil war—in effect, they postponed a movement to establish “revolutionary” colleges on a Jeffersonian model for the better part of a century. The emergence of political science as a distinct discipline had to await this development (Haddow 1939), but the rise of political science in the new state universities and certain private colleges then proceeded to bypass the denominational colleges altogether. When communities of faith came to political science, then, they encountered a fully formed discipline (organization, bureaucracy, body of knowledge). The collapse of evangelical academia in the United States was not only a function of this eventual supplanting by the Jeffersonian model, however. It resulted also from internal intellectual weakness (Marsden 1983) and from fragmentation in the Protestant community itself. Evangelicals and liberals had preserved a coalition on social and political, if not theological questions as late as World War I (Marsden 1980). Splitting first over questions of patriotism, the supposed impact of German theology on German culture, and the rise of premillenialist writings in the wartime atmosphere, they polarized decisively—and permanently—over evolution and modernism, disputes which culminated in the Scopes trial of 1925. Thereafter, fundamentalism, and by association evangelicalism more generally, was well and truly rusticated by liberal protestantism and the secular academy. Denominational identity itself was downplayed, especially in higher education (1988, 184-195; see also Burtchaell (1991) “The Decline and Fall of the Christian College”).

12If neo-Calvinist political inquiry does break new ground with respect to a theory of state and society, the widely noticed “return to the state” in the discipline at large does not promise to make this common ground (see Dryzek and Leonard 1988). For Lowi (1992), as for Almond (1988), the return to the state offers no fresh examination of the normative questions linking state, individual and society, but rather a new awareness of government as a variable. I agree. What is needed is not to make the state a variable, “but to make political science, through a new and higher level of discourse, a discipline worthy of constitutional democracy—scientific, theoretic, historical, and critical” (Lowi 1992, 891). If there is nothing more to the movement than a course correction away from the Almond/Easton-inspired language of the political system (see Susser 1992), then we cannot expect a convergence with the normative concerns of neo-Calvinist thought. Such, for the present, appears to be the case.

13The superficial affinities between branches of evangelicalism and traditions in political science are as follows: reformed evangelicalism is hermeneutically sympathetic to the Institutionalist tradition—“the dominant mode of American governmental organization and political thought in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Seidelman and Harpham, 4; see also Farr 1990 on the pre-history of political science as a form of hermeneutics).
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between Lowi and Kuyper, though narrowed by the conviction that one must articulate a theory of the state, widens also, for each brings radically different presuppositions to bear on the problem. If one can speak of religious presuppositions in Lowi’s case, these do not transcend a Lockian view of humans as reasonable, socially-inclined utility maximizers. Lowi’s prescription for what ails the liberal state is not, on this account, radical, for the problems of the liberal state may not be laid at the feet of sinful man. As a result, Lowi seems willing to place all his eggs in the one basket of a return to the rule of law.

There can be no pretense that a Kuyperian attempt to reconcile America’s institutionalist and radical democratic traditions would leave either intact and would simply discover a hitherto undiscovered unity between them. I have already noted that the more one pursues neo-Calvinism to its roots, the more it emerges in continental European guise in its view of state and society, in its qualified treatment of rights, in its defense of the legitimate authority of the state, an authority independent of popular consent. I am perhaps less confident than some of my neo-Calvinist colleagues that a Kuyperian interpretation of the American political tradition would point to anything less than wholesale transformation of that tradition. As I have observed elsewhere (Sherratt and Mahurin 1995), a Kuyperian approach to the American situation has some things in common with anti-federalism in its regard for a differentiated civil society built on common values. But there’s the rub. The civil society reached for by anti-federalists and sought after again by neo-Calvinists, Catholics, and others with like sympathies today did not capture the American imagination nor dominate its rhetoric as does the curious mix of Madison and Locke. One may argue that American discourse generally is as satisfied as Lowi in particular with their “religious” presuppositions and has not seen the problems of liberal democracy as calling for their radical re-examination.

For precisely this reason, of course, one must be cautious about the prospect of neo-Calvinist presuppositions receiving a warm welcome in America. Short of a wholesale transformation, the Kuyperian orientation may make its most salient contribution by disentangling republicanism from the Lockian view of society in which rights are located outside the state, which is denied an independent foundation in common values or natural law. The republican tradition, even Madisonian republicanism with its accommodation of individualism and its ambiguity with respect to the public interest, is starved in the thin Lockian air. Elshtain (1988) puts it this way:

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evangelicals who trace their roots to the radical Reformation, to anabaptists and quietist sects, Radical Democracy with its built-in antipathy to structures and institutions, its spontaneity, and its suspicion of the powers that be, is inherently appealing. As for the Progressive liberal Third Tradition, it has attracted evangelical Realists in the tradition of Reinhold Niebuhr, who argue for prudence—a composite of factual knowledge and discernment—in translating biblical principles into policy. Adaptability to changing and interim circumstances is perhaps the hallmark of both the Third Tradition (one thinks of Herbert Croly’s harnessing of Hamiltonian means to Jeffersonian ends) and this Christian Realist orientation.
The empirical reality of American democracy, in Tocqueville’s view, even as it frees individuals from the constraints of older, undemocratic structures and obligations, also unleashes atomism, individualism, and privatization. . . . The lure of private acquisitiveness spawns political apathy and invites democratic despotism. All social webs that once held persons intact having disintegrated, the individual finds himself isolated and impotent, exposed and unprotected. Into this power vacuum moves “the organizing force of the government,” the centralized state.14

Elshtain’s argument takes us beyond Lowi’s prescription of juridical democracy to the disintegrative forces that would nullify that procedural cure. These are the forces neo-Calvinism addresses. Neo-Calvinism gives the republican tradition a second chance, so to speak. In its treatment of the state and no less in its treatment of rights, it brings that tradition back into view. It allows us to see again that the ratification of the Constitution represents continuity with republican thought at least as much as it represents disjunction and a new beginning. The religious character of Kuyper’s thought is itself an aid to this end. “Kuyperian presuppositionalism,” writes Marsden (1988), “is a style of Christian thought that emphasizes that crucial to the differences that separate Christian worldviews from non-Christian ones are disagreements about pretheoretical first principles, presuppositions, first commitments, or basic beliefs.” Law and politics stem from these basic beliefs, irrespective of the deity that is worshiped. In this foundational sense Skillen (1995, 35) writes that “religion . . . is inescapable for human beings.”

This treatment of Man as a religious being lends further clarity to the functions and limits of the Kuyperian state described above. Not only is the state seen as deriving its authority from God’s ordinances (a view dependent on a particular, Calvinist, religious orientation), but, by extension, the state itself is also viewed from a perspective that holds all fundamental human commitments in high regard because they stem from basic beliefs. Giving these commitments their due requires sharing of authority in the interests of the general welfare; and it requires freedom for a plurality of such commitments to find expression politically. Here is an emphasis entirely missing from Lowi’s analysis and prescriptions.

The contemporary neo-Calvinist perspective thus affirms that the theory of the state is interdependent with the theory of church and state, and it is critical of the separationist approach to the latter, which still holds sway on the Supreme Court. For from the neo-Calvinist perspective, full religious freedom is not to be secured by reaffirming the freedom to worship in churches of one’s choice, and it is positively affronted by walling off religion from the public square. On the contrary, the foundational character of religious commitment necessitates its recognition and protection in multiple domains: in churches and families, naturally, but also in schools and social service agencies, in and out of the public square. Rights are grounded in the religious character of humankind, for no right turns out to be

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as important as a broadly construed right of free exercise; or, to put it another way, the concept of free exercise takes on dimensions undreamed of by the founders protecting the cerebral, low-intensity protestantism of the “Gentlemen” of the late 18th Century, a religious outlook and practice presumably needing precious little protection! Among contemporary neo-Calvinists, this enlarged and nuanced view of religion has manifested itself in calls for pluralism in education, health, and welfare (Monsma, 1996; Carlson-Thies and Skillen, 1995; Skillen 1993; McCarthy et al. 1982; Zylstra, 1991) and for a system of proportional representation to replace the present electoral system (Skillen 1995, 137-155, for example).

In sum, the neo-Calvinist perspective could rescue the American state from the theoretical obscurity it wallows in and the disdain in which its post-1930s manifestation is held. Should the present welfare state be comprehensively dismantled, the state’s juridical functions would still need clarification of the kind neo-Calvinists can offer, for Kuyper shows us the need for justice within and between the various spheres of social life, in addition to criminal justice and a policy of national defense. Given the upsurge in ethnic and religious sensitivities and the troubled awareness of multiple cultures within the American nation-state, Kuyper’s high view of religion as a way of life no less than the particular insights of his Calvinism takes on a new significance. It is hard to see how Lowi or the Third Tradition might articulate such issues distinctively.

Conclusion

From at least the Populists to the New Left, the American state either represented the people against the interests (taming them by regulation) or it sided with those interests against the people, indicting itself by “democratic” standards. The legitimacy of governmental authority rested on these mutually exclusive options, which built both statist reality and anti-statist feeling on their Lockian foundations. Where a quasi-Lockian discourse pits state and individual against each other and largely overlooks the intermediary institutions of civil society, neo-Calvinist discourse, a religious discourse on reality with a high view of religious freedom, situates the state in a three-way relationship with individuals and societal institutions which multiplies the roles and stances of the state: in partnership with the individual to protect civil rights when a family, school, club or business would deny these; in deference to churches in their exercise of ecclesiastical law with respect to church members; in retributive relationship with convicted criminals; in cooperation with faith-based social service providers, and so forth. Since a differentiated society is the locus of most citizen freedom (people live out their lives in the a web of institutional “memberships”), the integrity of these institutions emerges as a proper object of governmental concern and protection. If the larger number of relationships just described do not simplify the work of courts (as I allude to in my discussion of neo-Calvinism’s articulation problems in regards to state intervention), it does foster a richer public discourse, one less circumscribed by artificial
and typically reductionist treatment of people and their multifaceted relationships and obligations. One could put this another way, following Walzer (1990) who observed that the truncated discourse of American politics could be viewed either as bad (invoking a highly restricted view of persons and societal relationships) or simply wrong. Neo-Calvinists may rightly maintain that the three-way relationships I have just described constitute a better description of existing relationships in which the American state is involved than the conventional terms for discussing the state offers—existing relationships denied visibility in law and political culture.\(^{15}\) The situating of the state in relation to persons and differentiated social institutions takes us away from the nominalist categories of American discourse and allows the state to emerge from its hiding place behind a Lockian social contract formula, a formula which hoodwinked us into believing that popular consent dissolved the problem of political authority. With Kuyper’s help, to put it simply, Christians may challenge and change public discourse. The importance of such challenges lies in the prevalence of the utilitarian, materialist and reductionist views of human life that have flourished in American political culture.

We are left with an interesting dilemma. If I am right, then the particular contribution the neo-Calvinist writings can make is to the reshaping of what Lowi, following Walter Lippmann, called the “public philosophy.” But it lacks a practical, rule-based theory of state intervention to give practical effect to its biblically-based principle of fidelity to calling, a deficiency compounded by the elegant formulas of liberal democracy. It cultivates a biblical sensibility to politics but suggests only in general terms the outlines of public-legal arrangements. These features limit its appeal in the American context. Here, the features recognized as most attractive may be limited government and the priority for protecting religious liberty, but to speak of a religious view of all of life is more likely to invoke New Age than Christianity!

Circumstance, rather than theory, may situate American discourse in a reconsideration of the state, as the promises attached to government downsizing are held up to the light of actual experience. Moreover, as more is learned about the actual relationship between government and private agencies, along the lines of the work being done by Monsma (1996) and the Center for Public Justice, a richer understanding of government’s empirical role can emerge to replace overly simplistic separationist logic. This research points to complex, cooperative interaction between government and religious agencies, a reality that stretches the separationist dogmas of the Supreme Court and the volunteerist/limited government dogmas of conservatives to their respective limits. In that climate, the Kuyperian juxtaposition of society, persons and the state may inform the subsequent debate. For, de-

\(^{15}\)Stephen Monsma (1996) has documented highly interdependent relationships between faith-based social service providers and state and federal governments—although in the solitary modern-era case addressing this relationship the Supreme Court’s reasoning maintains a contorted separationalist logic, requiring that the agencies not be pervasively sectarian and that the funds go for exclusively secular purposes (Bowen v. Kendrick, 1988).
spite the beating it has taken, the Madisonian tradition of confidence in internal design may have seen its time come again, although, curiously, its recent revival owes more to quasi-libertarians bent on shrinking the state than civic republicans willing to describe it afresh and affirm its necessary functions in democratic society.

References


The Abolition of Value in the Classroom: Some Observations from the Language Arts

By Ruth Lessl Shively and Thomas Lessl

Introduction

In The Abolition of Man, C. S. Lewis examined a problem that is inherent to instruction in the language arts, one that should be of particular interest to those concerned with the relationship between Christian faith and the teaching vocation. In this little book Lewis showed that some textbooks being used in the English secondary schools were inculcating a philosophy of ethical subjectivism in the guise of instruction in literary criticism. Although Lewis made these observations some time ago, we would like to suggest their enduring relevance for those who teach in the language arts. We believe that Lewis was identifying a problem that is endemic to education in the language arts, namely that theories of language are always accompanied by some allotment of metaphysical baggage when they make their way into the classroom.

Thus the central goal of this essay is to suggest the enduring relevance of Lewis’ complaint against ethical subjectivism and to suggest how instructors might address this issue in the classroom. Accordingly, the first section of this paper will revisit Lewis’ claim that teachers in the language arts wittingly or unwittingly impart to their students the metaphysical beliefs that have given rise to the theories they teach. More specifically this section of the paper will show how ethical subjectivism is suggested by commonplace instruction in the notion of “connotative” meaning. The second part of the paper will outline some of the ways in which teachers can address subjectivism in the classroom, not only by helping students to be aware of subjectivist elements in their studies, but also by offering them objec-
The ethical philosophies that make their way into instruction in the guise of communication theory are likely to reflect—as Lewis himself demonstrated—the predominantly naturalistic beliefs that pervade the secular academy. Lewis believed that naturalism of this kind was advancing the “abolition of man,” an incremental tendency in Western cultures to undermine those ethical sensibilities which he regarded as the very essence of our humanity. Lewis also recognized that naturalism had so permeated the fabric of Western societies that teachers who were not exceedingly cautious could easily become unwitting partners in its propagation.

While the specific language theories that Lewis identified with this problem have now gone out of fashion, the more general problem still faces every instructor—and in particular those who accept the ethical realism that is found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Because the theories of language that circulate in college classrooms are products of an academic culture that subscribes to metaphysical skepticism, these theories also suggest in various ways that ethical realism is an untenable position. Whether or not this is intentional would be impossible to say. Nevertheless, it is a predictable outcome of such theorizing, and one that creates a dilemma for instructors. While they themselves may not be skeptics, in teaching a language arts curriculum that includes such theories they are always in danger of becoming the unwitting purveyors of those doctrines.

We hope to offer here a plausible remedy to this dilemma. In doing so our first objective will be to outline the problem itself. Then we will discuss some solutions.

**Ethical Subjectivism in the Communication Textbook**

To examine Lewis’ assumption that the process of teaching a theory of language entails as an incidental side effect the communication of those metaphysical or anti-metaphysical notions that inspired such theories, we would like to explore a fairly common topic in the field of communication theory—the notions of denotative and connotative meaning. These concepts are particularly appropriate as illustrations of Lewis’ position, since they appear to have descended from the referential theory of meaning of C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, which was at issue in Lewis’ book. This is a theory of language and knowledge that, while neither profound nor fashionable, remains a common feature of basic communication textbooks.

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2. C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*: A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism (1923; reprint, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960). Although Lewis does not acknowledge it as such, the textbook lessons that he examines in *The Abolition of Man* appear to have been derived from this theory.
3. It is also a communication theory that is antithetical to the objectivist understandings of value that are endorsed by various religious traditions. This is evident in the more overt hostility toward theism that Ogden and Richards express in their book. See, for instance, Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 16-18, 38.
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The philosophical underpinnings of Ogden and Richards’ theory, as these authors openly acknowledge, come from the linguistic positivism that was in fashion in the early part of the twentieth century. Their theory thus presupposes that all legitimate word meanings derive from cognitive associations that language users build up between symbols and material referents. The basic tenets of this view are quite familiar. All words must have a physical referent that is located either within the outer world of perception or else in the interior physiology of the speaker. The first category of external referents, which Ogden and Richards called “symbolic,” or “scientific” are those which result from a causal relationship set up between the outer world of material objects and the inward response of symbolic representation. Because of their causal linkage to the outer world, “scientific” symbols express objective reality for Ogden and Richards. The second category of meaning is comprised of symbols that signify only the inward experiences of the language user. If these “emotive” meanings have material referents, they are merely the physiological responses that occur within the subjectivity of the language user. Such symbols, since they refer only to “the attitude, mood, interest, purpose, desire, and so forth of the speaker and thence to the situation, circumstances and conditions in which the utterance is made,” are relegated by Ogden and Richards to a secondary category of significance.

The analysis that supposes that words are meaningful only when they draw an auditor’s attention to some material referent will always be obliged to debunk certain common varieties of meaning. In particular this would be true of all statements expressing value. The pupil who is asked to bring such a semanticist theory of meaning to literary analysis will operate, Lewis writes, under two premises: “firstly that all sentences containing a predicate of value are statements about the emotional state of the speaker, and secondly, that all such statements are unimportant.”

Let us see if we can briefly illustrate what Lewis is complaining about by examining the kind of interpretation such a semanticist theory might bring to the following statement:

The wanton destruction of our natural environment is contemptible.

The person saying this, according to Ogden and Richards, will be making a statement about his or her feelings, and could not, strictly speaking, be expressing a moral judgment against environmental pollution. All expressions of value have to

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4 Early on in their book, Ogden and Richards (14) identify their work with the positivist project of bringing to the social sciences the same clarity that is found in physics. Accordingly, they renounce all notions of metaphysics—and therefore are forced to reduce ethical statements to mere emotion.

5 Ogden and Richards, 122-6, 223-236.

6 Ogden and Richards, 223. The inferiority of the second category of terms is clearly evidenced in their differentiation from those deemed to have “scientific” signification.

7 Lewis, 15.
be denied because the theory requires firstly, that meaningful symbols will have external reference, and secondly, it presumes (because it strives to be a “scientific” theory of meaning) that all reference is material. Words such as “natural” and “environment” have clear external and material referents, but words like “contemptible” and “wanton” point to the inward experience of the speaker. Ogden and Richards conclude that because such words reference internal physiological reactions, the speaker who uses them is “guided merely by his linguistic habits and a simple faith in the widespread possession of these habits.” And so they are dubbed “emotive.”

What Ogden and Richards have done is not entirely wrong; it is simply incomplete. The theory’s materialistic assumptions inevitably require that it deny the evaluative significance of words like “contemptible” and “wanton.” No material referent for values can be found in nature, and so these writers are required to presume that the physiological experience that coincides with the use of such terms is their only referent.

The reduction of any term expressing value to mere emotion also makes the statements in which they occur nonsensical. This was the second point of Lewis’ criticism—that this theory makes any statement containing a predicate of value unimportant. When the word “contemptible” is denied its ethical meaning, the grammatical meaning of any statement in which it occurs must be regarded as inherently misleading. While the grammatical form of the above statement indicates that the words “contemptible” and “wanton” refer to both acts of environmental destruction and to the speaker’s judgment of such acts, as Ogden and Richards would have it, this cannot be right. Since “contemptible” has no referent in the outer world of materiality, it can only refer to the internal materiality of human emotion. And so, if the semantic theories of Ogden and Richards are correct, the statement can only mean that “I have contemptible feelings.” One cannot truthfully say that any “act” is contemptible, but only that one’s feelings about the act are “contemptible.” So long as the word is required to have a physical referent, it can only denote the physical state of the speaker—his or her feelings.

Students who are taught to reason about language in this fashion may hardly be aware of it, but they are being taught to doubt the integrity of any meanings that express value. The effects of this may go equally unnoticed, and singlehandedly this sort of pedagogy is certainly not capable of transforming pupils into ethical subjectivists. Nevertheless, such materials provide another nudge in that direction. Students who have already absorbed the relativistic truisms of our age—the presumption that “everyone has their own values” and that moral arguments are incapable of being settled objectively—will now find that such reasoning is endorsed by the learned as well.

—Ogden and Richards, 122.
At this point, some readers may wonder if we are constructing a straw man. The semantic theories of Ogden and Richards are, after all, quite dated, and certainly are not taken by contemporary language theorists to be the final word on the meaning of meaning. But while this is true, a version of this theory persists in language arts textbooks in the various notions of meaning that they teach.

A philosophy of ethical subjectivism embedded in language theory can be seen in a variety of textbook examples. One such text is the widely adopted public speaking textbook *Speech: A Text with Adapted Readings* by Robert Jeffrey and Owen Peterson. In the section of this book called “The Nature of Language,” the authors discuss several methods by which language may be classified. They show that language varies in degrees of abstractness, that its purposes may be “informative, expressive, or directive,” and they distinguish between language that is “emotive” and “neutral.” In their examination of the distinction between informative and expressive language, the materialistic philosophy of Ogden and Richards clearly persists. “Informative language,” the authors tell us, seeks to enhance the listener’s knowledge or understanding of something. Its sole purpose is to enlighten rather than to influence the auditor’s beliefs or actions.

They go on to list several statements as examples of this before they introduce their definition of “expressive language,” which consists of statements made by a speaker to indicate feelings. It seeks neither to inform nor to persuade the listener. Examples of expressive language are:

- Ouch!
- What a beautiful day.
- I’m worn out.
- I wish I were taller.
- This is delicious.

It may be granted to Jeffrey and Peterson that statements such as these are the kind that are likely to be spoken, at least in part, to express feeling, but they are just as likely to do more than this. With the possible exception of the first—which is an exclamatory utterance—none of these examples is without some evident informative value. Certainly the person who says “what a beautiful day” may wish to express feeling, but such a statement would make no sense if those feelings had no

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10 Jeffrey and Peterson, 385-90.
11 Jeffrey and Peterson, 387-388.
12 Jeffrey and Peterson, 388.
external referent. Grammatically, in fact, the statement says nothing about feelings. Despite what people may mean when they say that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” the word “beautiful” in the above statement is attached as a modifier to the word “day.” Jeffrey and Peterson are only surmising that the statement is uttered in order to give air to an emotion, but the syntactical conventions at work in it give no indication of what this emotion is. The words themselves are about an object, the weather, and any emotional content they may have is only what we read into them.

What Jeffrey and Peterson seem to be suggesting is that a word such as “beautiful” does not communicate information because it can have no material referent. They are right in saying that we do not mean anything material when we refer to beauty, for beauty is clearly not a thing but a quality. But they are wrong to suggest that the word’s meaning is purely subjective. Any five minutes of casual conversation with these two authors—or anyone else—would show that they cannot really mean what they are saying. If the word “beautiful” is expressive only of the speaker’s feelings and of nothing else, then what the person really means to say is that “I have beautiful feelings.” People do occasionally say such things, but this is not what is being said in the above instance.

We are not saying that emotions are not at work when objects are called beautiful, nor that such feelings are irrelevant to the meaning of the word “beauty.” Rather we are saying that such feelings are not the subject of declarations of the kind examined above. Feelings may inspire declarations about the beauty of the weather, but grammatically and semantically, such declarations attach the qualities of beauty to the object of discussion rather than to the observer.

If beauty never really refers to anything besides emotional states, then the speaker would be equally justified in applying the appellation to any object. It could be no less meaningful to say “what a beautiful slum” as to say “what a beautiful forest.” If there is not something in forests that inspires the emotions associated with the word “beauty” that cannot be found in a slum, then there can be no objecting to the person who says that slums are beautiful. Of course in real experience nearly all people express the conviction that certain objects are genuinely beautiful and that others are genuinely not. Only certain objects excite our thoughts and emotions in such a way that we would feel justified in attaching the word “beauty” to them, and thus we assume that it is a property of some object that we are referring to when we call it beautiful. It is true that these properties cannot be recognized except through the emotions, but this certainly does not mean that their referents are merely the subjective mechanisms by which aesthetic awareness is aroused.

Jeffrey and Peterson, while purporting only to teach speech, have also constructed a philosophical argument that undermines the whole notion of aesthetic value. The same would be true if they had used in their list of examples any statements that express moral judgment. One can no sooner point to a material referent and dub it “goodness” than to a material referent for “beauty.” Thus while Jeffrey
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and Peterson do not address instances of moral expression, the understanding of language that they propose would debunk all moral as well as aesthetic meanings. This implication of the referential theory for moral judgments is suggested in the authors’ subsequent treatment of emotive meanings. Language, they write:

can also be classified according to how much emotion or feeling it arouses in the listener. Words that stimulate emotional responses are called emotive or connotative; words that evoke little or no emotional reaction are referred to as neutral or denotative.13

This would be fine so long as the authors only meant to show the varying capacities that words have for inviting emotion, but they immediately leave the reader with no alternative but to conclude that what we call values are really just emotions. This is evident in the reductionistic implications of Jeffrey and Peterson’s statement below:

A speaker’s choice of words for conveying an idea can greatly influence the hearer’s emotional response. Note the differences in the following passages, each embodying essentially the same thought:

He delivered a strongly worded attack.
He delivered a vicious tirade.14

An absurdity arises in alleging that the first statement expresses the same “thought” as the second. A “strongly worded attack” might refer to the same event as a “vicious tirade,” but contrary to what Jeffrey and Peterson say, the thoughts represented by the two statements are quite different. The reader who is invited to regard an act as a “vicious tirade” is being asked to make an ethical judgment that a phrase like “strongly worded attack” does not invite. In denying this, these writers imply that the ethical dimension of the second statement may be reduced to its emotive content—which is to say that the moral judgment at stake in calling something “vicious” is meaningless. Having appropriated materialistic assumptions comparable to those expressed in the theories of Ogden and Richards, they assume that what conventional speech recognizes as values are really just physiological conditions.

In one sense Jeffrey and Peterson have got it backwards. We would learn more about the emotional content of this imagined act if it were described as a “strongly worded attack” than if it were called a “vicious attack.” In addition to whatever emotions it expresses, the word “vicious” also draws attention to the specific moral features of what is being described. The first statement, by leaving moral valuation out, is thus more purely emotive.

Jeffrey and Peterson are right, however, when they say that the phrase “vicious attack” will more greatly influence the listener’s emotional responses. But they perpetuate a dangerous misunderstanding through their failure to explain why this is the case. The student who takes seriously their claim that these two

13Jeffrey and Peterson, 386.
14Ibid.
statements communicate the same thought can only conclude that the difference between them is merely one of emotional intensity. And if students draw this conclusion, they must also decide that the value that the second of these two statements expresses is reducible to this emotional difference. They will conclude that all forms of evaluation merely signify variations in emotional arousal.

Whether or not Jeffrey and Peterson realize it, their treatment of language theory surreptitiously passes along to its readers a prejudice against ethical objectivism. In the guise of a simple lesson on the emotional complexity of language, their textbook reinforces the popular subjectivist assumptions about value that already pervade modern cultures.

The Pro-Active Approach: Teaching Moral Objectivism

Our purpose in showing how lessons in communication theory may contribute to the debunking of values is to make our readers more cautious about what they teach lest they become unwitting mediators of ethical subjectivism. But we also believe that the teacher has an obligation to offer students a positive answer to subjectivism, that is, to make them aware of the problems associated with this position and of the alternatives provided by ethical objectivism or moral realism.

Definitions

We should begin by further defining some of our terms. First, if value subjectivism is said to lead to ethical subjectivism, value statements must be related to moral statements in some way. To clarify this relationship, we can define value statements as expressing claims about the goodness, utility, or merit of a thing or act and moral statements as expressing claims about what ought to be or be done (according to an unconditionally binding command or standard). Thus the two kinds of statement are related in that to assume that something ought to exist or be done is to assume that it is good or valuable, and, conversely, to assume that something is good or valuable is to assume that it ought to exist or be done. And so to debunk the objectivity of values has the effect of debunking the objectivity of ethics or morality as well.

\textsuperscript{15}The parenthetical clause is necessary here because moral claims always have a certain unconditional sense. For example, if we say “skydiving is a good activity for thrill seekers” or “you ought to read this book if you like mysteries,” we do not make moral statements because the goods in question are conditional upon non-obligatory or amoral ends. Their worth depends on one’s having certain tastes or proclivities (like thrill seeking or the love of mysteries) that presumably one is not morally bound to have. Conversely, then, if we say “it is good to love one’s neighbor” or “one should be courageous,” we do make moral statements because we reference unconditional goods or obligations. Thus we do not say “love is good if you happen to like that sort of thing” or “courage is good if you are a particular kind of person” because we assume that both love and courage are goods that all people in all kinds of conditions are obliged to seek. Again, then, the specifically moral claim is unconditional.
Second, we should also further define the ethical objectivist and subjectivist, or moral realist and non-realist, alternatives at issue here. Following Keith Ward, we can say that ethical subjectivism finds “the ultimate basis of morality in man’s psychological constitution, in his basic desires or emotions or dispositions,” while ethical objectivism maintains that “what makes the statement ‘X is good’ correct is not something about men’s feelings for X but something about X itself, or at least something independent of any human mind.” Thus while the subjectivist equates the statement “X is good” with “I like (or approve of, or desire) X,” the objectivist insists that this statement is capable “of being true or false, and what determines its truth or falsity is not any fact about any human mind.”  

If the determinant of moral truth is not a fact about human minds, then what, we might well ask, is it a fact about? Or what kind of reality will show us whether the statement, “X is good,” is true or false? Of course, there is no one realist answer to this question. Some will say that X is good if it accords with the ultimate end or telos of human nature, others that X is good if it is willed by God, still others that X is good if it coheres with a particular moral code or law (and of course there are various realist combinations of these and other answers as well). But while these differences may be of concern to the theologian or philosopher, they need not concern us in our effort to present a basic realist theory of moral language. For what these views share is what is most definitive of moral realism: the belief that X is good insofar as it coincides with an objective moral reality, whether that reality is a divine plan, a natural end, a moral code, or some other moral fact. Thus the crucial realist assumption is that X is good not because one feels or thinks it so, but because it is good or because there is a factual standard of goodness against which to gauge feelings or opinions.

Arguments

While a full-blown philosophical argument for ethical objectivism would be too involved for the basic language arts course, a manageable argument can be made via some fairly simple observations about moral speech. In short, we can argue, first, that moral speech assumes ethical objectivism rather than ethical subjectivism—that is, that we ordinarily use moral terms as if we were referring to an objective, nonempirical reality rather than to a subjective, empirical (emotional or physiological) one—and second, that there is good reason to maintain this usage. The primary claim here is that we use moral terms as if they referred to a nonempirical, objective reality rather than to an empirical, subjective reality. The first part of this claim—that moral terms have a nonempirical rather than empirical referent—holds in three senses. First, the moral referent, or what is sometimes referred to as the “moral ought,” is used to indicate an ideal or possible state of

affairs rather than an actual or material state of affairs. Thus it is nonempirical in that it tells us how things ought to be, rather than how they are. Or conversely, empirical descriptions about how things are do not prescribe or tell us how things should be.

Second, the moral referent is nonempirical in that its claims always assume a kind of unconditionality or point to an obligation that exists independently of any particular empirical conditions. This relates to the first point in that the moral ought refers to what must be done regardless of what is done or indicates what we should do regardless of what we might like to do, which is to say, it is not contingent on our given practices, desires, or ideas. Thus we do not say things like “you ought to be unselfish if it suits you,” or “you ought to love your children if you are a Western white male”; for if unselfishness and love are considered morally obligatory, they are considered obligatory for all persons in all times and places. Though this is not to say that particular expressions of, and culpability for, these obligations may not vary with empirical circumstances, but only that we do not think of moral obligations themselves as variable or that we refer to them as if they held unconditionally.

Finally, the moral ought has a nonempirical sense in that its use assumes we can act on moral principle or for moral reasons as opposed to being empirically determined. That is, the ability both to choose one’s actions and to act on principle is integral to the meaning of moral action. Regarding the ability to choose, first, we can simply say, with Kant, that ought implies can. That is, when we say that someone ought to do something, we imply that he or she can do so since it would be absurd to demand actions from beings who had no control over their actions or to give moral commands to creatures determined by forces outside of their control. Regarding the ability to act on principle, second, we ascribe morality only to actions done out of a conviction about what is right—or for moral reasons—not to actions done under the force of selfish or unconscious desire or compulsion. For example, if a politician champions the cause of agricultural subsidies because he thinks we ought to preserve small farms, we may assume that his action is moral; but we will not think so if we know that he has acted so only in the interests of getting financial support from the farming community or because he is enamored with a farmer’s daughter. Again, then, we ascribe morality only to actions done on principle or for moral reasons. Thus the moral referent is nonempirical because it

17In Ward’s more specific terms, ought is “primitive in the logical sense that it cannot be translated without change of meaning or defined in terms of any other concepts; and is non-exponible in that it cannot be eliminated without change of meaning.” Ethics and Christianity, 60.

18Keith Ward writes: “the commitment to a certain principle as morally right does not seem . . . a matter of open alternatives; on the contrary the moral agent is unable to conceive that an incompatible principle could be right, and accepted as such by him. The foundation of the claim to necessity is in the agent’s refusal to envisage other possibilities as real possibilities, not only for him but for any man. Thus he refuses to found morality on any contingent fact.” See Ethics and Christianity, 50.
cannot be determined by any empirical laws, wants, or compulsions—or not, that is, without losing its moral sense.

Beyond arguing that moral speech refers to a nonempirical reality, the ethical objectivist also maintains that this referent is objective rather than subjective. One aspect of this argument was suggested earlier in discussing Lewis’ critique of emotivism; that is, that our evaluations lose their grammatical sense when value terms are stripped of their objective status, as when they are taken to refer solely to emotions. Thus the emotivist must read the statement, “the wanton destruction of the environment is contemptible,” to mean “I have contemptible feelings,” while any ordinary reading of this statement will take it to indicate not only that the speaker feels contempt but also that this feeling fits its object (the wanton destruction of the environment). In other words, the emotivist cannot make sense of the fact that expressions of approval and disapproval are considered appropriate or inappropriate relative to the idea of an objective order or that the grammatical meaning of evaluative terms requires the assumption of objective value. As Lewis puts it, “just as to say that a shoe fits is to speak not only of shoes but of feet,” so to speak of emotion as if it speaks not only of the emotion but of a reality beyond the emotion.19

Another way to get at this notion of objectivity is to notice that moral speech commonly assumes the possibility of moral error. Earlier we noted that actions will not be considered moral unless they are done for moral reasons. Here we add that having moral reasons for one’s actions is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for moral ascription. That is, actions may be done for moral reasons and still be considered immoral. For example, most of us would say that a murderer’s actions were wrong even if he felt that they were morally justified. And, in fact, most of us have had the personal experience of looking back on some action and concluding that it was wrong despite the fact that, at the time, we thought it right. In other words, we commonly distinguish between feelings or opinions about the rightness of an action and the objective rightness of an action. Or in considering whether an action was morally justified, we consider whether the actor’s reasons were true or false and ascribe morality only to those done for true moral reasons. Thus, we at least implicitly acknowledge the existence of some objective way of judging the truth or falsity of moral reasons or appeal to the idea that there is a standard of moral rightness independent of our convictions.

Now this claim about an independent moral standard is sometimes wrongly taken to mean that moral truth comes to us independently of—or in another way than through—the usual human media: language, cultural practice, and so on. Thus moral objectivism appears to make the absurd claim that we grasp concepts without using any forms of conceptualization. But what is in fact meant by independence here is simply that, like empirical truth, moral truth is not something the mind creates for its own purposes, but something that the mind discovers—some-

19Lewis, 31-32.
thing to which it and its purposes must be conformed. In other words, moral truth is not a product of our desires or opinions, but something that stands outside of and impinges on these desires and opinions. Thus it holds independently of our particular conditions, which is to repeat the earlier observation that its claims are unconditionally binding.

The latter clarification aside, the idea of a nonempirical, objective truth still presents certain difficulties—especially for students who have been taught, in the tradition of Ogden and Richards, that meaning requires material reference or that objectivity needs a verifying physical object. Since there is obviously no such material referent or object to ground moral claims, what meaning can we give to moral objectivity? Or how do we know this kind of nonempirical truth?

In answer, the moral objectivist can only say that this kind of truth is self-evident or is directly intuited as an objective demand, for any attempt to explain the moral *ought* in empirical terms, as an *is*, will destroy it or turn it into something amoral. Thus, if there is to be any sense of moral obligation at all, we must recognize something that is self-evidently obligatory. As Lewis observes:

We 'just see' that there is no reason why my neighbour’s happiness should be sacrificed to my own, as we 'just see' that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another. If we cannot prove either axiom, that is not because they are irrational but because they are self-evident and all proofs depend upon them. Their intrinsic reasonableness shines by its own light.

The point here is that some forms of knowledge—moral and empirical—are not capable of being grasped or described in the usual ways because they are the forms by which we grasp or describe other things—the grounds for knowledge in general. Thus because these forms are unique and basic to thought, they are not susceptible to the usual material analogies or proofs, or being unlike other things, they are not grasped by being likened to other things.

Moreover, the suggestion here is that this kind of self-evident claim is necessary to empirical, as well as moral, reasoning. For example, in reasoning about empirical matters, we assume or “just see” that a thing cannot *be and not be* at the same time (that is, we assume the principle of contradiction), and that inference produces valid conclusions. Neither principle can be proven in that, first, each claims a necessity and universality that can never be demonstrated in empirical experience (as the latter is always contingent and particular and, as such, cannot demonstrate that which is true in all times and places), and second, any attempt to prove the validity of inference or the principle of contradiction would itself assume both principles and, as such, would be circular and invalid.

20The phrase “self-evident truth” is often used to refer to beliefs that are considered more or less indubitable for a particular culture or age. This is how Thomas Jefferson uses the concept in the Declaration of Independence when he declares that all human beings are created equal. However, Jefferson’s belief is not self-evident in the sense that we mean here, but is derived from the religious doctrine of Creation *imago dei*.

Thus, there is nothing really extraordinary about the moral claim of self-evidence or the idea of a nonempirical objectivity—nothing more extraordinary, at least, than that which is assumed in our everyday empirical reasoning. In both cases, reflection on the nature of empirical and moral thought demonstrates that we must presuppose the validity of certain truths. And so since all reasoning requires nonempirical or self-evident truth claims, ethical subjectivism runs into two problems: first, it cannot distinguish moral claims on the grounds that they lack external material reference since empirical claims do the same (insofar as they rest on self-evident logical principles); and second, it cannot declare nonempirical truths meaningless since, in being equally reliant on such truths, its own claims would then be rendered meaningless, too.

Thus far, we have supported ethical objectivism over ethical subjectivism by showing that moral terms ordinarily refer to a nonempirical, objective reality rather than to an empirical, subjective reality. But the question remains: does this matter? That is, even if the subjectivist allows that ordinary moral speech requires an objective perspective, cannot he or she simply reject ordinary moral speech?

There are at least two good reasons for not doing so. First, it is almost impossible to reject consistently ordinary, objectivist moral speech. After all, doing so means never again using terms of moral praise or blame, speaking of moral goods or virtues, arguing against social injustices, or engaging in any common normative forms of communication. And while it is conceivable that some might manage to maintain this pose in their philosophical writings, it is hardly conceivable that they can do so in their everyday lives—that they can raise children, develop friendships, have healthy relationships with neighbors and co-workers, and so on, without recourse to ordinary, objective moral concepts.

Thus, ethical subjectivists must either ignore their moral theory in real life or accept a fundamentally amoral existence. And since (fortunately) very few can carry off the latter, most simply live with the inconsistency. As Lewis observed, “A moment after they have admitted that good and evil are illusions, you will find them exhorting us to work for posterity, to educate, revolutionize, liquidate, live and die for the good of the human race.”

Another primary problem with eschewing ordinary, objectivist moral speech is that this speech is a crucial element of healthy civil society and democracy. The point here is that these desirable conditions can only be maintained if most citizens will at least sometimes put the common good or certain notions of justice before their own interests, and most citizens will only do this if they believe that there is an objective moral good or principle at stake. To be more specific, civil societies and democracies require, among other things, citizens who will generally respect the moral freedoms of others even when it is in their interest to be coercive, who will typically obey laws even when they can get away with disobedience, who will accept democratic decisions on principle even when they disagree with or are dis-

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advantaged by them, who will generally uphold the rights of the disempowered even when they are among the powerful, who will be willing even to risk their lives or the lives of loved ones for the sake of protecting the nation as a whole. And if people are going to be willing to do these things—that is, if they are going to be willing to sacrifice their interests for the sake of society, democracy or justice—they must believe in something that stands above their interests. They must hold to an objective moral truth and, as a society, we must be able to make a case for democracy or justice in terms of these truths. As Jacques Maritain put it, “Genuine democracy works against the grain of nature and therefore requires some heroic inspiration.”

Conclusion

Our purpose in these brief explorations has been to examine and to some extent to remedy a predicament faced by instructors who embrace a Christian understanding of ethics. Although we presume that this predicament arises elsewhere as well, we have located one area of study in the language arts where philosophical assumptions deeply contrary to the ethical realism of the Judeo-Christian tradition have been influential. In doing so, our aim has been first, to recognize the ethical implications of what is often taught under the guise of instruction in the nature of meaning and second, to redress this situation by examining some strategies with which an alternative philosophy of ethics can be introduced into a language arts curriculum.

These explorations have endeavored to affirm the same concern that C. S. Lewis drew attention to in The Abolition of Man, that teachers have an obligation to be attuned to the fact that there are philosophical underpinnings to every academic subject. Nothing that we do in the classroom is philosophically neutral. It is easy to lose sight of this in a university culture so devoted to the compartmentalization of academic subjects and which accustoms us to an illusory belief in the autonomy of academic fields. While the separation of fields provides the academic world with a functional division of labor, it does not so well serve the goals of education. It may cause instructors to ignore the philosophical (and thereby the religious or antireligious) undercurrents of what they teach and thus to deprive students of a critical self-awareness that was once a central concern of higher education.

While the concerns outlined here have particular interest to instructors in the language arts who embrace traditional religious creeds, what we are advocating does not require teachers to relinquish our culture’s established tradition of separation between church and state. We are only advocating that teachers take responsibility for the full range of implications that come with what they teach. This concern should be of interest to instructors no matter their religious belief or unbelief. It represents a policy of fair play that should guide all of higher education.
By Clarence Walhout

Introduction

Christian thinkers often find themselves on the defensive in contemporary American intellectual life, especially when they speak about matters of general public concern. The reasons why there is scepticism and sometimes hostility to Christian expressions of social critique are not difficult to understand. However, throughout its history Christianity has exhibited an intellectual as well as spiritual flexibility that has enabled it, without losing its own traditions and perspectives, to respond to changes that take place in social life and in philosophical theory. This flexibility has not been lost, but perhaps it needs to be exercised more energetically in this postmodern era. In my own area of study, literary theory and criticism, some energizing influences spring from Jurgen Habermas and Paul Ricoeur. Their ideas are of particular interest as they pertain to the role of literature and religion in American public life.

The Public Sphere

The image of America as a melting pot goes back at least as far as J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur’s Letters from an American Farmer (1782). In recent years, the concept of total assimilation that it represents has taken some harsh criticism from those who prefer the image of the salad bowl (or the mosaic). The salad bowl im-
age suggests a mixture in which each ingredient maintains its distinct taste and yet contributes to the integrated flavor of the dish as a whole. The buzz word for this approach to American culture is multiculturalism. While the notion of multiculturalism protects the distinctive features of each ethnic community that makes up American society, it tends also to prize differences among subaltern communities and thus unintentionally to foster discord or isolationism. Currently, a third model for interpreting American society seems to be emerging. No metaphor has yet captured the heart of this approach, but the idea is suggested by the terms public life or public sphere.

The term public sphere attempts to incorporate the values of the earlier two models while moving beyond them. The problem with the assimilation (or melting pot) model is that individual and ethnic differences are eroded in favor of a homogenized national identity, and the problem with the multicultural (or salad bowl) model is that individual and ethnic differences can lead to rivalry and antagonism among groups. Recent discussions of the nature of public life suggest new ways of conceptualizing the relation between individual, ethnic, and national identities and of exploring the practical consequences of such conceptions. These discussions of the public sphere build on or respond to the theories of Jurgen Habermas, whose early book entitled The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere appeared in English translation in 1989.

Three themes in particular stand out in the growing body of literature on the subject: first, an emphasis on social and cultural institutions and practices rather than on purely theoretical or ideal models of social life; second, an effort to understand the nature of personal and social identity; and third, a conception of the nature of understanding and truth. Taken together, these themes suggest the need for an interactive model of social and moral behavior. I want now to comment briefly on these three ideas.

**Practices**

The turn to practices rather than to idealized models is symptomatic of a general shift away from Enlightenment patterns of thought. Crevecoeur’s picture of America as “the most perfect society now existing in the world” is based on enlightenment ideals of equality, freedom, justice, individualism, property rights, and common sense. “Men are like plants,” Crevecoeur writes. American colonists adapt naturally to the new-world environment and develop traits that ensure the unity of the new society. The ragged surfaces of civilized life caused by European disruptions are being worn smooth in the broad streams of a new civilization: superfluous qualities (such as religion) are being washed away, and qualities that are necessary and useful for the common life are being preserved.

Crevecoeur’s model obviously misrepresents the realities of actual life, as does any idealized conception of society, whether the idealization be based on an enlightenment model or on Christian or Marxist models. Every idealization, as Linell
E. Cady remarks in *Religion, Theology, and American Public Life* (1993), selects one tradition of thought or one “originating, constituting text” as its privileged starting point. In contrast to such idealizations stands the work of many recent thinkers who emphasize the priority of historical and cultural studies. We could mention here Gadamer’s analysis of historical prejudices and the need for a “fusion of horizons,” Ricoeur’s notion of distantiation and the power of texts to open new worlds, Derrida’s analysis of the inaccessibility of origins and the open-endedness of history, Habermas’s theory of the nature of communicative action in a postmetaphysical society, and Walter Ong’s view of the evolution of consciousness and the historical nature of understanding. As Alasdair MacIntyre argues, the history of societies and cultures is not an evolution out of a common source of human identity or a progressive movement toward a Hegelian ideal; it is, rather, the interweaving and constant expansion of social practices that historically form and reform the patterns of cultural life.

**Identity**

The conception of the self that undergirds the melting pot model is that a universal human nature is the common property of all people and that particular national and ethnic differences are accidental and replicable. On the other hand, the salad bowl model holds to the view that identity is formed by cultural and environmental factors that cannot be erased. In both cases there is an assumption that identity is a constant in human beings and that this identity forms one of the bases for social theory. The essentialism of these viewpoints is questioned by recent philosophers who prefer a narrative conception of the self that emphasizes change, growth, and historical formation of the self. Linell Cady sums up this historicized conception of the self as follows:

Rather than possessing an enduring essence or identity, the self is a dynamic process of creation and re-creation. . . . The self is constituted by a narrative that provides a structure and meaning to the otherwise disparate moments and events of its life. Becoming a self, then, is an ongoing project that entails the interpretation of one’s past and future, thereby producing the coherence and identity that distinguish the self from the biological organism. (75)

This dynamic conception of identity suggests a model also for understanding ethnic and national identities. Such identities can evolve and develop through interactive discourse in the public sphere and need not be conceived as demanding either the assimilation of the melting pot model or the separatism of the salad bowl model.

**Truth**

The enlightenment conception of truth as the necessary propositions of self-reflexive reason is seen by most current thinkers as an inadequate model for un-
understanding the source and nature of truth. Antifoundationalism, meaning rejection of the Cartesian project of establishing the foundations for truth in reason alone, has become an accepted principle among philosophers of all stripes. Thinkers have come to this conclusion from many lines of thought. Walter Ong, to give one example, argues that rationalist assumptions about knowledge and truth are themselves products of the historical evolution of consciousness and of the development of noetic traditions. Again we may allow Cady to sum up:

Discounting the myth of an ahistorical, universally shared human reason, philosophers have increasingly stressed that reason is inextricably rooted in a specific historical and cultural matrix. Reflection takes place in and through a linguistic medium that reflects the assumptions, values, and interests of a particular place and time. (35)

What this brief overview suggests is that questions of truth, identity, and culture cannot be understood in the light of rationally idealized models of human nature and human understanding but need to be examined in the light of social practices that arise from cultural experiences and respond to changes in cultural life. Questions about universal or common human qualities are to be judged in the light of cultural and historical studies as well as in the light of the logical conditions for rational understanding. In such a view, social life is formed in what we may call an interactive model, a model in which social practices established by traditions of thought and behavior are constantly being modified by the experiences of individuals and groups who, though formed by those traditions, are also exploring new forms of living.

The key concept here is tradition. Traditions shape the issues that come to the fore in the public sphere. Where there are no traditions that claim and compel the thought and behavior of people, there can be no public sphere; and where there is a public sphere, there will always be a questioning of traditions. In ethnically diverse societies, there will often be a clash of traditions. But the questioning or clashing of traditions is not entirely destructive; the rivalries and critiques that create tension and struggle in public life serve to establish the integrative forms and values of a society as well as to undermine what is no longer functional. Paul Ricoeur remarks on this phenomenon in his Lectures on Ideology and Utopia; he is speaking of class struggle, but the point can be made about ethnic and ideological struggle as well:

Class conflicts are therefore never exactly situations of total war. Realization of the integrative character of ideology helps to preserve the appropriate level of class struggle, which is not to destroy the adversary but to achieve recognition. . . . The underlying integrative function of ideology prevents us from pushing the polemical element to its destructive point—the point of civil war. What prevents us from making a plea for civil war is that we have to preserve the life of our adversary; an element of belonging together persists. Even the class enemy is not a radical enemy. In some sense he or she is still a neighbor. (263)

In the light of this model of public life, it is clear that neither assimilation nor multiculturalism is adequate. The ideal of both the melting pot and the salad bowl
models is a well-ordered society in which conflicts cease, either through resolution of differences in a homogeneous society or through peaceful coexistence in a heterogeneous society. But these idealized goals do not account for the processes of actual social change. Differences do not simply fall away, nor do separate cultural entities exist endlessly side by side. In dealing with the inevitable conflicts that occur in a multicultural society, these two models are guided by their respective goals. But since these goals are irreconcilable, public debate is left with partisan confrontation rather than true dialogue, with face-offs rather than genuine resolutions.

The third model of public life is posited on the view that the processes of cultural life can be advanced by rational debate and that as a consequence of genuine interaction changes can be affected in the conflicting parties without destroying their traditions and identities. Public life will always be characterized by conflict and mutual critique among the constituent cultural groups, but if there is a genuine public sphere, the various groups that make up a society will exhibit a willingness to change in response to the interests and ideas of others. Instead of shucking off their traditional identities or of clinging stubbornly to the past, the various groups will influence and change one another through public interaction. Through such interaction, traditions can be renewed and developed rather than be either abandoned or stultified. This model of the public sphere does not envision a utopian resolution of conflict; rather, it believes that conflict and interaction are what drive human beings to strive for a better life. Since a society with a healthy public sphere doesn’t assume that an idealized or utopian goal can ever be achieved, it focuses its public debates and actions on the immediate issues and needs of the society. It acts in the light of the diverse traditions and the historical circumstances that form a particular society instead of envisioning an ideal to which all societies should conform. A healthy public sphere, in this third model, is one in which conflicts generate new possibilities for better living in society, not one in which all conflict ceases.

In a society based on the interactive model, the aim of social life is not total assimilation, for distinctive individual and ethnic identities are necessary elements in the process of growth and change. Nor is the aim the simple preservation of multiculturalism, for ethnic traditions are moribund if they cannot change through interaction with other traditions. In an ethnically diverse society, the stimulus for change comes through the conflict of cultures. If there is a genuine public sphere, such conflicts can be wholesome and productive and not antagonistic and confrontational. In an interactive society each individual and each ethnic group can both contribute to and be changed by the cultural life of the others. The goal is mutual stimulation and growth.

Christianity

How does Christianity fit into this picture? Since Christianity is made up of
many subgroups and subcultures, it is risky to generalize about Christians as a whole. It is fair, however, to suggest that many Christians fluctuate between an assimilation model and a multicultural model, and that the Christians who do so tend to be suspicious of the public sphere model.

For many Christians the assimilation or melting pot model is attractive if it is given a special twist: assimilation is fine as long as it takes place on Christian terms. That is to say, it would be wonderful if all others would assimilate into the Christian tradition and establish a unified Christian society: “What the world needs is Christianity.” In this view, however, Christianity does not need the world. For many Christians “Assimilation” is the name of a one-way street coming into the community; the only road going out is called “Missionary Boulevard.”

Assimilation on this model is at best an unrealistic ideal, and thus for practical reasons many Christians adopt a multicultural model. That is, if Christianity cannot assimilate the world, it must at least preserve its own communal integrity; it must preserve its identity amidst the multiplicity of non-Christian communities, and that calls for separation. Separatism has a long history in Christian thought, whether in the forms of escapism or coexistence, and can be adapted readily to the multicultural model of society.

Both of these views are self-destructive. In our postmodern cultural environment Christianity needs to explore the public sphere model. The postmodern environment reflected in the work of the figures I cited earlier suggests not only that monological forms of discourse are of decreasing significance in the modern world but also that in theory at least all doors leading into the public arena have been opened. If in practice the door leading from Christianity into the public sphere often seems to be slammed shut, it is nevertheless unlocked and needs only the persistent desire of those within to turn the knob and to step insistently into the public arena. The only prerequisite for participation in the discussion of public issues is that all participants be willing to follow the norms for constructive dialogue, and these are norms that Christians can readily adhere to.

But I do not want here to argue the case for Christian participation in the public sphere. Rather, I will turn to a specific sphere of discourse—literary criticism—to explore how this conception of the public sphere may provide a model for interactive dialogue between Christian and non-Christian communities. If literature expresses thoughts and feelings that are pertinent to the public life of society, then a critic’s engagement with literature can be one of the forms of public discourse. And if the critic happens to be a Christian, his or her Christian criticism can properly become discourse in the public sphere as long as the critic is willing to learn from others as well as to offer his or her own critiques. Because of well-established conceptions of truth and Christianity, it has been difficult for Christians both in theory and in practice to be genuinely interactive in this way.
It is common for Christian critics to say that Christianity has much to contribute to the proper understanding of literature. It is less common for them to say that literature has much to contribute to the proper understanding of Christianity. If Christians are to do criticism in the public sphere, however, both directions of influence need to be examined. In fact, it may be better to begin with the observation that literature contributes to the understanding of Christian thought than with the observation that Christian thought contributes to the understanding of literature.

If we ask how literature can influence and enhance Christian thought, we implicitly acknowledge that Christian beliefs can be developed and modified in response to cultural influences. Christians do, of course, hold that Christian dogmas are in some way constant and enduring. But it is also true that Christian beliefs are enmeshed in cultural history and reflect the colors of changing cultural situations. Christian thinking thrives best when it interacts creatively with other forms of thought and cultural experience. Since literature is one way in which the great variety of cultural forms, values, attitudes, and beliefs are expressed, Christianity can find in literature a vital source for its own development and enrichment. Thus, let us ask how literature can influence and enrich the ways Christians think about their beliefs.

First, literature can contribute to the understanding of theological and moral beliefs. If we take a set of writers who have strong moral themes—such as (in America) Jonathan Edwards, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Stephen Crane, Saul Bellow, and John Updike—the one who is closest to traditional Christian theology, and the one whose declared aim is to interpret Christian beliefs, is Jonathan Edwards. Yet there is nothing in Christian theory that requires acceptance of Edwards’ picture of evil and redemption as an authoritative statement of Christian belief or acceptance of his works as more valuable for Christian readers than the works of the other four writers. Edwards’ view is an interpretation of Christian belief, not an authoritative statement of it. And although the other four writers may not offer interpretations of Christian theology, they may enhance our theological understanding and sensitivity as much as or even more than Edwards does. Edwards’ picture of God’s wrath and vindictiveness in “Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God,” for example, may be less compelling for Christian readers than the pictures of violence and degradation in the stories of Crane and Bellow or the forms of social and moral consciousness in Hawthorne and Updike.

Reading the stories of Hawthorne, Crane, Bellow, Updike, and others affects our emotions and judgments and thereby enables us to reflect on the implications of our beliefs. As a result of their reading, some Christians may focus ethical attention more strongly on social issues than on matters of personal faith, or see more value in social action than in hortatory condemnation of immorality, or develop more concern for the underprivileged in society. Other Christians may have opposite reactions, of course, and become judgmental and censorious. But however lit-
Literature affects us as readers, it helps us interpret our personal beliefs about life. Even literature that is antagonistic to Christian belief may dramatize aspects of experience that influence Christian belief and help it to develop its own latent potential.

A second observation has to do with aesthetic enjoyment. In spite of the impression sometimes given by formalist schools of criticism, aesthetic pleasure has never been divorced from a reader’s beliefs about life. What we enjoy and how we enjoy it are closely tied in with our personal beliefs about what we take to be worthwhile. The task of criticism is not to justify the pleasure of literature on aesthetic grounds alone but to explore how the aesthetic pleasure of literature is related to the varieties of personal belief that readers bring to literature. How is it that people with such a diversity of beliefs can all find enjoyment in the same works of literature? The answer is not that the enjoyment is a purely aesthetic experience and that aesthetic enjoyment is detached from or transcends personal beliefs. Rather, the answer must be found in how beliefs function in relation to aesthetic enjoyment.

Without giving this topic the philosophical analysis it deserves, I will make only the simple observation that when people with differing beliefs speak to others about their beliefs, they understand the others’ views without abandoning their own. And if the speakers are well disposed toward one another, they not only profit intellectually from their conversations but also find keen enjoyment in them. It is a truth of experience that we can hold in our minds ideas and whole systems of belief which we do not agree with or commit ourselves to and that our own ideas and beliefs are modified and enriched by the encounter with other ideas and beliefs. It is also our common experience that some of the keenest enjoyment we are capable of comes from such experiences.

Such is also the case with the reading of stories. We can enter imaginatively the fictional worlds of literature without confusing those worlds with the actual world and without confusing them with one another. The aesthetic enjoyment of such experiences includes not just an enjoyment of the form of the narratives but the enjoyment of imaginatively encountering other ways of seeing and interpreting life. Our personal beliefs are expanded and enriched by these experiences; we are exhilarated by the growth that such interaction makes possible. Understood in this way, aesthetic enjoyment does not entail the sharing of the beliefs that are encountered in literature but comes from the dialogic engagement with those beliefs. And understood in this way, the Christian reader can experience the aesthetic delight of literary works as intensely and broadly as any other reader, whether the works express a Christian view of life or not.

A third observation has to do with historical understanding. The beliefs about or the interpretations of experience that are expressed through or by means of narratives are never final or authoritative; they are always interpretations made from a certain viewpoint that is influenced and limited by cultural horizons. Jonathan Edwards’ Christian views were in many respects an expression of what he saw as important in the light of Lockean epistemology. Stephen Crane’s stories
were influenced by intellectual and social currents in post-Darwinian America. Yet, readers of our day, Christian readers included, may find valuable the views of both, valuable not only for the sake of historical understanding of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but also for the understanding of our own culture, since our culture has absorbed these influences.

These three observations are suggestive rather than fully argued. My aim is only to urge that if Christian readers and critics are to receive the enrichment of literary study, they must be open to the influences that literature can have on their own beliefs, to the aesthetic enjoyment that comes from non-Christian works, and to the role that literature can play in the development of a historical understanding of their own beliefs. They need also to explore the appropriate ways in which this openness can be creative and nurturing. Only if the enriching potential of literature is accepted and realized will we be ready for our second question: What can Christian beliefs contribute to literary criticism?

Before addressing this second question, we need to reflect on its nature and scope. First, it is a version of the question every theory or method of criticism faces. For the word Christian we could substitute Marxist, or Freudian, or archetypal, or structuralist, or new historicist, and the like. These schools or methods do not ordinarily employ the term beliefs, but since beliefs function in theorizing as assumptions that are logically prior to the systematic development of a theory, all theories of criticism rest on beliefs (assumptions) that stand outside the theory proper, or, to put it more accurately, are incorporated into the theory. All theories, in other words, hold or imply certain beliefs (Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* 59-66). The scope of the beliefs may vary in comprehensiveness, and, of course, theories need not involve religious beliefs, but every theory uses beliefs of some kind to define the parameters of the theory and to guide its development.

Second, no theory that is relevant to the analysis of a given body of data is derived entirely from its set of beliefs or assumptions. All such theories are constructed through an empirical process in which theoretical principles (beliefs, assumptions) are tested by their applicability to the relevant data. Christian literary theory does not grow from a set of Christian beliefs as an oak tree grows from an acorn. Like any other theory, it must be tested by its applicability, that is, by what illumination or methodological guidance it can give to the practice of literary criticism.

Third, the beliefs or assumptions that guide theoretical reflection do not stand free from the history of the practices to which they pertain. Theories and practices form traditions of thought and analysis, and new or modified theories enter this stream of tradition, offering some fresh insight on long-established practices. The practices of literary criticism have been shaped by many cultural and philosophical influences over centuries of theorizing, and no theory can or need displace the tradition and reconstruct literary criticism ex nihilo. Theories can and need only be constructed or revised in the light of historical changes or advances in the pertinent aspects of our cultural experience.
Contemporary debates among competing schools of criticism in the last three decades have obscured the common ground of tradition on which various theories do battle. The differences among contemporary theories are important, but their importance will ultimately be judged in the light of how constructively they illumine or redirect the tradition, not simply on their theoretical parrying with one another. Theories do not win approval simply by establishing deductive authority over one another; they earn their credibility by increasing our ability to understand the historically shaped enterprise of reading and studying literature. Criticism and critical theory are, in other words, historical practices, and any new or revised theory gains significance according to its ability to alter or shed light on the history of criticism.

Seen in the light of these observations, Christian criticism should not aim to be independent of the history of criticism, to achieve the autonomy of a purely deductive system, or to establish a method exclusively its own. The question we posed is not “how can Christian beliefs lead to a theory which is distinct from every other theory?” but, rather, “how can Christian beliefs, especially in the context of contemporary theorizing, contribute to the current discussion of literary criticism?” Much of what Christian critics do will be identical with or similar to what all critics do, regardless of their theoretical assumptions, and much will be closer to some critics than others. In some ways, on the other hand, Christian beliefs may lead to critical methods and emphases that will not be shared by critics holding other beliefs.

I want now to suggest five ways in which I think Christian beliefs may contribute to the practice of literary criticism.

1. Christian theory assumes that religion is a natural and essential element in human experience and that literature expresses or implies attitudes towards this aspect of experience, either by affirming or denying or ignoring its importance. Included in religion are beliefs about God and beliefs about the ultimate purpose and meaning of life. Perhaps not all people are religious in the sense of holding to a particular set of religious beliefs, but then the lack of such beliefs will be important in the forming of their views about the nonreligious dimensions of life. One’s attitude toward religion, positive or negative, is important in the development of one’s thinking and living.

Given this assumption, Christian literary criticism will take seriously the religious dimension of literature and/or literary understanding. Even though not all literature is religious, all literature has meaning in relationship to the cultural situations of authors and readers, and religious beliefs and values are always a part of those cultural situations. Sensitivity to these religious elements in cultural history and literature will characterize Christian critics, though such sensitivity is not, of course, theirs alone. An analogy may be made with Marxist criticism. The fact that Marxist critics are particularly sensitive to the economic and political dimensions of literature and culture does not mean that they are more sensitive than others to these dimensions; it means only that these dimensions of life are crucial to their...
conception of the nature and goals of literary criticism. Religion will have an analo-
gous importance in Christian criticism.

2. Because Christian critics see religion as an important element in human
experience and history, they will naturally view the history of theology and the
history of ecclesiastical practices as important influences on the history of litera-
ture. Complex theological debates and changing patterns in the practice of religion
may reflect significant concerns and developments in the history of cultural life,
and awareness of these debates and practices may be as important for the histori-
cal study and interpretation of literature as awareness of economic or political or
sociological debates and practices. How religious attitudes and values interact with
nonreligious values in the life of a culture or an author will be of special interest to
Christian critics, not because this interest is theirs exclusively or because they see
religion as a deterministic influence on literature but because they see religion as
an element of life and literature that is culturally important and that is often ne-
glected by critics who have different emphases.

Sensitivity to current theology and religious practices is as important as sensi-
tivity to the theology and practices of the past. Literary criticism today is empirical
and self-conscious, responsive both to the cultural contexts out of which literature
arises and to contemporary cultural contexts. Christian criticism, too, is aware of
the variety of ways in theological traditions have developed and continue to exert
influence, and it, therefore, is not and need not be monolithic. On the contrary, it is
strengthened when Christian critics demonstrate historical awareness of the dif-
ferences in thought and practice that exist within the Christian tradition.

3. While ethical criticism is not the exclusive domain of Christian criticism, it
is an aspect of criticism that Christians will regard as important. The reason for this
is that in the Christian religion, faith comes to fruition in a life of responsible ac-
tion. The Christian religion asks the believer to carry out the implications of belief
in a life of discipleship, a life that promotes the well-being of others. Everything
that exists in human culture, including literature, serves this ultimate end and has
only this as its ultimate justification. Christian criticism is concerned, consequently,
not only with the interior ethical principles working within a literary work but
also with the ways in which a literary work influences personal and social life.

This does not mean that Christian criticism is moralistic, dogmatic, or narrow-
minded—terms that have been used to stereotype popular conceptions of Chris-
tian criticism. On the contrary, productive ethical criticism demands a deep and
far-reaching understanding of all aspects of human activity. Every activity has an
ethical dimension, since it is always related to other activities in a larger sphere of
action. Because actions may be physical or intellectual, economic or political, legal
or aesthetic, and the like, ethical judgments about them require understanding of
their physical, intellectual, political, aesthetic, etc. character. To assert the impor-
tance of ethical criticism, thus, is not to deny or undervalue the importance of
aesthetic criticism or other types of criticism. It is, in fact, to stress their importance,
for the strength of ethical criticism depends upon the quality of other types or
dimensions of criticism. Ethical criticism is, in a sense, parasitic; it has no enduring life unless the other kinds of criticism are healthy.

An aspect of ethical criticism that is not often prominent in critical practice but is important for Christian theory is suggested by the term heuristics. Most literary criticism aims to be hermeneutical, that is, to interpret existing literary texts. Heuristics, in contrast to hermeneutics, focuses on the future by raising questions about the potential uses and effects of literature, about how literature and literary criticism can assist us in accomplishing larger goals in human life. Essential to heuristics is a theory of ends, a theory of the ultimate purposes of human activity and the function of artifacts in serving these purposes. Heuristics, in the sense of reflection on the potential social value of literature, is always implicit even in the hermeneutical task, for interpretation of literature is always guided by some assumption about the purpose or end of interpretation. The hermeneutical aspect of literary criticism is never wholly cut off from the critic’s sense of the potential value of criticism.

4. A fourth way in which Christian belief could contribute to literary criticism is in the generation and assessment of research projects. What is worthy of study and what priorities should guide the choice of research projects? Christian belief may function in two ways here. First, Christian views of what is important in human life will guide decisions about what is important in research. For example, Christian belief that religious experience and thought are important in human history will identify that aspect of literature as a significant area of study. Or, to give another example, Christian views of the nature of pleasure will guide studies of the nature of aesthetic pleasure in the reading of literature. Second, Christian beliefs may lead to the study of topics that may be neglected or slighted by other critics, for example, the study of Christian themes or symbols in literature, or the study of Christian writers, or the study of theological traditions which influence culture and literature, or the study of forms of social injustice. These areas of study are not essential to the practice of Christian criticism and may, of course, be studied by any critic, but in given historical situations, Christian critics, guided by their Christian beliefs, may decide that particular issues need attention. Deciding what research projects are appropriate or needed in a given cultural situation is no small matter; such decisions are always closely related to the beliefs people hold about matters outside their specific areas of research.

5. Finally, and briefly, Christian belief provides certain principles for assessing critical theories and methodologies. Every theory is to some extent eclectic. If theories are viable, they will share, to some degree, methods that have proven useful throughout the history of criticism. No theory or methodology is totally self-referential or self-contained; all respond to the state of critical thought at given historical moments. Christian critics, too, make use of methods that have proven valuable for all types of literary criticism. Nevertheless, methodologies ultimately prove useful according to the purposes they serve, and varying conceptions of the purpose or aim of criticism will influence how a method is employed or altered. The
assessment of what is of lasting use and what is of passing moment is always an issue for critical thinking. Such assessments are made both on the basis of the internal logical coherence of theories and on the basis of their compatibility with basic beliefs that critics hold about matters beyond criticism proper. Christian belief is one set of beliefs that can be used for such assessment.

These are suggestions, then, about what Christian belief can contribute to the study of literature. Christianity does not imply that a critical theory can be deduced directly or entirely from its religious beliefs. But it does offer guidelines for assessing developments in the history of criticism and for finding its own place in that history. While Christian criticism will share much with other schools of criticism, its set of beliefs will also provide an emphasis and a coloring that is uniquely its own.

And that is what is required for criticism to enter and participate in the public sphere. In the public sphere we do not achieve or even expect total agreement. We do expect, however, that every theorist and critic will attempt to discover what is of common concern and interest and what is unique to a particular tradition of thought. Any criticism that is either totalizing or parasitic, hegemonic or separatist, domineering or escapist will fail to learn from or contribute to public critical discourse. While Christians have often adopted the extremes of isolationism or dominance, their proper role in the public sphere is to participate as an equal in the discourse of a pluralistic democratic society and in that social discourse to give and to take, to learn and to teach, to grow and to help others to grow. Such participation is not the equivalent of compromise or of submission. It is, in fact, the working out of the internal logic of the Christian model for living in history. The assimilation of the melting pot model sacrifices the distinctiveness of various traditions; the separation of the multicultural model inhibits growth and fosters confrontation. In the public sphere model, traditions interact, growing themselves and enabling others to grow. Christianity needs this public sphere both for its own welfare and for the benefits it can provide for others.
Learning and Christian Faith: 
Natural Partnerships within a Multiple 
Intelligence Teaching Approach (MITA): Problems and Possibilities 
By Ellen Weber

Introduction

Concern for faith and morals has entered a new era in higher education. According to Richard Hayes, psychology professor at The University of Georgia, moral education has “once again moved to the forefront of public consciousness as it did in its most recent heyday in the early seventies” (1995). As a curriculum developer and professor of education, I am interested in how people can apply faith to make meaning at university. In particular, how can Christians respond to faith challenges that punctuate their everyday lives as they interpret facts, manipulate concepts, solve problems, or evaluate research results? In other words, how can faith partner with learning in higher education?

Without question, faith issues permeate some university students’ thinking outside class. But how do students internalize faith in typical university classes where we teachers do most of the talking? A constructivism learning and teaching approach provides one suitable model for internalizing faith and learning because students actively participate. According to von Glaserfeld (1995), constructivism is the active creation of new knowledge, built upon cornerstones of one’s unique past experiences, prior knowledge, and fundamental beliefs. Prior knowledge for Christians includes knowledge of God and faith in His promises. In constructivist classes students are free to express beliefs and worldviews as these relate to lesson
topics. Through practical applications of their individual worldviews in class, students assume ownership of knowledge, and make decisions based upon their belief structures. But faith activation requires that students be active learners, not mere listeners or note takers.

When students are passive participants in the educational enterprise, or denied articulation of their worldviews, university classes help to erode the message of Jesus Christ, that God speaks through humanity about good and evil. Students are prevented from critiquing critical suppositions of pluralism’s effects and hindered from observing and identifying the subtle flaws of pluralism. Alister McGrath (1994) said that “To ask, What is right? is to ask about the fundamental characteristics of human existence—about what life is all about, and about what is worthwhile” (4). The intellectual arena for critique of pluralism exists within a teaching and learning practice that involves actively both students and teachers.

New Challenges for Learning and Teaching

At odds are sprockets of what it means to learn and teach well, and wheels of what Richard Hayes (1995) calls an over-reliance upon a positivist interpretation of science that has elevated research over practice as a preferred mode of knowledge generation (17). According to Christopher Lucas (1996), positivism with its talk of discrete “outcomes,” “competencies,” and learning “performances” has also acted against liberal arts education (142) or any emphasis on moral development. Goodlad (1990) advocated that models of moral education, including the preparation of teachers, should account for the unique relationships found in current diverse communities, represented in many modern schools. These models should be sensitive to the needs and proclivities within a multicultural environment, and a rapidly changing society. Effective learning and teaching models also reflect current knowledge claims such as self-reflection, a critical part of learning and teaching according to Schon (1987). According to Harro Van Brummelen, great teaching models also reflect biblical injunctions, values and principles that characterize a Christian path to learning and teaching (1995).

For all its criticism, postmodernism, applied to education (Aronowitz and Giroux 1990), articulates an urgent plea for educational reform. The postmodernist movement in education provides a challenge to usher more justice, equality, and freedom into classrooms. The point is made by Aronowitz and Giroux that empowerment for students cannot co-exist within current unjust social hierarchies that are perpetuated within traditional curriculum paradigms. Postmodernism in education for instance, calls for social mobility, democratic action, and the exercise of personal growth, all currently occluded, Aronowitz and Giroux assert, by the existing hegemonic process.

Giroux refers to educational exemplars who recommended freeing students to become active participants in their own education. These include Dewey, Tyler, Gintis, Goodlad, and Carnoy, all who have:
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shared a faith in those modernist ideals that stress the capacity of individuals to think critically, to exercise social responsibility, and to remake the world in the interest of the Enlightenment dream of reason and freedom. (57)

In the same way, modernists have confronted educators with critical imbalances of power and equality. One issue raised by modernists is a collapse of confidence in hierarchical educational structures that places teachers on top and ignore students’ voices. Since Christian scholars recognize that reason alone cannot provide worldview foundations, but wisdom and discernment is required, Christians are positioned well to create learning and teaching models that accommodate faith and morals. Where postmodernists have illuminated tears in old wineskins, Christians contribute new wine. Students can become involved at both levels, identifying flaws in current learning models, and contributing ideas toward new learning and teaching practices.

Rather than simply deliver prepared lectures, Giroux recommends that teachers actively guide students into critical encounters with their culture in search of its hidden structures. Postmodern discourse, while an unfinished one, identifies the specifics of oppression and demonstrates how schools and societies can be changed so that their individual and collective actions can make a difference (194). While it is true that postmodernism rejects the western philosophical traditions that rely on master narratives (68), it is also true that it has uncovered the involvement of power and privilege in oppressing some students within our present educational structures. With increased awareness of pedagogical oppression, oppressions that educational scholars such as Paulo Friere also raised, comes the challenge for specific recommendations for change from within our Christian academic communities. Rather than berate postmodernists for their lack of solutions, Christian academics might instead recommend answers from within Christian worldview precepts.

Constructing Moral Vision Within Learning Communities

Kohlberg, Vygotsky and von Glasserfeld (Weber 1997) suggested that to understand a person’s behavior, we must move beyond studying that individual in isolation and consider individuals within social contexts. In other words, a person’s moral choices impact entire communities. We know for example that violence expressed in the media probably impedes the development of a person’s ethical sensitivity. And what about the subtly of hate speeches, and nonverbal messages of gender or racial intolerance? Moral reasoning about issues such as violence, sexism, or racism involves making judgments about knowledge, formulating a moral ideal, and making decisions about what one ought to do. Moral reasoning can lead not only to moral behavior but also to the development of a Christian worldview.

Educators who daily encounter cultural and gender diversity must search for ways to show respect of different value systems, if we are to engage in a meaningful exchange with those who hold differing moral commitments. Alister McGrath
(1994) distinguishes between intellectual and religious pluralism. Intellectual pluralism, according to McGrath, “finds expression in postmodernism, which asserts that there is no objective truth.” Religious pluralism, on the other hand, asserts “that many religions exist in North America, and proceeds to draw the conclusion that all are equally valid manifestations of the same ultimate truth” (2). According to McGrath, pluralism leads to the assertion that “moral pluralism needs to be tolerated, indeed, even celebrated. To do otherwise would seem to belittle important minority elements in North American culture” (2).

We live in a pluralistic society. But can Christians afford to ignore Christ’s divine ability to transcend intellectual and religious barriers in order to construct moral vision that would glorify His name? Rather than assume that “pluralism discourages us from asking about truth,” Alister McGrath argued (1994), the Christian’s real challenge is to activate and develop more students’ voices on the topic of truth, and then allow God to reveal His truth to all participants. This voice might include Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who said that conservative religious ideologies and institutions tend to legitimate the oppression of women. Stanton was accused by some Christian scholars to be part of “Enlightenment” mentality and secular political tradition. But many Christians agreed with Stanton that “the Bible spoke of... absolute equality of men and women in creation, and more importantly, the religious duty of women to seek out their own salvation, independent of men” (x). Both assertions were radical pronouncements in the late 1800s and remain so today, according to Maureen Fitzgerald, in the foreword to Stanton’s book. At the twenty-eighth annual convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, held in Washington, D.C., in January 1986, the president of the Association said, during a discussion on the legitimacy of “The Woman’s Bible”: “The religious persecution of the ages has been done under what was claimed to be the command of God. I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do to their fellows, because it always coincides with their own desires” (Stanton, 216). But for some, like Stanton, the presence of pluralism, created a forum for critical discussions about equality and oppression.

Commenting on the reality of pluralism in our culture, Lesslie Newbigin, a prominent speaker on pluralism, said:

It has become commonplace to say that we live in a pluralistic society - not merely a society which is in fact plural in the variety of cultures, religions and lifestyles which it embraces, but pluralistic in the sense that this plurality is celebrated as things to be approved and cherished. (1)

The question is, how can learning and teaching practices engage a variety of diverse ideologies within a pluralistic community in order to pose Christian worldviews as a distinctive option?

James Rest (1995) identified four substantive areas that present challenges to moral education’s progress in schools. First is the role of theorists, such as Larry Kohlberg, who act as visionaries, and contribute to philosophical theory. Second is
the role of study designers, again like Kohlberg who illustrated the big picture, who introduce the theoretical umbrella that researchers use for experiments and analysis of empirical results. Third is the role of curriculum designers and teachers, who create strategies and activities for implementing educative theories. Fourth is the role of promoters and enablers, who create a forum to disseminate ideas and amplify the work (14). Rest’s third identified research challenge, curriculum designer and teacher, requires the creation of a vibrant learning environment, where a person’s faith and learning come together in the learning enterprise. Such an environment is explored in this work, its origins, and its potential for assisting moral choices is described. Alister McGrath (1994) said it this way:

In the midst of a sea of moral pluralism, Christians have every right, and a God-given responsibility, to maintain a distinctive moral vision. This belief is held on the basis of the firm conviction that this moral vision is grounded in the most reliable knowledge we have of the nature and will of God himself - given to us in Jesus Christ and Holy Scripture (34).

Multiple Intelligence Teaching Approach (MITA)

The MITA approach has been used in several education courses at McGill University, University of Toronto, University of British Columbia, York University, and Houghton College in New York. This approach relies heavily upon Multiple Intelligence Theory as developed by Howard Gardner (1992), which suggests that we know the world around us not just through language and math, but we also understand and express knowledge through spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, naturalistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. MITA is really the teacher’s classroom applications of MI theory, and it also includes constructivist teaching and learning approaches put forward by von Glasserfeld (1995). So to use MITA as a framework to learning and teaching on any campus is to welcome students’ beliefs and prior understandings as foundational to all learning. Simply put, MITA precludes lectures as an exclusive teaching approach. Within a Multiple Intelligence Teaching Approach (MITA), both learners and teachers express and develop their unique worldviews within a cacophony of beliefs. Both act as colleagues, students, and teachers in an interactive relationship with each other, with God, and with knowledge.

To illustrate how people develop unique worldviews within MITA learning and teaching, we will consider the three main features of a MITA teaching and learning approach: collaboration, content integration, and criteria for negotiated assessment. First, collaboration requires teachers and students to respect and interact with other faculty members, students, and the business community in order to establish common ground and create a forum for expression of ideas and beliefs. Second, content integration requires students to activate their multiple intelligences (Gardner 1983) in order to engage actively with a variety of interdisciplinary factors to solve real world problems. It should be noted here that MITA includes one’s proclivities to know God and practice divine law, and to express one’s past knowl-
edge and experiences in order to construct actively new knowledge. Since MITA integrates aspects from related disciplines, accommodates technical applications, and includes curriculum opportunities for a variety of learning and teaching approaches, it also activates students’ unique abilities and talents. Third, criteria for negotiated assessment includes the ability to create assessment criteria that not only builds ownership into the evaluation process but also facilitates integrity and shared values. The rubrics created include assessment measures that evaluate a variety of ways to know any topic.

While MITA has already generated interest and motivation for learning among students, the model continues to require need for further development for implementation in higher learning where lectures still predominate. However, MITA offers one practical contribution to the achievement of a difficult task: inclusion of students’ and teachers’ beliefs and moral values as an integral part of the educative process in higher education classes. Students and teachers within a MITA setting learn how to acquire and apply knowledge within community by using their unique abilities and drawing on fellow learners for additional resources.

Examples of MITA Applications

The research and development of the MITA approach has continued to involve work with students in undergraduate and teacher education courses. The MITA approach for teacher education courses taught in the US and Canada deal with three main issues:

1. Collaboration issues
2. Content integration issues
3. Criteria for assessment issues

In MITA, activities for integration among students range from pair-sharing to make predictions about a case study, to creating specific unit plans for teaching an upper level science class. Activities described by Weber (1997) illustrate collaborative learning among students and professors as well as between groups such as business communities.

Content integration activities include unit creation projects among teachers-in-training, but across different disciplines. For example, one integrated assignment involved the creation of a unit of study titled “Nuclear Accidents.” Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory (1983) was applied to inquire about the 1897 nuclear accident in Brazil. The following is a list of MITA activities through which students investigated the historic event:

1. Linguistic activities included archival and Internet research, essay writing, and debates about the effects of nuclear emission in matter. Linguistic activities include factual knowledge as well as critical decision-mak-
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2. Logical-mathematical activities included measurement units in atomic structures, background radiation issues, and the actual effects of nuclear emission on matter.

3. Musical activities included creation of Haiku and songs related to nuclear concerns that have contributed to cultural interactions and moral understandings, based on one’s particular worldview.

4. Bodily-kinesthetic activities included constructing a mock-up nuclear power plant based on the American-built 627 MW reactor and improved nuclear equipment, based on intellectual and moral assumptions of the group.

5. Spatial activities included creation of posters that showed nuclear materials used, the physics and technology of nuclear reactors, and suggestions for prevention of future nuclear accidents.

6. Interpersonal activities included mock interviews with the scientific community, witnesses at the explosion, military personnel, and families of the victims, along with a fictitious television report on the incident to report ethical implications.

7. Intrapersonal activities included a series of journal entries written by students who supposedly had suffered radiation exposure but had survived the experience. The idea here was to experience the incident as victims might have.

8. Naturalistic activities included collecting data, observing natural structures, visiting sites of natural specimens, and comparing nuclear effects on animals, birds, plants, fish, flowers, lakes, mountains, rivers, rocks, oceans, seasons, stars, shells and so on.

Using Mike Watts’ (1997) concept of teaching social issues and responsibilities of science and technology (1997), called event-centered learning, the students were able to draw on issues concerning nuclear policies in several countries. Through MITA the students experienced the physics, technology, ethics, and social ramifications of nuclear reactors. Through the above activities, students were empowered to activate their unique proclivities in order to engage meaningfully with specific nuclear related facts and concepts. Students in this teacher education class were encouraged to learn by mobilizing their innate capacities to meet real world challenges that they perceived as meaningful.
Constructivist Implications

In constructivist learning, knowledge is experienced by its relevance to the real world (von Glaserfeld 1995). The constructivist view is in opposition to Solipsism, according to which the mind alone creates the world. Constructivism is concerned with solutions to real world problems and relates these problems to the students’ experiences. In a constructivist learning experience, a learner actively constructs new knowledge by using prior knowledge and past experience as a sort of hook on which to hang new facts, ideas and concepts. The learner builds knowledge in a personal and purposeful way, accepting some facts while rejecting others. According to Piaget (1970):

\[ \ldots \text{human beings never remain passive but constantly pursue some aim or react to perturbations by active compensations consisting in regulations. It follows from this that every action proceeds from a need which is connected with the system as a whole and that values likewise dependent on the system as a whole are attached to every situation favorable or unfavorable to its execution. (38)} \]

Consequently, the learner actively applies new facts and concepts to previous knowledge and beliefs according to the epistemological principle that learners activate their unique abilities and past understandings to “construct” new knowledge structures.

It follows that what we know and believe about our world, our humanity, and our divinity all becomes active properties of the knowledge building enterprise. In the study of “Nuclear Accidents,” for instance, learners construct new empirical facts about the 1897 nuclear accident in Brazil through:

- Actively engaging their unique proclivities to experience the nuclear event. Students create projects that illustrate their activation of Gardner’s seven ways of knowing the content.

- Bringing past experiences, faith structures, world view frameworks through constructivist procedures. Students may believe that war opposes divine laws, for example. Their faith tenets impact their construction of ideas about nuclear procedures.

- Responding to specific inquiries such as, “How do nuclear policies effect society?” Through a MITA approach to learning and teaching, learners collaborate with others to understand nuclear accidents, integrate idea facts across disciplines to solve nuclear related problems, and negotiate appropriate criteria for an intelligence-fair assessment of their solutions.

Using MITA, the learner actively applies new facts and concepts to personal knowledge and beliefs in order to create new knowledge structures about nuclear acci-
Current Challenges for Christian Scholarship

A MITA approach to learning and teaching has two consequences. In human terms, it emphasizes active student and teacher involvement in their Christian beliefs as learners and teachers. In the classroom this active engagement will demonstrate itself in free expressions of faith and a demonstration of faith’s influence on ideas and concepts expressed. In divine terms, active learning creates an altar for Christ to light His precious truths in hearts for all to witness. Here we must return to a moment in history when fires were lit in spite of pluralism’s existence.

That moment describes Elijah’s absolute dependence on God to demonstrate divine truth and show evidence of faith in the presence of Baal’s pluralistic worldview. All present could express their beliefs and call upon their own gods. But it was God alone who silenced the prophets of Baal and showed faith’s power over pluralism. In spite of the many divergent voices, Elijah turned to God to turn hearts back to Himself. It was at that point that fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, along with the wood, stones, water, and dust in the trench. Such evidence of divinity over all humanity resulted in everyone present falling down on their faces in recognition of God as Lord (1 Kings 18: 36-38).

As Christians, we construct new knowledge through dependence on God for development and activation of unique worldviews. If we ignore our responsibilities for research, or if we limit workloads to include mostly “tyranny of the urgent” activities, we have relocated the construction of new knowledge to researchers outside Christian influence. It is not sufficient for Christian scholars to concentrate solely on students and teaching enterprises within Christian communities. Perhaps more than ever before Christian educators are asking with Mary Brabeck (1995), Dean of the School of Education at Boston College, “How are we educators, researchers, policy makers, and social activists doing in making this a better, more just, and caring world?” (3).

Quoting another change agent and Christian scholar, Christopher Kaiser, Lesslie Newbigin, who has spearheaded a strong ecumenical movement in the UK and served as general secretary of the World Council of Churches, shows how knowledge was constructed by Cappadocian Christian scholars, knowledge shaped by Christian principles but used to shape science throughout many centuries up to the present day. Briefly, these four principles include:

1. Creation of humanity in God’s image, as coherent rather than a chaos of random events.

2. Knowledge of the cosmos comes not as a result of ultimate reality through mystical contemplation, but through our investigation of empirical facts through careful observation.
3. Heavenly bodies are made of the same substance as earth, since God created heaven and earth, not (as Aristotle said) made of a different substance.

4. Materials used for the advancement of human salvation, such as medical advancements are valid, because of the work of Christ in the Incarnation. (7, 8).

One barrier that prevents Christians from taking part in critical research on new learning and teaching models may be lack of funds. The regular load of Christian academics is sometimes double that of secular counterparts, partly due to insufficient funding. But do we also crowd out research efforts because of a faulty work ethic? Admittedly, Christian professors must fill roles such as advising and registering students—important work, but sometimes a distraction from academic roles for which some are clearly called and trained. How can we support Christian scholars called by God for research without diminishing opportunities for faculty who may feel called to advising students rather than publishing new work? Is it possible that Christian campuses over time have come to value details of running its institution and ignored new research endeavors?

Yet it remains critical to Christian influence in academic settings that we support Christian scholars called to contribute to the development and practice of new knowledge about learning and teaching. How can we dialogue with the larger academic community otherwise? Without serious research and investigations, how can we offer Christian students the best from God’s revelations to humanity? How can we claim to be scholars? To teach well is to research well—these are two oars in one boat; without one, the other simply chases circles.

If institutions tax all scholars with equal busy work, how can academics called to research maintain any active role in their fields? How can some accept their calls to contribute to Christian scholarship and issues in the world as a whole? How can Christians in our generation perpetuate those model intellectual visions passed on to us from crucial figures like Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430), masters of the finest classical thought who influenced moral and intellectual understandings of their day? Perhaps the time has come to reconsider how learning and faith partner, and how learning and teaching practices either emulate or erode the message of Jesus Christ that God speaks through humanity about good and evil. Perhaps time has come to inventory our support for faculty called to research as well as those called mainly to teach. It seems to me that in any good school, equal balance is needed, since research informs teaching and teaching informs research.

One disturbing trend of degrading “ivy league” institutions has arisen in some Christian communities. The trend is unfortunate for three reasons. First, many of our finest Christian scholars and leaders come from ivy league institutions and were served well there. Second, scholars at these institutions often contribute enormously to every discipline, since funding and supportive environments exist for
research and development. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the way to success is never to defile the attempts of others in the field but to create excellence in one’s own. Charles Malik goes one step further in his challenge to Christian institutions. Malik points out that universities dominate the world and that we should seek to find out the mind of Christ about the university (20). But Malik, a product of Harvard, said that Christian universities have “not yet attained the stature of the fifty or one hundred top universities of the world, which set the pace and provide the model for all other higher institutions of learning” (29). Rather than put down these top institutions, Christian higher education should, according to Malik, measure their academic status “by how close they attain to the norms and standards of the more prestigious institutions.” The idea here is that through modeling excellence in academic respectability as do more prestigious institutions, Christian higher education earns the right to demonstrate that Jesus Christ has immense relevance “to the matter and spirit of their scientific research and learning” (29).

Can we imagine a practical demonstration of the Harvard seal (“Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae”—Truth For Christ and For the Church), which pervades all schools and departments? Only Christians can return meaning to mottoes that describe the foundations of some of the greatest universities in the world. But this cannot be done through criticizing great universities or apologizing for less qualified campuses simply because one teaches there.

Are we willing as Christians to proclaim that scientific progress and worship of Jesus Christ are incompatible? If not, our criticisms may be justified. But if we believe that great universities, institutions that lead in all domains of research, learning, discovery and invention, are those that are moored to Jesus Christ, we will exchange accusations for bold questions about what defines highest quality teaching and learning among our most prestigious competitors. Madeleine L’Engle (1996) challenged educators to consider new relations rather than adhere to traditional beliefs:

> Each time an unexpected discovery is made in the world of knowledge, it shakes the religious establishment of the day. Now, we are often taught that it is unfaithful to question traditional religious beliefs, but I believe that we must question them continually. Not God, not Christ, who are at the center of our lives as believers and creators—but what human beings say about God and about Christ; otherwise, like those of the church establishment of Galileo’s day, we truly become God’s frozen people. Galileo’s discoveries did nothing whatsoever to change the nature of God; they threatened only man’s rigid ideas of the nature of God. We must constantly be open to new revelation, which is another way of hearing God, with loving obedience. (27)

Further Questions to be Considered

Since MITA teaching and learning approaches at university are still embryonic, the following considerations bear further exploration if this approach is to contribute to teaching and learning reform. Three questions have emerged from the work so far completed:
1. How does collaboration within MITA learning and teaching benefit students and teachers? If, as Renata Caine suggests (Pool 1997), the brain is a social organ, the question arises: “How can collaborative learning create scholarly communities which benefit both teachers and learners?” How will collaborative endeavors be valued within a system that has emphasized individual competition?

2. How can a MITA approach provide key learning and teaching opportunities within subject specific classes? Heidi Hayes Jacobs (1989) and Robin Fogarty (1991) make a case for curricular integration based on the brain’s search for connections. This integration is supported by Robert Sylwester (1995). Accompanying new knowledge about brain functions are questions about how to integrate learning.

3. How can performance-based assessment be negotiated authentically at university? MITA supports the idea that we are intelligent in many different ways, thus making a case for departure from many traditional assessment practices. So, using MITA, how can reformed assessment approaches be integrated within existing assessment models in order to reflect new knowledge about assessment as an integral part of the learning process?

These questions serve only as a starting point for further development in MITA’s collaboration practices, content integration, and criteria development for negotiated assessment. Further research and development are still required. Research on learning and assessment using MITA would give way to new systems of learning and teaching, reflecting new understandings about how the brain works. As professors collaborate to build activity banks of what Gardner terms “intelligence-fair assessment activities,” students’ unique proclivities will become a more integral part of the learning process (Weber 1995).

Final Comments

If, as Lesslie Newbigin suggests, the classical view of true knowledge is vision, “theoria,” Christians who possess divine vision, also possess adequate knowledge to activate vision into reality. The terms vision and praxis, according to Newbigin, are replaced in current education for the terms theory and practice, terms which in no way include the sense of true knowledge as vision. This distinction between “vision and praxis” and “theory and practice” will be brought to light through a Christian scholar’s influences on knowledge construction. Without Christians as researchers, we have abdicated a search for the road back to vision and praxis, the hearing and doing of God’s word, a distinction that has momentous results in educational thought and practice. Without vision and research we have no hooks on which to hang the busyness that consumes our days as Christian
Recognizing the complexity of the current ethical problems in education, problems that require being able to identify the ethical matter of an incident and to interpret a situation in terms of how one’s behavior can effect a practical solution from divine vision, this paper acknowledges the lack of recommendations for creating specific pathways toward ethical sensitivity, moral reasoning, moral motivation, and moral character. These ethical problems are left to visionaries who contribute to philosophical theory, study designers who introduce theoretical frameworks for experiments and analysis of empirical results, and promoters or enablers who create a forum to disseminate ideas and amplify the work. But as curriculum designer and teacher, I have attempted to create strategies and activities for implementing educative theories about faith and learning. As described in this work, MITA provides one vibrant learning environment, where a person’s faith and learning come together in the learning enterprise. In recognition that a person’s moral choices impact entire communities, I introduced MITA as one response to activating faith within a higher education context.

Implementation of MITA into existing teacher education courses, however, is not without difficulties. Given the traditional formation of higher level curriculum courses, their requirements, and the traditional teaching approaches used, some professors are understandably reluctant to attempt new methods of learning and teaching. Rather than distrust uniformity and certainty to risk new approaches that open up possible diversity, these professors are reluctant to risk creating paradox and ambiguity as they break old learning roles, approaches, and habits. Curriculum change is always difficult, especially in higher education.

MITA’s evaluation so far has indicated that students seem to prefer collaboration, content integration, and criteria development for negotiated assessment. There is a concern, however, that while enthusiasm for MITA learning and teaching remained high at the student level, that teacher-centered teaching practices are often more rewarded within traditional universities. Practical concerns include a range of problems such as, “Will scholarship money be denied to students involved in non-traditional learning environments?,” “Will students meet requirements for more traditionally designed approaches, should they transfer or apply to graduate schools?” and, “How does using real world problems and a MITA inquiry method of learning, ensure adequate developmental skills in one’s trajectory of studies?”

Finally, to expect veteran teachers to exchange long standing academic traditions for more individual engagement of ideas and concepts may be unrealistic unless more emphasis is given to knowledge about how the brain operates and how brain functions influences specific learning and teaching practices. Gill Nicholls (1997) suggests that change is particularly difficult when “it involves a reconceptualization of roles and responsibilities within frameworks that have existed for a very long time, and are often seen as immovable” (119). Wherever universities and colleges reward collaboration more than individual competition between colleagues, endorse partnerships over hierarchical systems, or collaborate
with students to negotiate intelligence fair assessment practices, MITA practices will contribute to the active, student-centered learning enterprise at university.

MITA learning and teaching might begin to set the stage for questions such as: “Is there room for shared values, as opposed to the demand to prescribe what others should think?” Too often, when two sides of a faith controversy face off, the debate becomes simplistic. Anger rises from our lack of thought for complex issues. The debate is reduced to crossfire, causing both sides to grow antagonistic rather than propose solutions, solve problems, and honor others of differing views while so doing. Rather than demonizing the other side or assigning a judgmental value to another’s statement, MITA accommodates a forum for rational and faith generated discussions about how we can prepare our students for good citizenship. To engage meaningfully with others requires self-reflective Christian scholars. It requires a demonstration of concern and respect and a willingness to really hear other’s ideas on educational and moral issues. It also requires active participation in the exploration of new ideas about how to solve old problems. For example, “How can we include parents in educational policy-making?” “How can we prevent minorities from feeling like second-class citizens in our institutions?” “How can we address gender inequities in a Christian manner?” Perhaps the overarching issue here is respect for others and reliance on God. How can we acknowledge another’s prior knowledge and prior experiences on an issue such as good and evil without feeling God’s love and desire for that person?

MITA was designed to celebrate differences and to build on commonalities toward an improved understanding of shared values within learning communities. Why not facilitate those who feel called and equipped to research in the same way we facilitate those who enjoy other aspects of Christian teaching? It is overly simplistic to conclude that at Christian colleges we teach well while for the most part academics waste time on visions and research. Was Christ not teacher and scholar? Are we not challenged in scripture to follow progressive visions? If we demand the same for all on Christian campuses, we must exclude the abundance of God’s gifts in some. Because of the complexity of this issue, MITA involves doubt and ambiguity as much as it involves Christian ideals and vision. According to L’Engle, doubt can become a person’s doorway to truth:

The great metaphysical poet, John Donne, writes, ‘To come to a doubt, and to a debatement of any religious duty, is the voice of God in our conscience: Would you know the truth? Doubt, and then you will inquire.’ If my religion is true, it will stand up to all my questioning; there is no need to fear. But if it is not true, if it is a man imposing strictures on God (as did the men of the Christian establishment of Galileo’s day) then I want to be open to God, not to what man says about God. I want to be open to revelation, to new life, to new birth, to new light. Revelation. Listening. Humility. Remember—the root word of humble and human is the same: humus—earth. We are dust. We are created; it is God who made us and not we ourselves. But we were made to be co-creators with our maker. (28)

Christians who trust in God and rely on His wisdom for inclusion of faith and learning as a fulcrum component of education will create their own unique current
learning and teaching models that accommodate faith approaches to knowledge. MITA was simply my creation, albeit it was collaborated with several noteworthy scholars. How Christians respond to the current challenges of collaborating with colleagues, solving academic problems, and evaluating research results will determine how faith and moral education will move again to the forefront of higher education, a place faith occupied when Harvard created its motto, “Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae.” As Christian educators, are we willing to participate fully in this creation of new learning and teaching models that include faith practices? Just as MITA attempts to respond to ongoing changes demanded in any democratic society, our best learning and teaching approaches can by their very nature facilitate partnerships between Christian faith and learning. But only serious study and research will indicate how this is so.

In September 1999, the MITA Center launched from Houghton Campus under the following vision statement:

The MITA Center upholds visions for secondary and higher education learning, based on new paradigms and brain research. Profound differences exist about what people espouse as excellent learning and teaching practices. The MITA Center will partner with diverse scholars and learning communities in order to identify and support best practices. The Center celebrates and values gifts, abilities, and interests of all who share at its roundtables.

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The quantity and influence of protest movements have accelerated with modernization. This fact is reflected in the attention given to them by social scientists since the nineteenth century, an interest that has grown in recent years, particularly among sociologists. Protest movements and the ways they have been explained should also be of interest to Christians generally. Public protest is one of our greatest arenas of moral contest. Throughout American history, Christians have expressed and pursued their religious beliefs through protests, from those directed against child labor and slavery, to civil rights, abortion, pornography, and school prayer.

Yet while social scientists have shed considerable light on how protest movements emerge, recruit, function, evolve, succeed, and fail, there is good reason to be dissatisfied with their “explanations.” Christians pursuing biblical justice through protest might be shocked to discover that they are portrayed alternatively as: irrational or hyper-rational; driven by ideals or by material interests; constrained by social structures, or ignoring and modifying them at will; expressive or instrumental; fueled by money or moral passion; shaped by the experiences and psycho-dynamics of participants, or by impersonal economic forces. All of these portrayals shed some light upon, but also distort, their movements and involvement. For example, faith matters in guiding Christians’ goals and strategies—indeed, their protests may be in many respects evangelistic. But material interests, experiences, personality, and opportunities have also helped them to become involved more than many others who share their beliefs, and influence the immediate goals and means they find expedient or satisfying. Do scholars have to choose between taking protesters’ religious beliefs and other aspects of their cultural background and environment seriously, and dealing honestly with psychological, structural, or material influences?

In his excellent and exhaustive book The Art of Moral Protest, Jim Jasper has tried to correct excesses and to advance a synthetic view that takes all of these factors seriously. Destined to become part of many “required reading” lists in the field, this book is based on a close reading of major social movements theories, a review of studies on a wide spectrum of cases, as well as Jasper’s own considerable historical, survey, interview, and participant ob-
First, in addition to carefully assessing the specific strengths and weaknesses of each major social movements theory, Jasper makes some overall criticisms. Historically, students of social movements have advanced their theories by “trashing” rather than correcting and building upon existing work; constructed “general” explanations around only one type of movement; employed extreme reductionism and then maintained such over-simplifications by illegitimately stretching the meaning and application of core concepts; and created entire theories around “new” variables rather than fitting the latter into existing schemes. Jasper is particularly concerned with the ways these errors have obscured or distorted the role of cultural factors—but also with how they have fragmented the field, slowed or hidden its advancement, and prevented thinkers from appreciating the exceedingly rich, complex interplay of various factors in and across a range of social movements at every level.

Second, Jasper advances his own conceptions—about the basic dimensions of protest in general, the nature and role of culture in particular, and how these interact—in a way that synthesizes and builds upon, rather than replaces, existing schools of thought. Jasper maintains that there are only four basic dimensions of protest: biography (personality, self-perception, individual configurations of cultural understanding derived from personal experience); culture (common understandings and that which embodies them); strategies (interactional choices); and resources (physical technologies, their capabilities, and the money to buy them). His focus is on the first two as they function separately and as they interact with the other dimensions. Culture helps to motivate, define, rationalize, direct, and inspire every type of political action, and thus penetrates and influences the other three dimensions. Other factors commonly viewed as important, such as structures, networks, and formal organizations, can be collapsed into all or some of these four dimensions, though at times it may be analytically useful to treat them as distinct.

Jasper also emphasizes the “artfulness” of protest—a concept similar to the trendier term “agency.” Self-aware people make choices and they experiment, from creating and transforming imageries and language to staging “street theatre,” for reasons ranging from the need to “make do” with available resources to the pursuit of psychic satisfaction and communal bonding. Studying artfulness brings into focus the role that individuals and their idiosyncrasies play in social movements, and the dynamic rather than static nature of the four dimensions.

After unfolding and applying these dimensions in a series of fascinating chapters on movement activities from NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard groups protesting local threats) and whistle-blowing protests through boycotts and other direct action across a wide array of protest causes, Jasper turns his attention to a normative assessment of social movements. In general, he sees them as valuable not because they normally achieve much of their often-ambitious goals (indeed, using the Khmer Rouge as a case study he states that such radical, rapid change is not normally a good thing), but because they provide a moral voice. They are an opportunity for people to plumb, articulate, and modify moral understandings and practices collectively and in public. This is satisfying, strengthens the significance and emotional power of beliefs, and helps people to express or work out their identities while encouraging

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others toward deeper moral reflection. On the other hand, when protest movements utilize ideological abstractions that reduce people to mere means, and when they downgrade whole categories of humans to sub-human enemies, they become dangerous and destructive.

Throughout, Jasper embraces more culturally “left” movements while taking a far less sympathetic or informed view of protesters associated with more conservative causes—for instance pro-lifers, whom he describes as manipulative, opposed to dialogue, coercive, and more interested in rejecting than developing alternatives to many technologies. It would be refreshing to see more sociological work that takes a fairer perspective towards conservative movements. But Jasper is often sharply critical also of the movements he supports, and appears to make more of an effort to evaluate fairly protest he disagrees with than do many sociologists.

Jasper does not succeed in demonstrating that “culture” and “biography” should not be treated as “resources.” At times they are resources, as when insider knowledge creates a decisive advantage, or when broad cultural experiences and sensibilities enable people to network or promote their ideas successfully in a range of social settings.

A deeper problem is Jasper’s embrace of post-modern moral and epistemological relativism, as in this example: “As the ‘postmodernists’ insist, we have no universal, absolute Truth on which we can construct our beliefs, no firm grounding we can always take for granted. We have only our own cultural traditions, and the traditions of others” (10). This is not only logically self-refuting (if true, it is an absolute) as well as antithetical to orthodox Christian belief, but it ultimately undermines the value and significance of every moral vision presented in this book.

These difficulties aside, The Art of Moral Protest is a fascinating, well-written, convincing book that represents a significant advance in understanding social movements. It is appropriate for faculty looking for a critical, synthetic overview of classic and “cutting-edge” theories on social movements, as well as graduate and advanced undergraduate students who already have some passing familiarity with the main schools of thought in this area. And despite its biases, it is an excellent choice for Christian thinkers wishing to consider the ways in which protests can be effective, satisfying, even aesthetic ways to proclaim biblical visions of reality and morality in contemporary culture, without falling into a detached idealism that ignores the real contingencies of objective resources, opportunities, and strategy.


Reviewed by Fred J. Brenner, Biology, Grove City College

Although I found Where Garden Meets Wilderness thought-provoking, I am troubled with several aspects of the book. First, I am troubled by the dichotomy between Evangelical Christians and mainline Protestant and Catholic Christians that appears to permeate it—for example this statement at the beginning: “But environmentalism as a movement among evangelicals, like its non-evangelical counterparts (secular, New Age, mainline Protestant and Catholic), is a recent phenomenon.” In part, this may be a function of the definition of “evangelical.” If we accept the American Heritage Dictionary (2nd college ed.) characterization
of Evangelical Protestants as emphasizing the authority of the gospel and believing that salvation is from faith and grace alone rather than from good works and the sacraments, there is indeed a major theological dichotomy between Evangelicals and many mainline Protestants and Catholics. Yet in the introduction, Rev. John Michael Beers, a Roman Catholic theologian, states that “All Christians who believe the evangelium, that is, the Good News of Jesus Christ, are rightly called evangelical. Whether by tradition, history of submission to a particular authority, we may be known as Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anabaptist, Episcopalian, or Presbyterian”—or, I might add, any other denominational label. Secondly, I am troubled by the implication that scientists who are Christians and employed by state colleges and universities and other secular institutions are often operating in a hostile environment. My discussions with colleagues at many state institutions suggest this is not the case. The author further states that refereed literature, especially scientific journal literature, is dominated by anti-Christian thinkers. As a reviewer for numerous scientific journals for over thirty years, I am not aware that ideology is a criterion for reviewing manuscripts. In all cases I am aware of, submissions are reviewed on the basis of their merit and contribution to the discipline, and the author’s or reviewer’s religious beliefs are not an issue in acceptance or rejection.

In chapter 1 Beisner refers to the writings of Aldo Leopold, considered by many the father of scientific resource management in the United States. Leopold suggested that resource managers should ask the question “What is best for the resource?” which may not be compatible with using it for the benefit of the greatest numbers through time, or with preservationism, but may be compatible with sustainability. This concept implies Christian stewardship of God’s creation. Use of the earth’s resources for human survival is not in itself evil, but humanity’s abuse of power in harvesting or mining these resources is wrong. Extraction of coal by strip mining, as Beisner suggests, has created habitat for fish and wildlife; but mining also polluted over twenty-five hundred miles of streams in Pennsylvania alone, to the extent that they have not supported life for over a hundred years. That we are growing more trees than we are harvesting may be true, but are we growing the same quality and diversity that existed prior to harvesting? It may not be wrong to harvest a whale for human survival, but do we have the right to bring any species to the point of extinction? They are, after all, God’s creation, too!

Evangelical environmentalists commonly use Scripture to develop a stewardship ethic, but as the author suggests, there is danger of misuse or improper interpretation or application of some passages. Though Christians may use Scripture to support an environmental ethic, we must remember that environmental policy should be based on social and economic justice and the integrity of creation and not necessarily on ideology. The author makes a point of distinguishing between the Fall, which is humanity’s sin, and the Curse, God’s response to that sin. “Unlike secular and New Age environmentalists, who have no allegiance to Scripture,” he states, “evangelical environmentalists must think through how God’s repeated devastation of the earth in Judgment on human sin fits into a Biblical view of environmental ethics.” The curse is upon the earth because of humanity’s sin; but do we believe in a loving God who declares all creation good (Gen. 1:31), or do we believe that earthquakes, volcanic eruptions or other natural phenomena that destroy creation, including human life, are because of humanity’s sin and a curse upon the earth? It is unfortunate that we call an earthquake an “act of God,” since loss of life is due to people constructing high-rise buildings in an earthquake zone as well as the earthquake itself. Christian teaching leads me to interpret Scripture in the historical and ethical context in which it was originally written.
And with many passages of Scripture, there is no agreement on when they were written or by whom, let alone their interpretation.

Chapter 5, titled “The Problem of Environmental Misinformation,” implies that a substantial portion of the environmental data published by leading scientists and public and private environmental agencies is wrong. My first response is that we construct our environmental models on the best data available at the time, but may have to modify them as new information becomes available. The author further implies that risks to human health are relatively low and may not be of concern. Suppose, however, I hand you a glass of water and tell you the chemicals are below the limits for drinking water, but if you drink this water for twenty years these chemicals will bio-accumulate and you’ll have a 10 percent chance of developing stomach cancer. Would you continue to drink the water? This is your choice. But in many parts of the U.S. and the rest of the world, humans and other organisms in God’s creation have no choice about the water they drink. And unfortunately, many people at greatest risk from environmental contaminants are in economic strata affording no choice as to where they live or the water they drink. In regard to soil erosion and crop production, advances in crop genetics and agricultural technology have resulted in higher production, much of it on corporate farms. But nutrient, sediment, and bacterial contamination from agricultural lands remains the leading contributor to the degradation of freshwater ecosystems in the U.S.

An example of the alleged misinformation Beisner critiques is the statement, attributed to Susan Drake, that “in Africa alone, a tropical forest area the size of Ohio is destroyed each year.” Beisner compares the area of Ohio, 116,105 km², to that of Africa at 29,901,620 km², but fails to recognize that the entire African continent is not a tropical rainforest.

Beisner’s claim that there is no direct link between pollution and human death and suffering is not historically accurate. In 1948, twenty deaths were directly linked to air pollution in Donora, Pennsylvania. The evidence that leaks from toxic waste dumps cause deaths may not be 100 percent conclusive, but there are several examples in the U.S. and elsewhere of higher incidences of childhood cancers in toxic dump areas than occur in the general population. Although a company may be absolved of direct responsibility for health risks from a toxic discharge, there is a difference between being innocent of a crime against humanity and being found not guilty in a court of law. Moreover, as stewards of the earth, we should be concerned about the death of other members of God’s creation from exposure to these chemicals.

With the discussion of the population debate in the final chapter I found some agreement. However, there is often an inverse relationship between a nation’s GNP and its birth rate. In many parts of the world large families are considered necessary for survival, parents relying on children to provide for them when old or disabled. Health care, especially for the poor, is often linked to the national economy. Christians should be in the forefront in working with poor nations to improve their economies. At the same time we should insure social and economic justice for all people, as well as maintain the integrity of creation.

The six essays comprising the appendix reiterate many of the themes in the main text. Though interesting reading, I am not sure they add any further insight.

While I found this book thought-provoking, I disagree philosophically with many of its themes and examples. As an ecologist and wildlife biologist who has spent his entire professional career working on restoration of damaged ecosystems, I realize the impact humanity has had on Creation. I agree with Lynn White’s much-publicized 1967 article in Science that Christians must accept responsibility for the degradation of Creation. The time has come for
all Christians to work together to maintain and enhance all of God’s Creation. Depending on our individual theologies, the paths we take in developing our stewardship ethics may differ dramatically, but hopefully the result will be the same.


Reviewed by Kevin M. Cragg, History, Bethel College (Minn.)

Many of the thirteen essays in this book relate to the intellectual impact on the work of Christian historians made by the impulses labeled postmodernism. Since one of the useful emphases of postmodernism is to understand the “situatedness” of the narrator, let me confess that several of the contributors to this volume are professional friends and colleagues whom I have interacted with for some twenty years or more (and likely absorbed some of their ideas already), and that I, as many of them, teach at a Christian liberal arts college in the evangelical tradition. Most of us are members of the Conference on Faith and History, a group of Christian historians who believe it important to integrate faith and learning in a lively way in our teaching and scholarship. My approach to this work is primarily as a teacher interested in using insights from the book to enrich and strengthen my students’ training and education.

This is a welcome set of essays. As one who teaches a seminar which tries (among other things) to persuade students that one can be both a Christian and a reputable historian, I appreciate anything that shows Christian historians at work and that discusses our various tasks. Following a burst of theoretical discussion in the 1970s and 1980s (see D. G. Hart’s essay in the work), there has been a relative dearth in Christians writing about philosophy of history from a Christian angle.

The most obvious audience for this collection is Christian historians—students and teachers of history—who need to be aware of the issues postmodernism raises for the discipline of history and who wish to address those challenges from a Christian perspective as well as standard critical stances. Academics from other disciplines, interested in what Christian historians are up to nowadays, or wrestling with the dangers and opportunities afforded by postmodernism, would find good access here. College students could meaningfully interact with some of the essays; but others, especially those laden with the arcane jargon of postmodernism, require considerable background knowledge about the disputes being addressed.

The essays are conveniently packaged into three categories: theory, applications in scholarly efforts, and applications for teaching. This strikes me as a reasonable way to appeal to the various roles most of the intended audience fill. I found it very useful. As in any collection of essays, usefulness and readability varies. Some essays derive from addresses given at a conference at Calvin College in fall 1996.

An overall theme in these responses of Christian historians to postmodernism is that the postmodern critiques of the idea of historical “objectivity” (usually identified with the views of the Enlightenment as extended by nineteenth century “scientific” history) provide opportunity as well as peril for scholars trying to use a Christian perspective when examining the past. Since, for example, one goal of postmodernism is to “give voice to the voiceless,” why not give voice to past Christian believers or supernaturalists as much as to women.
or gays? The voices of all have historically been repressed by the Enlightenment elitists of the academy. On the other hand, the absolutizing of relativism poses major problems for historians who believe that the past really happened and that we can know something about it, even if not completely. The idea that the experience of the past cannot be mediated to us by language—a tenet implied by some postmodernists in literary theory—is essentially destructive of the enterprise of history, and is rejected by most historians on the basis of common sense.

Other essays apply postmodern insights to specific studies or pedagogical issues. I found employment of postmodern theories most enlightening. In an essay about the troubles in Northern Ireland, for example, Ron Wells asks the question, how does the conflict look when we take seriously the Protestants’ own assertion that the contest is essentially religious rather than, as most “objective” academic observers maintain, nationalist or economic? He finds that Protestant activities can be rendered more understandable and coherent if their religious stance is recognized and taken seriously.

Likewise in classroom application, G. Marcille Frederick illustrates the usefulness of some postmodern viewpoints by applying the insights of literary structuralists (scholars who found common structures in narratives cross-culturally and who are technically pre-postmodernists) to how one constructs a history survey course. Whose story do we tell mostly? Is the process of industrialization in the U.S. more the story of Andrew Carnegie or of the mill-puddler whose skills became devalued as his productivity increased? If we emphasize the puddler, do we know him only for his craft and economic role or do we include his family, his cultural customs, and his religious faith as part of the story? What is the stance of the narrator (teacher) to the story? Is the story a romance, tragedy, satire, or comedy? She reminds us graphically that our suppositions about the nature of the story are reflected in how we structure a course.

If you are baffled by postmodern vocabulary as I am, not all essays will clarify things for you. Some assume prior knowledge of the postmodern categories (even if the essay primarily finds fault with those categories). Others acknowledge the (deliberate) ambiguity of terms but give us some working definitions. Others teach by example and application.

Many of the essayists reiterate an important Christian theme that somewhat corresponds to postmodernist views. That is, they remind us that, for Christians, human wisdom and insight is always proximate and marred by the Fall and that any of our proclamations and truth claims need to be tempered by epistemological humility. We see through a glass darkly, whether the glass is uniform or fragmented into a thousand facets.


Reviewed by Terence Cuneo and C. Stephen Layman, Philosophy, Seattle Pacific University

Christian Theism and Moral Philosophy is comprised of twelve essays that aim to illuminate the connections between some of the central issues in moral philosophy and the Christian faith. The book is divided into three sections of equal length: “The Metaphysics of Morals,” “The Epistemology of Ethics,” and “The Ethics of Love.” Ten of the essays are written by philosophers, while two are written by theologians. Five of the twelve essays are repub-
lished here in their entirety or in large part.

Due to space constraints, we can summarize only four of the essays, but we think these four are among those apt to be most interesting to CSR readers.

Robert Adams’s essay, “Divine Commands and the Social Nature of Obligation,” defends a subtle version of the divine command theory of ethics. Adams begins with a social theory of obligation, according to which “having an obligation to do something consists in being required . . . by another person or a group of persons, to do it” (49). According to Adams, a social theory of obligation has at least these two merits: first, social theories of obligation enable us to see morality as fundamentally about interpersonal relationships as opposed to being fundamentally about abstract principles; second, if moral obligation is grounded in social relationships, then there is a close link between moral obligation and moral motivation. However, Adams argues, unless the social group is expanded to include a loving God, social obligations do not have the binding character of moral obligations; in fact, social obligations can be contrary to true morality (for example, Eichmann had a social duty to organize the transportation of Jews to death camps). Certain divine attributes, such as omniscience and perfect love, give God’s demands a bindingness superior to human social requirements.

In her contribution, “Christianity and Moral Knowledge,” Caroline Simon maintains that although Christians agree that there are moral truths and that humans can know some of them, Christians have no shared moral epistemology. Simon provides a judicious evaluation of three distinct Christian moral epistemologies: (1) epistemic supernaturalism: “moral beliefs are justified if and only if they are validly inferred from non-moral propositions concerning God”; (2) epistemic naturalism: “moral beliefs are justified by inference from non-moral propositions about human nature and the world”; and (3) intuitionism: “moral knowledge can only be validly inferred by inference from premises which include moral truths” (115).

Simon considers a number of arguments in favor of epistemic supernaturalism and finds them wanting. Borrowing an argument from Peter Geach, Simon concludes that not all of our moral knowledge can be derived from revelation, for we must use at least some moral knowledge attained independently of divine revelation to test alleged revelations.

Simon also rejects epistemic naturalism. On this view, goodness is rooted in human nature, and whenever “something has the overall effect of contributing to the realization of human capacities, that thing is objectively good” (131). Simon rejects epistemic naturalism primarily on the grounds that “there clearly are capacities which human beings have which should not be realized and other capacities which seem insignificant from a moral point of view” (132), for example, the capacity to manipulate others or to grow long fingernails. Sorting out the pernicious and trivial capacities will require a standard independent of any within the naturalist’s repertoire.

Simon defends rational intuitionism, the view that some moral principles can be known a priori (for example, “It is impermissible to shoot the person in front of you at the grocery store in order to gain his place in line”) (140). Simon’s discussion of rational intuitionism is carefully reasoned and interesting; in our judgment she succeeds in turning back a number of standard arguments against it.

Philip Quinn’s essay, “The Primacy of God’s Will in Christian Ethics,” is a vigorous defense of a traditional divine command theory. According to Quinn, the divine command theorist has the materials both to mount a cumulative case in favor of her view and to show that the divine command theory is superior to certain kinds of virtue theories. Quinn’s argu-
ment in favor of the divine command theory appeals to its ability to account for God’s sovereignty, God’s having commanded Old Testament figures to engage in ostensibly immoral behavior, and the fact that the love commandments are at bottom commandments. His argument against virtue theories maintains that, in their secular garb, they rest on too sanguine a theory of human nature, and in their Thomistic dress, they are not really virtue theories (in any robust sense) at all.

“Norms of Loving” is the latest in a series of papers by Jorge Garcia, which seeks to articulate a Christian ethics of virtue. Garcia’s paper has two basic aims. First, it briefly elucidates his “role-centered” virtue theory according to which virtues are those qualities that allow persons to occupy certain “morally constitutive” roles well. On Garcia’s view, “[m]oral truths about what actions a person ought to perform are . . . justified on the basis of more basic truths about what kind of friend, or neighbor, etc., she ought to be” (233). Second, Garcia offers a battery of reasons for thinking that Quinn’s “argument from the immorality of the patriarchs” for the divine command theory fails, and that William Mann’s defense of moral dilemmas is unconvincing. One of the more pleasing features of this volume is that, in adjacent essays, it exposes the reader to some of the more interesting arguments for the divine command theory (Quinn’s paper) and some searching criticisms of them (Garcia’s essay).


**Reviewed by Edward B. Davis, History of Science, Messiah College**

As a historian, I find a certain irony in my having become even less than a footnote to history. The source of this experience is the advertisement by Cambridge University Press for John Brooke’s earlier (1991) book, Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives, which I reviewed for the journal *Isis*, closing with the observation that “every scholar in our discipline [history of science], and many others as well, should benefit from reading this work.” To my amusement, these very words are now featured prominently in promotional puffs, credited to the journal but not to the author. Most likely, nothing else I ever write will be quoted as often.

I am tempted to use the same words again here, even if this work is not quite as original as the first. Working with Geoffrey Cantor, best known for his spiritually sensitive biography of Michael Faraday, Brooke has followed one work of scholarly achievement with another. The link between them is far more than rhetorical: where the earlier book was synthetic in approach, stressing how the complexity of the history of religion and science since Copernicus defeats all attempts to impose overarching conceptual schemes, this book presses the same
claim through a series of independent case studies, narrowly analytical but equally pessimistic about efforts to reify “religion and science” or other grand narratives. For Christian scholars, the good news is that, once again, the warfare thesis leaves the lists bloodied and beaten; the bad news is that nothing but complexity itself can take its place, leaving little succor for those of us who want to write more hopeful, less messy accounts that might even prove helpful to non-specialists seeking to sort through the mess in order to draw general conclusions. Although the authors deny an intention “to dissolve the great issues that have been debated under the banner of ‘science and religion’ into fragments of local history,” (25) it is difficult to see what other impression one could form.

This is not to deny the value of seeing, several times and in detail, precisely how complex, and how locally constructed, the history of religion and science has actually been. I am particularly keen about the way in which other accounts, including certain post-modern works, are shown to be locally constructed, or deficient in other ways. For example, Brooke and Cantor undermine Fritjof Capra’s claim (in The Tao of Physics, 1975) that modern physics and new age mysticism are closely intertwined in their rejection of classical physics, by showing how this depends on a master narrative of its own that badly misreads both modern and early modern science. Likewise, they challenge Michael Buckley’s influential interpretation (in At the Origins of Modern Atheism, Yale, 1987) of natural theology as the ultimate source of atheism, concluding that “The old adage that no-one had doubted the existence of God until the Boyle lecturers undertook to prove it will not really do” (151). Their masterful retelling of the Galileo story dispels another old myth, “that Galileo was condemned for having seen the truth” (106), when in fact the astronomical theory he was defending was far from obvious and his quasi-Protestant stance on biblical interpretation acted as a lightning rod in a church struggling to respond to the Protestant threat. Brooke and Cantor also apply their theme of complexity to biography, to argue for the importance of studying individuals rather than stereotypes, especially “the essentialist position’ which attributes fixed defining qualities to both science and religion,” an allusion to Ian Barbour’s widely followed typology (from Religion in an Age of Science, Harper & Row, 1990 and elsewhere). Biography, as they demonstrate in fascinating studies of John Tyndall, St. George Jackson Mivart, William Carpenter, and Adam Sedgwick, shows that individuals “were not restricted to any single essentialist position” (275-76). But this leaves open the possibility that historians might do well to investigate how various positions on science and faith were taken by specific persons, at specific times, in specific places, for specific reasons. Indeed, the authors suggest as much in their discussion of the Galileo affair when, referring to Robert Cardinal Bellarmine’s positive evaluation of astronomy as a glorious and moral enterprise, they note that “the historian’s question becomes, ‘What went wrong with this relationship of mutual respect?’ No general model of ‘the relations between science and religion’ can possibly capture the nuances of such a change” (110).

Overall, Brooke and Cantor want to seize the rapidly growing field of religion and science from the scientists and the theologians, who have typically run aground on the rocks of an ahistorical essentialism, usually with opposing ideologies driving them there. Their effort to avoid similar disasters represents both the promise and the challenge of this sophisticated new study.

Where does this leave the Christian historian of science who wants to use history of science as part of a larger critique of secular modern science? First, it gives us perhaps the best sense thus far of the dangers of facile historical analysis—an unmitigated good, for shoddy scholarship aids no cause. Second, it shows us several highly interesting ways in
which clever historiographical methods might be applied to old questions, thereby enriching our own efforts to say important new things. Finally, in spite of its disavowal of timeless models, it actually reinforces the validity of studying specific ways of relating science and faith, in specific contexts. And this can only help, not hinder, the Christian scholar seeking to understand the past in order to help contemporary Christians relate their faith to contemporary science.


**Reviewed by Paul Rhodes Eddy, Biblical and Theological Studies, Bethel College (Minn.)**

In recent years, the “problem” of religious diversity, the quest for a Christian theology of religions, and the issue of inter-religious dialogue have become increasingly pressing matters within a wide variety of theological arenas. It seems that the day is nearing—and perhaps already is here—when the doing of Christian systematic theology without consideration of such issues will be the exception rather than the rule. *Grounds for Understanding* will be a helpful resource for anyone entertaining these complex and challenging questions.

The genesis of this book is tied to an ecumenical Christian consultation on “Theological Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism” held in October 1994 in Newark, New Jersey. Specifically, the book contains the published versions of eleven of the conference papers, as well as opening and closing chapters by the editor. The book begins with a very helpful orienting chapter that serves to summarize the papers represented by each of the eleven chapters that follow. Here, Heim notes that Christians tend to mine three primary theological veins, trinitarian in nature, when responding to religious diversity: the fact that God is the Creator of a single unitary creation, implications of the various Christological modalities (pre-incarnate, incarnation, post-incarnate), and finally, the ubiquitous presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the world.

The contributors to this volume come from a wide array of Christian traditions and denominations, including Roman Catholicism (Mary Ann Donovan), Eastern Orthodoxy (Michael Oleksa), Anglicanism (Peter Slater), Lutheranism (Dan Martensen), Methodism (Nehemiah Thompson), Pentecostalism (Sam Solivan), the Reformed tradition (Jay Rock), the Mennonite tradition (Tom Finger), the Wesleyan Holiness tradition (Floyd Cunningham), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (Mozella Mitchell), and the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ (Fred Norris). In each case, the theological distinctives of that tradition are brought into dialogue with the pressing questions of religious diversity. In some cases, the results are easily anticipated. For instance, among the nine affirmations suggested by Finger toward a Mennonite theology for interfaith relations are “Jesus Christ . . . provides the ultimate norm for all human living,” and “Peace, sharing, and justice are at the heart of this normative way” (73, 75). At other times, themes that have traditionally led to a less than optimistic valuation of other faiths are explicated in new and fruitful ways. For instance, instead of connecting the Reformed emphasis on human sinfulness to a pessimistic view of the salvific fate of other religious persons, Rock suggests that such insights should tame triumphalist attitudes and, along with an emphasis on God’s sovereignty over all peoples,
actually serve to open up new possibilities with regard to religious diversity. In the final chapter of the book, “Elements of a Conversation,” Heim offers a useful summary of the discussions that followed the original conference papers.

This book will be a very helpful resource to anyone who is attempting to analyze or construct a Christian theology of religions. The original conference managed to bring together an impressive number of diverse Christian voices for this important conversation. There are no glaring lacunae with regard to Christian perspectives represented here. (The original conference included a Baptist voice, represented by James Roberts; time constraints, however, prevented the inclusion of his paper as a chapter.) The conference is to be commended for including the voices of those who are all too often left at the margins of conversations about religious diversity. Here, I refer to the “conservative” voices that are perceived by more theologically liberal parties to be unhelpful—if not downright embarrassing—for the theology-of-religions discussion. If those who recognize themselves as “Christians” cannot allow for the diversity of voices within their own ranks to be heard, there is little chance that we shall ever be able really to hear the voices of those outside the Christian fold. This book sets a proper example for future intra-Christian discussions by inviting those with both evangelistic zeal and hard theological questions to participate in the dialogue.

The weaknesses of the book are less about the book itself than about the inherent pitfalls of any intra-Christian theologizing about religious diversity. First, there is the simple caution that must come with every attempt to offer a representative theology of religions from a particular Christian tradition or perspective. The problem, of course, is that the diversity within a particular tradition today may be wider than that across traditions. The chapter on “A Mennonite Theology for Interfaith Relations” provides a good case in point. The author of this chapter juxtaposes his own proposal with that of another Mennonite voice, Gordon Kaufman. Despite their common bond as Mennonites, Finger’s proposal and Kaufman’s pluralistic vision are literally theological worlds apart. Other contributors could have followed Finger’s lead in clarifying that their presentation may not be as representative of their tradition across the board as one might suspect.

Finally, there is in these essays much talk about the (a priori) Christian theological distinctives and emphases that should guide a particular tradition’s response to religious diversity. However, generally speaking (there are exceptions) there is much less emphasis on the need to actually engage the other religions before coming to final conclusions with regard to a theology of religions. While a priori Christian theological commitments are an important and non-negotiable aspect of any faithful Christian theology of religions, they should be allowed to complement an a posteriori approach that attempts to engage the religions seriously on their own terms before constructing a theology about them. Naturally this a posteriori element will mean that the construction of a Christian theology of religions will be a much more complex and time-consuming task than has traditionally been the case. However, the results promise to be more than worth the time and effort spent.


Reviewed by Michael J. Giuliano, Communication Studies, Westmont College

Some books should be recommended for what they say. Others should be recommended
for how they say it. This intriguing compilation of essays gathered from the 1995 Religion and Prime Time Television Conference at UCLA is more the latter than the former. Yes, it explores the questions surrounding the what and why of religion on prime time television. But when this conference brought together thinkers from academia, the media industry, conservative and liberal Christian perspectives, Jewish perspectives, Muslim and Buddhist communities, and also from atheist commitments, it illuminated the advantages of addressing important questions from multiple angles of thought.

One of the interesting by-products of the multiple-perspective approach of this book is the varied treatment given to a single issue or artifact. For example, conservative Christian leader Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association and UCLA undergraduate sociologist-to-be Gabriel Rossman offer the same episode of Roseanne as evidence for their claims. The interesting point is that Wildmon claims that prime time television denigrates traditional religious values, while Rossman claims that prime time shows may actually embrace those values!

Another result of the approach of this book is the illumination of certain unspoken assumptions. Over half of the articles highlight at least one unsupported warrant offered by one of the other writers. For example, record company executive Danny Goldberg challenges this commonly offered evidence for media effects: if the media did not influence us, why would companies spend billions of dollars on advertising? While acknowledging that advertising does indeed influence our purchasing decision, Goldberg challenges the assumption that similar decision-making processes are involved in our moral action choices.

The book is composed of articles from nineteen of the conference participants. Seven of the articles are either speech transcripts or essays from religious leaders, six from academics, three from media journalists, and three from industry representatives. Each of the articles attempts to address one or more of the following questions: (1) Should we define the portrayal of religion in prime time television through overt symbols and topics that the shows address or through the worldviews represented by the characters? (2) Is the portrayal of religion on television positive or negative? (3) If it is negative, is it because of the worldview of television executives, the inherent nature of the television medium, or some less proclaimed, less obvious cause? (4) Do we need or want more portrayal of religion on prime time television?

The authors ask as many questions as they answer. Since most of the essays are short, they introduce evidence for their claims rather than exhaust it. But this format allows for at least two interpretations to each of the important questions. In addition, the various occupational worlds of the writers allow for a delightful mix of both practical and theoretical observations. Almost all of the writers mention specific programs as evidence for their claims.

Not surprisingly, a project of this kind results in uneven quality. Four of the essays deserve special consideration. UC-Berkeley Theology Professor Margaret Miles provides a telling critique on the various demands for more religious characters and religious themes in prime time. Along the way she argues well for the value of theory-driven research.

Los Angeles Times columnist Thomas Plate provides a terse introduction to the question that Neil Postman originally asked in Amusing Ourselves to Death (Viking, 1985): Is the television medium capable of presenting an authentic portrayal of religious experience? Plate’s answer, like Postman’s, is a resounding “no.” Michael Medved, well known for his Hollywood vs. Religion book (HarperCollins/Zondervan, 1992) and video (Chatham Hill Foundation, 1994), updates that work in a short survey of Hollywood’s increasing interest in religious themes (although even he must be surprised by the explosion of overtly religious pro-
grams that have emerged since he penned this essay). He documents several Hollywood executives who are vocal about their conservative religious commitments. Finally, every Christian media scholar would do well to read atheist Dan Barker’s lament on the poor treatment that “unbelievers,” as he calls them, receive in prime time shows. What is striking is how similar his complaints sound to those of the various conservative Christian media watchdog groups.

The final section of the book includes three articles by industry professionals. They speak with one voice that programming decisions are made primarily through the lens of what sells. As Medved quipped in his essay, “the profit motive is still more important in the entertainment business than the prophet motive” (114). That is, no doubt, why the initial question raised in this 1995 conference—why are there so few religious characters and stories in prime time programming?—seems a bit out of place in 1999. With the success of shows such as Warner Brother’s 7th Heaven, CBS’s Promised Land, as well as the continuing popularity of CBS’s Touched By an Angel, the question in religion-media circles these days is, “Why all of the interest in religion?” This final section suggests that despite our search for a deeper meaning to religion’s resurgence in prime time, the primary reason for this transformation may be as close as the latest copy of the Nielsen ratings.


Reviewed by Guenther (“Gene”) Haas, Religion & Theology, Redeemer College

Wold’s book joins the growing list of those that defend the traditional interpretation of the biblical passages on same-gender sexual relations. His specific focus is to fill a void that exists in the contemporary literature on homosexuality. He argues persuasively, in this reviewer’s estimation, that the concern for order (in creation, society, and worship) is the necessary context for understanding the relevant biblical passages.

In part 1 Wold builds his case by showing that in the two millennia before Christ the concern for order is common to the major Near Eastern cultures of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as of Israel. All three hold to a social order which has a divine source, and of which the individual is a part. Any conduct out of harmony with this divine order results in disorder and divine sanctions. Wold notes what is unique about the biblical outlook of the Jews: order is the work of the one holy Creator God, and evil, with its resulting disorder, is the consequence, not of lesser deities who are held in subjection by the victorious god(s), but of sinful human conduct.

Wold acknowledges that this concern for order does not provide a consistent pattern of attitudes and legislation concerning homosexual practice in extra-biblical societies, though the concern for fertility leads them to promote the nuclear family as central for orderly social life. (More work needs to be done on existing documents to fill out our understanding here.) In part 2 of the book Wold applies the notion of order to the Old Testament texts on homosexual conduct. The norm that God has established for human life is heterosexual union according to Genesis 2:24 (“For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh”). Homosexual union constitutes a sinful disorder that results in God’s judgment upon not merely individuals but also society as a whole. Wold argues that this is reflected in three narrative passages in the Old Testament:
Ham’s incestuous homosexual rape of his father, Noah (Genesis 9:18-27); the attempted homosexual rape by the men of Sodom (Genesis 19); and the related story of the Gibeonites (Judges 19). The two passages in Leviticus (18:22 and 20:13) that refer to same-sex relations teach that the holiness of God is to be manifested in the ethical sexual conduct of the community. Wold argues that condemnation of same-gender sexual relations is clearly indicated by the specific terms used and by the severe penalties prescribed here (that is, death and extinction from Israel). Homosexual acts are grave violations of divine law, and infringements of ritual purity or monotheistic worship, which threaten the existence of the community and alienate it from God.

In part 3 Wold brings the notion of order to bear upon the three pertinent Pauline texts: Romans 1:24-27; I Corinthians 6:9; I Timothy 1:10. In his references to “nature,” and what is “natural” and “unnatural,” in Romans 1:26-27 Paul clearly appeals to the creation order for his condemnation of homosexual relations. In I Corinthians 6:9 Paul’s comments that homosexual conduct results in impurity in the church and exclusion from the kingdom of God draws upon the understanding that disorder and punishment result from violations of God’s good and holy order. Wold supports this with his careful analysis of the terms used in these passages. (He also argues persuasively that the terms malakoi and arsenokoitai, found in I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10, refer to the passive and active roles in homosexual intercourse.)

A key aspect of Wold’s discussion of the Old and New Testaments is to point out that the goal of the Bible is the restoration of the sinner—even the deliberate sinner—to God through repentance and an obedient new life. This is obvious in the New Testament, where Paul states that homosexual offenders in Corinth were washed, sanctified, and justified in Christ (I Corinthians 6:11). But Wold argues convincingly that even in the Old Testament era there was room for the repentant homosexual to be restored through the sacrificial system, specifically the Day of Atonement. The point is that while Scripture clearly condemns homosexual relation, it contains a consistent message of the gospel of God’s grace to homosexuals, relevant to our own day.

In conclusion, Wold’s book furthers our understanding of the biblical teaching on homosexuality by setting it in the context of the biblical concern for order. A creational moral order is integral to any proper understanding of the biblical worldview, and thus to a faithful exegesis of the biblical passages on moral behavior. Wold’s book is a significant contribution.


Reviewed by H. Wayne House, Trinity Law School, Trinity International University


Carter, an avowed Christian who believes in the importance of dissent, seeks to speak to the
difficulty of maintaining loyalty to a government that is unwilling to listen to those challeng-
ing an unrighteous law—a condition that in turn may bring a dangerous state of affairs in
which dissent turns to disloyalty.

The book (167 pages, including appendixes and notes) is divided into three major chap-
ters. The first chapter attempts to heal wounds of what Carter sees as a bleeding America,
which needs to recognize that the strength of our republic comes not so much from our
consent as from our dissent. In his second chapter, Carter speaks to the situation where the
secular sovereign and the communities of faith come into conflict regarding moral under-
standing, and the conflict that derives from such, often resulting in disobedience to the state.
The last chapter sets forth how the courts should deal with the dissenters in America dis-
cussed in chapters one and two. Discussion of this topic is especially important since courts
desire to posture themselves as if they are a check on the state when they are in reality a part
of the state and desire to preserve it even to the detriment of dissenters.

Carter argues that there is a tendency on the part of some to identify dissent as some-
how un-American, while in reality dissenters help to maintain the democratic benefits of our
country by insuring the practice of justice. Professor Carter centers first on the Declaration of
Independence to demonstrate that, though the document highlights the idea of government
by consent, it spotlights more the underlying disloyalty of the signers of the document. He
gets to the heart of the matter when he indicates that the “consent of the governed” does not
appear to be the major political concern of the signers. Rather, the focus of the colonists’
complaints seems to be in the fact that their repeated and reasonable complaints had been
rebuffed, even, at times, bringing further abuses from the Crown. Though the king may
certainly have been a tyrant, as the signers allege, their deepest charge is that he has ignored
their complaints. It is the Crown’s treatment of dissenters, not the dissent itself, that is cru-
cial. Carter applies this principle from the dissolution of ties with England in the eighteenth
century to today.

We observe today considerable distrust of American government. This has seemingly
accelerated with the advent of the Clinton presidency, due largely, in this reviewer’s opinion,
to the forceful way in which Clinton sought to undo many gains of the Reagan-Bush years
on matters of concern to more socially conservative Americans, such as protection for the
unborn, and the way in which he has sought to enforce policies on American society, often
through undemocratic executive orders (the most of any president). This assessment seems
to be correct since, as Carter acknowledges, a large number of conservative religious organi-
zations have arisen in recent years, including those representing most of the strong black
church tradition on social issues. These groups strongly resist the secular morality that has
gained such prominence in American culture. Religious conservatives have had tremendous
influence on American elections, evidenced by the fact that those who have won the presi-
dency for the last number of elections have been Republicans or Southern Democrats, run-
ning on platforms to the right of center.

Carter believes that secular liberals do not understand the importance of religious faith
to so many Americans. They would be at a loss to give a reason why the federal and state
governments have historically been so focused on the protection of religion. The view of the
nation’s capital that seems to have been expressed especially in the 1994 elections is not too
dissimilar to the concern the colonists expressed in the Declaration. Carter speaks here not of
the violent in society but to the average American.

Values have passed from one generation to another, Carter says, through three vehicles
in society, namely, the home, the school, and the place of worship. Average Americans be-
lieve that government, through the schools, is seeking to undermine these values. Some believe that the public schools are even openly hostile to the values of parents. Because of this parents have desired prayer in the schools, believing that this will provide some important moral support. As the state, through any of its vehicles, becomes indifferent or even hostile to the religious faith of the people, loss of allegiance may very well occur. Governmental control of education that works against religious beliefs and values seems to represent an illiberal attitude and gives rise to lessening allegiance to this illiberal state.

A major target of Carter’s concern is the courts. Americans often view the courts—based on a myth the courts themselves have fostered—as separate from the government, neutral entities which judge between the masses and the state. In reality, they are very much a part of the state. Moreover, as Carter illustrates with the instance of pro-life demonstrators being charged under RICO as gangsters, courts provide little opportunity for the disobedience of people of faith on moral grounds, a situation tantamount to providing no redress of grievances. The courts have generally looked unfavorably on disobedience. The Supreme Court even ruled against Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Carter argues that judges should take care to understand the religious point of view. They find this difficult due to the very secular ethos that we have in our current society.

Carter’s book is commendable, though maybe too short to develop his thesis as it needs to be developed. Moreover, though professor Carter is willing to strike many chords of liberal conscience, he tends to fall short in offering suggestions on how to change the liberal intellectual or jurist to view fairly the dissent of socially conservative Christian dissenters. His desire to be the detached scholar makes him appear, for this reviewer, a little too ambivalent.


Reviewed by Joseph LaPorte, Philosophy, Hope College

The latest papal encyclical, written by a philosopher pope, represents an effort to clarify the relationship between philosophy and the Christian faith. In seven chapters plus an introduction and a conclusion, the pope sends the message that both our natural faculties and revelation point to truth, since both are gifts from God. The pope is anxious to see good philosophy produced, respected, and put to theological use. He insists that theologians in particular pay special attention to philosophy and urges philosophers not to lose sight of revealed truth.

This is all quite in line with the Catholic tradition, to which I belong. In this tradition, matters of faith are commonly explained with the help of philosophical terms and concepts: for example, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is explained by appealing to the concepts of substance and accident. The Catholic tradition also takes an optimistic view of the powers of natural reason to achieve, without the help of revelation, knowledge of some (though of course not all) truths that we can learn by revelation. Here the tradition draws from St. Thomas Aquinas, whom the pope commends (especially in chapter 4) as a model thinker. St. Thomas, who borrows heavily from the Greeks and particularly from Aristotle, holds that unaided natural reason can discover something about the nature of God, for ex-
ample. John Paul is in sympathy (15).

Protestants have traditionally been less sanguine about the condition of human reason. Some reservations about the encyclical in this regard should not be unexpected, then. At least one outstanding Reformed thinker (Alvin Plantinga, in *Books and Culture*, July/August 1999, 32-35) has suggested that the encyclical lacks proper emphasis on the need for conversion, without which philosophers produce thought that is not just incomplete, as Catholics are wont to grant, but positively at odds with Christian faith: the philosophy of Daniel Dennett, among others, is adduced in this regard. Still, the natural faculties of the unconverted should not be underestimated. Dennett is as critical as any Christian of some of the philosophical positions taken on by the pope: Dennett spurns, for example, the position that “truth is born of consensus and not of a consonance between intellect and objective reality” (86). This is a philosophical position of theological consequence: a right understanding of this issue is indispensable to a proper reception of revealed truth, as the pope emphasizes (12, 139-140). So natural reason, even the natural reason of unconverted thinkers, can be put to the service of theology. Moreover, although the pope does see the scope and power of natural reason as more extensive than might a Calvinist, he is also well aware that contemporary philosophy is infected by a series of maladies; and he does put a finger on sin and “philosophical pride” (7, 35, 44, 105) as causes of error. So while there is some genuine disagreement here between Catholic and Reformed views, those differences can be exaggerated.

Just how much value Christians should place on non-Christian thought has, of course, been an issue for Christians since the dawn of Christianity. John Paul shows sensitivity to various perspectives in the ongoing discussion as he briefly details the history of the Church’s relationship to philosophy (chapter 4). He begins with Paul’s address to the Athenians, moves through the early Church fathers, with their stress on the dangers inherent in Greek thought, to Augustine’s synthesis of Christian and Platonic ideas, to Anselm, and then Aquinas. St. Thomas is treated with particular attention, as is to be expected because of the Catholic Church’s close ties to him. He is admired especially for his emphasis on the compatibility and mutual reinforcement that mark the relationship between faith and reason.

Fittingly, immediately following his survey of the history of philosophy and the special role of Aquinas, the pope addresses the role of the magisterium in the realm of philosophy (chapter 5). Here he states prominently: “The Church has no philosophy of her own, nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others” (75). Its constant recommendation of Aquinas “has not been in order to take a position on properly philosophical questions nor to demand adherence to particular theses”; rather, Aquinas stands as a model for his unstinting effort to show the harmony between faith and reason (114). Study of Aquinas is encouraged (87-8, 91), but the pope is clear that there are philosophical currents of “Christian inspiration” outside Thomism (89). Phenomenology, among other schools, is mentioned in this connection. Since the pope is himself something of a phenomenologist, and since he recently canonized Edith Stein, a student of Edmund Husserl, such unusual openness is perhaps not so surprising. And Catholic education has been marked by this openness for decades: long gone are the days when Bertrand Russell could complain (for example, in *A History of Western Philosophy*, Simon and Schuster, 1945, 452) that in Catholic circles, philosophy amounts to Aquinas and only Aquinas. Later in the encyclical John Paul encourages Christians to enrich their own thought with the insights of Indian thought, Chinese thought, and so on (100-107). At the same time, he cautions Christians not to abandon what the Church has gained from the Greek tradition. The Christian’s task, as he sees it, is to embrace what is wholesome in any philosophical enterprise, but to reject whatever is discor-
I hope readers will agree that much of what the pope says is just common sense. The general message of the encyclical, which is that we Christians ought to seek, by reason and faith, to come to know universally valid truths about God and God’s creation, ought to be appreciated by Christian scholars of all stripes. The encyclical is refreshing, edifying, and inspiring. I recommend it to anyone interested in the relationship between faith and reason.


Reviewed by Donald Lindskoog, Psychology, Northwestern College (Iowa)

This book alerts Christian readers to what many personality theorists regard as a genuine breakthrough in psychological science, namely, the Five-Factor Model of human personality. In 1985, P. T. Costa and R. R. McCrae began to build the case for a comprehensive description of the person as consisting of no more and no fewer than five basic traits: emotional stability, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. The argument they used was primarily mathematical, employing a statistical procedure called factor analysis for boiling down thousands of descriptive terms and personality test items to a few “factors” that capture their essence. Moreover, each of the five factors has been shown by the same statistical procedures to have six facets that further illuminate its nature. The fourteen years of follow-up research and scientific scrutiny have only strengthened the psychological community’s conviction that the Five-Factor Model is indeed among a handful of solidly established, reliable “law-like” findings.

For Christians this model’s unusually well-confirmed status invites comparison with scriptural principles that are assumed to have similar truth status. With this 1999 book, James Beck, a licensed clinical psychologist who teaches at Denver Seminary, accepts the task of making that comparison. Under the “Major Theses of This Book,” Beck states that “. . . this book will analyze ten major teaching themes of Jesus as illustrations of his counseling to us. The wonder of his counseling will become evident as we see how these ten themes speak powerfully to the five major factors found in human personality” (15). To do this, it is Beck’s intention to juxtapose each of the big five personality traits to two comparable character traits derived from the life and teachings of Jesus.

As he writes alternately about psychological and about biblical knowledge it becomes clear that Beck is one of a perhaps diminishing—but I believe admirable—group of Christians who also happen to be psychologists and who give sustained and heartfelt credence to both social science and revealed theology. Always suspect among Christians, psychology has lately become a particularly popular target of some evangelical Christians. A rash of anti-psychology books has appeared on the Christian bookstore shelves, including Psychoheresy: The Psychological Seduction of Christianity by Martin and Deidre Bobgan (EastGate, 1987); Psychobabble: The Failure of Modern Psychology and the Biblical Alternative by Richard Ganz (Crossway, 1993); and Why Christians Can’t Trust Psychology by Ed Bulkley (Harvest House, 1994). In the same vein, psychologist Larry Crabb a while ago decided that his deepening spirituality was incompatible with his training in clinical psychology.

Thus Beck is refreshingly bold in his owning, and even admiring, psychology. Moreover, he competently exegetes biblical passages relating to the ten major teaching themes of
Jesus, namely, spread joy, experience hope, display mercy, pursue justice, show love, be trustworthy, enjoy peace, live in acceptance, offer and accept confession, and seek and grant forgiveness. As I read I was sometimes moved by poignant insights from his exposition of biblical passages relating to each of these themes. Beyond this, Beck’s willingness to criticize evangelicalism, especially in his discussion of pursue justice, is courageous and timely, often fortified with illustrations from recent history in South Africa, Guatemala, and Mississippi. Generally, he provides a fine commentary on each of the ten themes that are derived from the life and ministry of Our Lord.

If the reader, however, wishes to clearly understand a logical link between the big five personality factors and the ten ministry themes of Jesus, he or she may be disappointed. Beck somewhat speculatively re-labels each of the factors using his own new categories: “Our Experiential Life,” “Our Motivational Life,” “Our Interpersonal Life,” “Our Attitudinal Life” and “Our Emotional Life.” From these, he moves to the ten ministry themes, two for each category listed above.

There are two problems with this linking process. The first is that the categories developed by Beck are not evidently faithful to the content items making up each of the five factors. Each of the factors was initially labeled by Costa and McCrae by examining the factor content items of which it was comprised and by trying to characterize the common theme represented by the highly inter-correlating items. As mentioned, Beck moves beyond this characterization by placing his own new label on each factor. Thus, for example, conscientiousness (Costa’s and McCrae’s term) becomes Our Motivational Life. But are conscientiousness and motivation in any way equivalent concepts? That they somewhat overlap one another seems intuitively probable, but that they are the self-same concept, either in essential theme or scope of meaning, has not been demonstrated. In another example, Costa’s and McCrae’s factor label agreeableness is transformed into Our Attitudinal Life. But the psychological continuum ranging from high agreeableness to low agreeableness does not seem to imply the same thing as the range of possible human attitudes (Our Attitudinal Life). In sum, then, there just does not seem to be a cogent connection between the Five-Factor labels and the categories Beck uses to structure Jesus’ ministry themes.

Another way to make the same point is to ask whether the book would have been essentially weakened had the discussion of the Five-Factor Model been totally absent. Taken as a discussion of central themes of Jesus’ life and ministry, the book is valuable. Beck’s training in hermeneutics and his careful exegesis make his discussions profitable, pleasurable reading. But the discussion of the five personality factors adds little except to provide a loose organizational structure for the discussion of themes of Jesus’ ministry.

The task that has engaged Beck has daunted dozens of Christian psychologists who have attempted in their writings, with varying success, to relate meaningfully the moral, spiritual, and theological framework of the Bible to the social scientific framework of psychology. It is indeed a worthwhile task that we trust is doable on the assumption of the unity of truth in Christ. Given the difficulty of the task, it is not surprising that only a small advance is made with each worthy effort.


Reviewed by Steve McKinzie, Dickinson College
Phillip Johnson has become something of a phenomenon in contemporary scientific and intellectual circles—a man who asks appropriate and important questions, but all in the most uncompromising and embarrassing ways. Johnson’s passion is, of course, evolutionary theory, and like the little boy in the fable, he is quite certain that the emperor (what one might call current evolutionary naturalism) is really wearing nothing at all. For Johnson, the evidence supporting the contemporary framework of an all-encompassing naturalism is anything but convincing. Honesty demands that the scientific establishment own up to the real difficulties of the Darwinian paradigm. But unlike the fable, a good many close to the emperor aren’t about to question his excellency’s wardrobe. The emperor’s advisors, the true believers in Darwinism, scientists who have an enormous vested interest in the scientific status quo, aren’t listening to Johnson, not even for a moment. None of them are ready to abandon their theories or their political power in the world of grant writing, academia, and industry—areas in which the Darwinian worldview still holds such powerful sway. For these scientists, nothing but intelligent design could conceivably replace the Darwinian framework, and none of them are eager to admit to intelligent design, no matter how persuasive the evidence. Consequently, the evolutionary scientific community vilifies Johnson, and they revile his writings, particularly his earlier books, Darwin on Trial (Regnery Gateway, 1991) and Reason in the Balance (InterVarsity, 1995). The virulence of their attacks suggests that more than a few of Johnson’s arguments may be hitting home.

The author’s new book, Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law and Culture offers a rare treat. It gives to the general public a single sampling of Johnson’s shorter writings over the last six years—essays, lecturers and reviews, drawn chiefly from his contributions to First Things and Books and Culture: A Christian Review. The compilation is pithy and no-holds-barred Johnson at his best. Trained as a lawyer, and currently holding a professorship at Berkeley’s School of Law, he has a barrister’s logical precision and a prosecutor’s penchant for making his accusations stick. Take for instance one of the book’s short historical essays, “Domesticating Darwin.” Here Johnson shows that even though most scientists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century recognized that the social implications of Darwin’s evolutionary paradigm were clearly racist, they nevertheless domesticated their hero’s theories. They made them suit the social prejudices of the day. Never mind the logical results of his theory in the realms of sociology or anthropology. Darwin must be made “to pipe the tune of liberal egalitarianism and cultural relativism,” and, the author adds, at the cost of significant intellectual coherence among his followers.

Johnson also has his share of fun with naturalism and its defenders. In a piece entitled “What is Darwinism?” he chides Stephen Jay Gould for defending classical Darwinism, even though Gould knows all too well its glaring weaknesses, and he teases Richard Dawkins about his notion of the creative powers of a “blind watchmaker” about which, Johnson reminds us, there is so very little evidence. In such instances, the author’s humor and logic can be devastating, for the man does his homework. He knows the scientific literature. He misses nothing.

But there is more. Johnson is also delightfully wide ranging in his reviews. He includes a penetrating account of Michael Behe’s Darwin’s Black Box (Free Press, 1996), as one might expect, but also a fascinating and surprisingly exuberant treatment (for a Protestant) of two books on Eastern Orthodoxy. There is a gracious review of the autobiography of Paul Feyerabend, the iconoclast and philosopher of science, and an appreciative analysis of George Marsden’s The Soul of the American University (Oxford, 1994).

The collection, taken as a whole, serves as an excellent introduction to Phillip Johnson,
an increasingly important figure in the contemporary debates surrounding science and its place in modern culture. Dedicated materialistic naturalists will find most of this collection and Johnson himself infuriating. Theistic evolutionists will think him unsettling. For the rest of us, he is the emperor’s youthful critic. You may not agree with all that he writes, but you cannot help but admire his spunk and good sense. Phillip Johnson is a fine writer and a tenacious debater. He is someone you want to keep on reading.


Reviewed by Roger Mohrlang, Religion, Whitworth College

In 1997, a heated controversy broke out among evangelical Christians over a proposed inclusive-language edition of the popular NIV (New International Version) translation of the Bible. First published in the U.K., the new gender-inclusive translation provoked a storm of protest among American conservatives. The American publishers of the NIV, battered by adverse publicity and pressure from key leaders of the Southern Baptist Church and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, quickly canceled all future plans for gender-inclusive changes in the NIV. In a meeting urgently convened in Colorado Springs, they also agreed to a more conservative set of guidelines for dealing with gender-related problems, formulated in part by the critics of the inclusive-language translation. Widely disseminated, these became known as the Colorado Springs Guidelines.

In the following months, many Bible translators and publishers of Scripture in favor of gender-inclusive translations began to voice their disagreement with the Colorado Springs Guidelines. They argued that the guidelines were too restrictive and failed to appreciate the complexities involved in Bible translation and the changing patterns of language usage. The resulting controversy elicited strong words, angered constituencies, and brought confusion to many churches.

In response to this controversy, D. A. Carson (Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) sets out in this lucid and well-reasoned book to shed some light on the difficult question of gender-related issues in Bible translation. After giving a brief history of the current controversy, Carson describes the complex issues involved in Bible translation and the different ways that gender functions in languages and cultures all over the world. He then offers a critical analysis both of the Colorado Springs Guidelines and of the gender-related principles underlying the new inclusive-language translation, showing the deficiencies of both and the need for more precise formulation. This is followed by a careful examination of a number of disputed Old and New Testament passages posing gender-related problems, together with suggestions about how they might best be translated. He devotes special attention to complex passages that have significant doctrinal implications. Carson concludes with a discussion of whether or not the English language is changing, and some final “pastoral considerations” in which he encourages the critics of inclusive-language translations to be more careful in their thinking, more cautious in their writing, and more civil in their responses.

A self-described evangelical “complementarian,” Carson affirms the need for the judicious use of inclusive language—not in order to accommodate the pressures of feminism, but in order to translate the original meaning of Scripture faithfully and to adjust to the
changing use of language. Because languages differ significantly in their semantic categories, Bible translation cannot be based on the simple desire to maintain “formal equivalence” (that is, the consistent literal translation of words like “he,” “him,” “man”). If the goal is faithful translation of the meaning, not simply the form, then the translator must be prepared to alter the form in order to preserve the meaning. (Even the ancient translators of the Septuagint and the New Testament writers appreciated the need for this.) In reality, the choices that Bible translators face are difficult and complex, and inevitably involve some degree of change in the original meaning. Those engaged in Bible translation must accept the limitations imposed by the different structures of the languages with which they are working.

Given a Christianity Today Book Award in 1999, this choice book—scholarly but non-technical—is intended for the general reader, not the specialist. It makes a number of useful contributions: (1) it provides an excellent introduction to the complex issues involved in producing a modern translation of the Bible; (2) it presents clearheaded and careful thinking about gender issues in Bible translation; and (3) it is a model of how to do careful, accurate biblical exegesis in context, illustrated by a number of helpful examples. It also gives an interesting, brief history of the different ways that people have dealt with gender problems in the English language—and shows how uncontrolled emotions and imprecise thinking can distort issues and hurt relationships in the Christian community.

The points to be criticized are few. The analysis of semantic structures of specific languages (chapter 4) could have been shortened and simplified. The specific guidelines could usefully have been written out again when they are discussed individually (chapter 5), to make it easier for the reader. The number of Old and New Testament passages examined (chapters 6-7) could have been reduced, as a number make the same point. The decision to translate the phrase “son of man” literally for the majority of its Old Testament occurrences (170-173) could be questioned. The slight sharpness of tone here and there (for example note 21 of chapter 1) could be softened.

Overall, this is a fine book—and a useful one. It is well conceived, clearly written, and carefully argued. Without question, it will help to sharpen the thinking and exegesis of Bible translators dealing with gender-related issues all over the world. It also has a lot to teach the general reader about Bible translation and careful biblical exegesis, as well as about the complexities of gender-related issues in Bible translation. I recommend this book for all serious students of the Bible.


Reviewed by Dennis Sansom, Religion and Philosophy, Samford University

This book is another indication of the growing interest in the relationship between religion and science. Goodenough is Professor of Biology at Washington University of Saint Louis, daughter of a former Methodist minister turned Professor of the History of Religions, a member of the editorial board of the influential religion-and-science journal Zygon, mother of five children, and choir member of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Saint Louis. She has written this book like a daily devotional, with two-thirds of each of the twelve chapters an exegesis of a particular scientific claim followed by a devotional reflection on it drawing out the features of what she calls “religious naturalism.” The book combines clear and precise
surveys and summaries of scientific findings and theories with interesting autobiographical episodes and musings. Goodenough engages the reader to look at science and religion from her own development in these areas.

She recounts a particular episode as a young college student in which the teacher told the class the heavens really are nothing more than 100 billion galaxies with perhaps 100 billion stars in each. This fact frightened her, robbing her of the sense of awe and religious wonder of the skies. Ever since then she has been trying to reintroduce the religious feelings of mystery and sacred depth into nature without seeing them as dependent on a transcendent God. Is it possible to fulfill the role of religion (which she says is the integration of cosmology and morality) without a God? Can we see nature as a place in which there is the sacred but not look for a divine source of holiness? Can we take our bearing about the nature and destiny of persons and the cosmos from what science tells us about them but do it in a religious way? Can we have a religion based on science but without a God who is transcendent to nature, a Creator and a Redeemer?

Goodenough believes we can and should: “It is therefore the goal of this book to present an accessible account of our scientific understanding of Nature and then suggest ways that this account can call forth appealing and abiding religious responses—an approach that can be called religious naturalism” (xvii). Even though she does not articulate the distinction between religious style and content, it is implicit throughout the book. Religious content refers to the creeds, rituals, and symbols that attempt to delineate the reality of God. Religious style is the immediate influence of the depth-content of religious experiences, the necessary ways to respond to a holy and sacred reality, the form in which the encounter with the divine takes place.

Instead of God providing the depth-content, Nature does, and in the same ways in which we respond to God, we can also relate to the Mystery of the cosmos. Goodenough wants a “covenant with Mystery” informed by science and inspired by art and the history of the world’s religions, in which we live according to a planetary ethic, respecting and adoring the complexity and design of the cosmos. From this covenant emerges the renewed and strengthened religious principles of gratitude, reverence, a credo of the continuation of life, and a deep wisdom of our place within the epic of evolution.

For instance, Goodenough shows that by an understanding of how an organism works through a vast series of genetic feed-back loops in which it is equipped and learns to feed and reproduce itself, we can better appreciate the grace of being individuals, especially since we are the improbable product of the union of one of 400,000 ova with one of hundreds of millions of sperm cells. We are our own miracle, and in knowing this “I sanctify myself with my own grace. To the extent that I know myself, I am known. My yearning to be Known is relegated to the corridors of arrogance, and I sing my own song, with deep gratitude for my existence” (60).

Though the book is an interesting, good, and delightful read, it illustrates that just as when a theologian or philosopher tries to do science it frequently comes across as rather sophomoric, so too when a scientist tries to be a theologian and/or a philosopher it frequently comes across rather amateurishly. The language of our scientific, philosophical, and religious concepts has emerged through profound experiences and centuries of scrutiny and analysis. Its words mean things because they refer to things, and for that reason they are not so malleable that we can get the word “nature” to refer (so to speak) to a transcendent deity, or the word Mystery (Goodenough capitalizes it) to refer only to the intricacies of nature, without the words losing much of their meaning. On a certain level of daily discourse, we are
quite creative with words, but when we stop and think about our ideas, we soon realize they are created and shaped by our language. Hence, to assume that religious language without a religious source can communicate a scientific insight on the cosmos is to take away the life expressed in the religious speech and substitute the vocabulary of the scientist. The attempt is interesting and provocative, but the meaning of religious language still implies God.

Ian Barbour (a leader in the interdisciplinary study of science and religion) says there are four ways of relating science and religion: (1) conflict, (2) independence, (3) dialogue, and (4) integration. Each way has strengths and weaknesses. A particular weakness of the “integration” model is that either scientific or religious ideas may be distorted to fit a preconceived synthesis that claims to encompass all reality. I believe Goodenough is subject to this criticism. She is not to be faulted for trying to integrate science and religion. There have been great examples of such attempts (for example, Alfred North Whitehead’s Process and Reality), and Goodenough makes a contribution to this model by showing that science does not abrogate the usefulness of religious language (in the manner of some thinkers such as Daniel Dennett of Darwin’s Dangerous Idea [Simon & Schuster, 1995] and Richard Dawkins of The Selfish Gene[Oxford, 1976]), and that religious language need not avoid scientific connotations to be distinct. But her effort to eliminate religious content from religious style so that we can remain scientific and religious at the same time runs the risks of promoting not a religious naturalism but a scientific naturalism with some important religious words (for example, Mystery, sacred, and covenant) added.

Nothing would be lost to Goodenough’s approach if she claimed there is a God. The existence of a transcendent God does not preclude science, and until science proves that there is no God (which frankly would be a waste of its time; it has enough to do), science does not need to think the choice is either transcendence or nature. They are not mutually exclusive and can in fact inform each other. Much would be added to Goodenough’s approach if she did indicate a theistic support, because at least then her religious style would have a religious content which would keep the words grounded in a way of life formed by the encounter with a transcendent God in nature.


Reviewed by Susie C. Stanley, Historical Theology, Messiah College

Brekus’s meticulous research, reflected in more than one hundred pages of notes and bibliography, resulted in a list of over one hundred women preachers in “evangelical” Arminian churches which she identifies as Freewill Baptists, Methodists, Christian Connection, and African Methodists. She also considers Jemima Wilkinson and Ann Lee. Brekus’s sources included church records, tracts, and memoirs written by clergy, religious periodicals, denominational manuscript records, and local histories. A helpful appendix lists the women who preached between 1740 and 1845, along with their birth and death dates (if known), their denominational affiliations, and the first year their names appeared in records.

Brekus traces the support and opposition women preachers faced. Along with recovering the history of women preachers, Brekus uses their stories to challenge misconceptions such as those fostered by a neo-Marxist analysis of revivals and Ann Douglas’s feminization
theory of nineteenth-century churches. She also joins the debate over whether the concept of woman’s sphere limited or freed women. She adds her voice to the latter position by showing that the emphasis on women’s supposed innate superior piety and virtue was used to justify allowing women to preach. The boundaries between the public and private spheres blurred when their contemporaries referred to women preachers as Mothers in Israel and Sisters in Christ, facilitating the expansion of their domestic responsibilities to the larger family of God.

Brekus is correct in asserting that Phoebe Palmer, the Methodist lay preacher, claimed she did not preach “in a technical sense” (338). However, Palmer proposed that all preachers, men and women, preach instead in a “biblical sense.” Palmer’s defense of women preachers, *The Promise of the Father*, attests to her affirmation of female preachers. In another error relating to Methodism, Brekus indicates Methodists were premillennial (159) when in fact they were postmillennial.

Unfortunately, Brekus confirms Ecclesiastes’ lament that “there is nothing new under the sun.” Although current advocates of women preachers use the same verses as their foremothers, arguments have not yet convinced a large segment of Christians to recognize the call of women to preach. The backlash against women preachers today echoes the backlash Brekus describes in the 1830s and 1840s. Opponents, then and now, accuse women of being “masculine” in an effort to shame them out of their calling. Women preachers of the nineteenth century avoided association with woman’s rights advocates of their day because they “supposedly sought to destroy the traditional family” (327). Contemporary opponents of women’s rights advocates, such as Beverly LeHaye, level identical charges in an attempt to prevent Christian women from aligning with them.

Likewise, the explanation for the decline of women clergy in the mid-1800s rings true today. Those of us who have examined the significant reduction in women preachers within the Wesleyan/Holiness movement also have adopted a sociological analysis to explain this phenomenon. Upward mobility, resulting in marginal sects becoming respectable denominations, resulted in the reduction. Sociological determinism, which should be inimical to believers in free will, seems to prevail! Theologically, it was mainline clergy in the 1830s and 1840s who voiced the loudest opposition to women preachers. Today, fundamentalists, including some who have infiltrated Wesleyan/Holiness churches, have exerted the most influence in discouraging women preachers.

It is difficult to find fault with a study that is so well documented and makes such a sizable contribution to American religious history. However, despite Brekus’s rationale for excluding Quaker women, their inclusion would have been a welcome addition to her book. Granted, their theology did differ from that of “evangelical” women, but as Brekus concedes, the women she considers “were deeply influenced by the examples of Quaker women ministers” (16). For instance, many adopted the plain dress of the Quakers even though their denominations did not require such restrictions. Since Quakers were the only group that “fully recognized women’s right to speak in public” in Revolutionary America (75) and dozens of Quaker women ministers itinerated by 1800 (76), it is no surprise that “evangelical” women looked to Quaker women as models. In fact, Laura Haviland, whom Brekus mentions in connection with her time as a Wesleyan Methodist preacher, was actually a birthright Quaker who left the Quakers when they disapproved of her ecumenical involvement with other Christians who opposed slavery. Haviland rejoined the Quakers in 1872, twenty-six years before her death. The connections seem to justify the inclusion of more information on Quaker women.
In the epilogue, Brekus skips over Wesleyan/Holiness women but mentions the rise of pentecostal women preachers. Denominations in the Wesleyan/Holiness movement began ordaining women in unprecedented numbers during the later decades of the nineteenth century. Their story picks up where Brekus’s ends.

Brekus provides a more inclusive understanding of American history between 1740 and 1845 by repopulating it with women preachers who had been forgotten. Her book is invaluable for scholars in women’s studies and a must for those who study women preachers, because she has unearthed stories of women who were “buried in the flow of history” (263).


Reviewed by Charles Taliaferro, Philosophy, St. Olaf College

Aviators sometimes refer to ideal flying conditions as CAVU, which stands for ceiling and visibility unlimited. In today’s intellectual climate, mind-body dualists will not find much that is CAVU. In this collection of ten essays by eight scholars from different disciplinary perspectives, the case against dualism is advanced alongside the case for nonreductive physicalism. Whatever happened to dualism? These authors concede that dualism has not been disproved by contemporary science (13, 139), but they argue that there are good scientific, philosophical and theological reasons against it. By their lights, a materialist account of human nature, and nature tout court, is compatible with Christianity. This is depicted as good news, for Christians would otherwise face an intellectual crisis due to the notorious inadequacies of a dualist philosophy (24). These philosophers, theologians, biologists, and psychologists argue that Christians need not lose their souls by gaining a materialist view of nature.

The book has considerable merits, which I shall highlight. But I note with regret that dualism is given extremely short shrift at many places. There is no citation or reference to important work in defense of dualism by Richard Swinburne, John Foster, W. D. Hart, Howard Robinson, and others. John Eccles’s work is discussed, but there is otherwise little indication that the authors are even aware of more recent, philosophically constructive approaches to dualism. Prominent members of the Christian philosophical community have aligned themselves with dualism (for example Alvin Plantinga, Robert M. Adam, Stephen Evans, Keith Yandell), and to neglect their contributions is to truncate the stated goal of Whatever Happened to the Soul? John Cooper’s superb Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting (Eerdmans, 1989) is in the bibliography, but it is a shame that the arguments of this book are not addressed in a sustained fashion. Nor are those materialists addressed who are themselves less than sanguine about the success of materialism: Colin McGinn, Ned Block, Galen Strawson, Thomas Nagel. McGinn’s comment is representative: “We have a good idea how the Big Bang led to the creation of stars and galaxies, principally by force of gravity. But we know of no comparable force that might explain how ever-expanding lumps of matter might have developed an inner conscious life (The Mysterious Flame, Basic Books, 1999, 15). Nagel is referenced on page 18, but none of his work is cited or discussed.
Dualists are characterized as upholding an excessively splintered view of the mind-body relationship. Dualists think the soul “somehow inhabits a body” (xiii). Dualist accounts of mind-body interaction are said to violate the law of conservation of matter and energy (7-8). And dualism is shown to be implausible by recent neuroscience, which demonstrates the radical interdependence of the mental and physical. Dualism has historically been utilized in the defense of slavery, the oppression of women, and the denigration of sex and marriage (chapter 9). Dualism also unfairly exalts human beings apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. It is suggested that dualists deny that you can see human beings: “Humans are what you see; that is, there is not another invisible, non-material part of the individual that must be factored into the formula of understanding. The person is he or she who physically stands before you” (228).

“Philosophers see dualism as no longer tenable,” Nancey Murphy writes in chapter 1. Certainly many philosophers do, for the reasons just outlined. But there are able dualist philosophers who have replied to the above objections. Dualists have construed the soul (mind or person) and body in profoundly integrated terms so that there is no place for thinking of the soul as a mere inhabitant in the body. If an integrated form of dualism (of the kind articulated by John Cooper, among many others) is taken seriously, there is also every reason for the dualist to claim that you can see the people who are before you. To claim otherwise is to buy into the intentionally conceived caricature of dualism that Gilbert Ryle advanced in The Concept of Mind (Hutchinson, 1949). (A serious reading of The Elusive Mind [Allen & Unwin, 1969] by H. D. Lewis is a good antidote to Ryle’s effort to bury dualism). Mind-body interaction is mysterious so long as one assumes that the only causal interaction that is possible is physical. It is question-begging to assume at the outset that physical causation is the only kind. Versions of the law of the conservation of matter and energy do rule out dualism, as they would rule out God’s activity in the world. The contributors to Whatever Happened to the Soul? do not want to rule out divine action. And quantum theory seems to allow for enough leeway such that a strict physicalist determinism is not the only scientific option. Theists in the classical tradition hold that the cosmos in all its features is sustained in being at each instant by God’s causal, sustaining power. If theism is intelligible, then presumably it is intelligible to posit mental-physical causal interaction in human nature. There is nothing about dualism per se that rules out the radical dependency of the mental and physical or precludes a dualist reading of nonhuman animals. Most contemporary dualist hold that the mental states of animals are no more identical with physical states than we find in human nature. Dualists have been feminists, anti-racists, anti-slavery, and pro-environment. Dualism has been linked with some nasty company. So has the theory of evolution. One example of how dualism can be ecological or, in a word, “green,” is that much of the Native American approaches to nature that are currently in vogue among environmentalists is dualist.

Setting to one side the critique of dualism, the positive portrait that emerges in this text is of great interest to the Christian community. Can Christians retain belief in the soul, albeit the soul is understood as a function of the brain? In Chapter 1 Murphy offers a survey of Christian views of human nature, highlighting the theological significance of contemporary science and biblical studies that have underscored the holistic character of human life. In Chapter 2 Francisco Ayala offers an evolutionary account of the emergence of ethical reflection that is free from contemporary sociobiology and the assumption that evolution by its nature is ipso facto progressive. If you are looking for evolutionary ethics, I recommend Ayala over E. O. Wilson. V. E. Anderson’s contribution, in Chapter 3, is an accessible, scientifically sophisticated reading of contemporary genetics and an argument against the sufficiency of
genetics alone, shorn of psychological, social, and spiritual factors. In Chapter 4, Malcolm Jeeves steers a course between dualism and reductive materialism. Chapter 5 is Warren Brown’s case for seeing the soul in terms of “critical cognitive capacities for personal relatedness.” Murphy’s Chapter 6 is a pivotal chapter in this joint project. She argues for the compatibility of physicalism and intentionality, freedom, rationality, and religious experience. Even if unsuccessful (and, unfortunately, I think it is unsuccessful), this chapter is a bold, fertile, admirable contribution. Joel Green and Ray Anderson place the book’s nonreductive materialism in biblical perspective. In Chapter 9 Stephen Post blasts dualism for its many sins of association: “The fact that a tradition with a dualist theory of human nature has a paradoxical moral legacy, one radically egalitarian and inclusive, the other radically aristocratic and exclusive, suggests that dualism contains no single moral message” (209). The same may be said for materialism. Warren Brown wraps the book up with a useful summation of the advantages of nonreductive materialism, both scientific and theological.

While it is regrettable that the authors do not take constructive dualist projects more seriously, it would also be regrettable if this book were ignored by dualists, materialists, and those who have yet to declare their allegiance. The current field of philosophy of mind is murky, and virtually every extant theory today faces serious obstacles. Nonreductive materialism can be accused of retaining all of the difficulties of dualism (how do mental and physical aspects or levels or properties emerge or interact?) and inheriting all the problems of physicalism (accounting for consciousness). But no theory right now is flying in CAVU conditions, and we can learn from each other as we struggle with the philosophy of nature, both human and divine.


Reviewed by Frederick A. Van Geest, Political Science, Dordt College.

The increasingly popular term “the third way” refers to a desirable middle ground that can be embraced as an alternative to the ascendant neoliberalism of our time and the failed socialism of the Cold War era. It is also the catch phrase of Tony Blair’s governing Labour party in Britain and is intended to encapsulate the ideological direction of the government. The book titled The Third Way by well-known British sociologist Anthony Giddens is an important book, not so much because of anything profound or insightful Giddens has to say, but because of the historical moment in which it is written. In writing this book, Giddens is attempting to give a reasoned, intellectual foundation for the proliferation of “third way” policies in Europe and elsewhere at the end of this century’s last, ideologically confused decade.

This book may be destined to become a classic precisely because of its attempt to carve meaning out of the struggle over dominant ideas that has shaped our world since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, the end of the decade is a good time to take stock of the recent ideological debates and how they have resulted in changed socio-economic policies (or vice-versa). At this point in history, there are on the one hand those who agree with Francis Fukuyama that the ascendancy of neoliberalism as reflected in the global dominance of American-style capitalism is desirable and vindicated in the grand “success” of the American economy in the 1990s. In contrast, on the other hand, a decade after the end of the Cold
War, supporters of socialism are few, and modern examples of its socio-economic “success” even fewer. And then there are those in between.

Giddens, along with many other social democrats in this latter group, does not wish to abandon certain socialist ideals. In his view, among the many virtues of socialism we risk losing with the rise of neoliberalism are its capacity to be an antidote to the rampant individualism inherent in neoliberalism and its concern with equality and social stability. Giddens is under no illusion, however, that the old style socialist ideology of the British Labour party in pre-Blair days is capable of making a return, nor does he lament its demise. Rather, he concentrates on establishing an ideological basis for a new-style social democracy called “the third way.”

What makes his exposition and analysis of the “third way” so interesting is that “the third way” seems to be a praxis in search of an ideological justification, more so than the other way around. Indeed, social democratic parties practicing the new style of social democracy dominate in Europe today, controlling or sharing power in thirteen of the fifteen national governments in the European Union. And yet, politicians and lay people alike continue to be in doubt as to what “the third way” actually means. This is where Giddens’s book becomes useful. It can be viewed largely as an attempt to given a coherent, substantive ideological justification for what seems to be happening in so many European countries. Giddens himself has been involved in both the praxis and theory of the “the third way,” being a close advisor to Prime Minister Tony Blair and instrumental in helping to develop in Britain policies which are neither neoliberal nor old-style socialist in nature.

For Giddens, the “third way” “refers to a framework of thinking and policy-making that seeks to adapt social democracy to a world which has changed fundamentally over the past two or three decades” (26). “Third way” policies revolve around a state that promotes mediating and community-building institutions of civil society and invests heavily in the human capital of its populace. According to Giddens, “third way values” include “equality, protection of the vulnerable, freedom as autonomy, no rights without responsibilities, no authority without democracy, cosmopolitan pluralism, and philosophic conservatism” (66). The “third way programme” involves “the radical centre, the new democratic state (the state without enemies), active civil society, the democratic family, the new mixed economy, equality as inclusion, positive welfare, the social investment state, the cosmopolitan nation, and cosmopolitan democracy” (70). In a nutshell, Giddens says this “renewed social democracy has to be left of centre, because social justice and emancipatory politics remain at its core” (45).

As an articulation of a “third way” program, the book is valuable. The last decade has seen many policy initiatives designed in this “way,” a fact Gidden’s recognizes as he acknowledges Britain’s rather late arrival on the “third way” train. Thus, the book brings together many of the familiar ideas that are coming to be known as part of the “third way.” They can no longer be considered original or unique, but they are a good composite of “third way” ideas, give ideological justification for many of the political phenomena in Europe in the 1990s, and are an explicit acknowledgment that socialism is, in practice, dead, and neoliberalism untenable.

The Christian scholar especially should welcome this book because it does not exalt or “idolize” a particular set of ideas, as is often the case with neoliberals and socialists. The “third way” is not a rigid political program based upon immutable ideas. Additionally, in this reviewer’s opinion, the “third way” has much in it that is consistent with biblical principles of community (as opposed to individualism), mercy, justice, and equality as image
The “third way” still has a long way to go. As an ideology it is still ambiguous and not always well defined. Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint, one of its more glaring weaknesses is its lack of a firm epistemological basis; many of its ideas appear to have little basis other than that they sound good, and practice tells us that “the third way” is by default a desirable ideological system, the two historical extremes having been found wanting. It is in this theoretical gap that the Christian scholar may have much to contribute in intellectual conversation with adherents of “the third way.” For instance, the various tasks Giddens recommends for the state in “the third way” sound good and reasonable, but they do not derive from any principled basis for what role the state ought to perform in a complex, differentiated society. Biblical notions of jubilee, the dignity of the individual, the importance of community, stewardship and justice can provide this basis. “The third way” may become by default the ideological basis for our modern nations (at least in Europe), and we would be well served by ensuring that there is a sound basis for it. At the very least, its newfound status demands that it receive from Christian scholars the same biblical scrutiny as neoliberalism and socialism.


Reviewed by Clarence Walhout, English, Calvin College

Vanhoozer’s title derives from Stanley Fish’s well-known book *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Harvard, 1980). Fish holds the postmodern, nonrealist view that meaning does not inhere in texts but in readers’ responses to texts. Since, on Fish’s terms, meaning arises only in the reading process, meaningful interpretations of texts are subjective and relative to the individuals and communities who construct and accept them. Vanhoozer’s book is dedicated to combating this view of hermeneutics and arguing the case that texts do have meaning independent of readers. The whole of interpretation theory hangs on this central issue of realism versus nonrealism. Fish is not Vanhoozer’s only antagonist, however; others include Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty.

As his philosophical allies, Vanhoozer claims such figures as Paul Ricoeur, Jürgen Habermas, John Searle, Mikhail Bakhtin, George Steiner, and Emmanuel Levinas. In large part his book assimilates key arguments from these and other figures, and thus serves as an introduction to the ins and outs of hermeneutical theory and a guide to contemporary approaches and theorists as well as a careful exposition of the author’s own positions. Vanhoozer puts his own stamp on the arguments by infusing them with the concerns of Christian theological and biblical hermeneutics.

Vanhoozer acknowledges that in the context of contemporary theorizing one cannot hold the view that there is a single correct interpretation of a text. However, he argues, even though no single interpretation can claim absolute certainty, interpretations can be judged to be closer to or farther from the truth because of the meanings that can be discovered within texts. Texts contain normative criteria for determining what interpretations are possible and plausible. Vanhoozer accepts the term “critical realism” for his position: “realism” because there is a meaningful and knowable textual reality outside the reader, and “critical” because
that textual reality can be known only through hermeneutical processes that are subject to error and the limitations of historical understanding. Because of the meanings discovered within texts, interpretations can be “adequate” even if not absolute.

For Vanhoozer hermeneutics is ultimately theological in nature, since theory is always concerned with the issue of transcendence: either the realist affirmation or the nonrealist denial. To structure his own understanding of the concerns and processes of textual interpretation, Vanhoozer uses a trinitarian theology. As the Father (author) speaks the word and as the Son (incarnated word or text) embodies the intent of the Father and as the Holy Spirit responds to and carries out the intentions of Father and Son, so authors, texts, and respondents are interdependent and equally essential elements in the processes of interpretation.

The theological arguments are not fashioned in extreme or eccentric ways and do not have the doctrinaire tone that is sometimes found in theological discussions of hermeneutics. Vanhoozer places himself well within the mainstream of Christian thought, particularly as it is articulated in the reformed tradition of Calvinistic protestantism. From that vantage point he makes a strong case for the need to rejuvenate traditional Christian realism so that it will continue to thrive in an intellectual environment that is dominated by a nonrealist hermeneutics of suspicion. While Vanhoozer’s theological concerns are always apparent, however, they are not the sole or even the dominant concerns. He is primarily interested in general literary hermeneutics, and he places the theological themes within that larger context.

The book is long, comprehensive, and a bit repetitive, but clear and readable in style. Its organization is lucid, and reading is aided throughout by the numerous topical heads and subheads. The first half of the book analyzes and critiques the nonrealists, who are characterized as the Undoers and the Users (deconstructionists and pragmatists); the second half presents Vanhoozer’s own case for the realist position. Each half is subdivided into three main sections which focus in turn on (1) the author, (2) the text, and (3) the reader.

The arguments are too numerous and detailed to summarize here, but crucial to Vanhoozer’s account is the affirmation of the role of the author and the author’s intention. From his reclamation of authorial intention flow important implications for understanding the text and the processes of reading. As a basis for his discussion of authors, texts, and readers, Vanhoozer makes use of speech-action theory, relating the three dimensions of that theory—locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts—to the corresponding triad of author, text, and reader. Just as meaning in ordinary speech (communicative action) cannot be understood without consideration of the three components of the speech act, so texts cannot be understood without consideration of author, text, and reader. The author has a real presence in the text even though he/she is in actual life absent from the text. The meaning given by the locutionary and illocutionary actions of the author remain with the text and can be discovered and understood by the reader who responds in perlocutionary ways to the authorial presence. Hermeneutical interpretation of texts, like a listener’s interpretation of a speaker in ordinary conversation, needs to be understood in light of the fundamental structure of all communicative action. And because of this interdependence of speaker (author), speech (text), and listener (reader), hermeneutics is able also to deal with the ethics of interpretation. Readers have rights and responsibilities that arise from their role in the communicative action of reading, and from their dependence on the authorial actions embedded in the text.

Vanhoozer has given us the large-scale exposition of a Christian realist hermeneutical theory that many have been hoping for since the advent of post-structuralist and deconstructionist theories. It should serve for many years as a resource of ideas and argu-
ments to be discussed and developed. It would serve as an excellent resource for students as well as for hermeneutical scholars, both literary and theological.

It is with some uneasiness, therefore, that I make the following three observations in critique. These do not undermine my admiration of the book, but perhaps suggest that the discussion of hermeneutical theory is always an ongoing process.

The first observation is that Vanhoozer occasionally makes statements that seem less than precise or fair. A sympathetic reader will accept them in context, but a dubious reader would seize on them as reason to accuse the book of misrepresenting the nonrealist position. I give two examples. In characterizing postmodern critics, Vanhoozer writes: “Difference and otherness have replaced rationality and universality in the postmodern pantheon” (198). The arguments against postmodernism are cogent enough and would stand taller without this rhetorical caricaturing. While difference and otherness are important for postmodernists, this does not necessitate or assume the rejection of rationality or even of universality. A second example is this. In arguing that postmodernists “undo the connections between words, speakers, and world,” Vanhoozer states: “There is therefore nothing to hold the play of language in check nor anything to give it purpose” (203). This conclusion would certainly not be justified for the postmodernist reader and should not be even for the sympathetic reader. Postmodernist language theories do not throw all checks and purposes to the wind. They may not be those of the realists, but they do nevertheless exist within the frame of postmodern and nonrealist theory. Tighter editorial restraint could have avoided a number of these overgeneralizations.

A second general comment can be related to the book’s title. Though Vanhoozer answers its question with a strong yes, one could answer it with a no and still accept Vanhoozer’s general position. The reason for this arises from the difficulty in defining the word meaning. Vanhoozer argues that there is meaning in the text because of the nature of speech actions: meaning arises from the illocutionary actions of the speaker (author), which are embedded in the speech (text). Words have meaning because their intentional purposes when they are spoken or written are inseparable from the words themselves. A text comes to us permeated with the illocutions of the author, and therefore it has a meaning that exists prior to and outside of the reader and the reader’s response. However, one could argue that if meaning does not exist apart from illocutionary actions, then meaning is not lodged in the text per se but appears only in and through the actions of authors and readers. The text is crucial to the meaning but does not have the meaning “contained” within it. Thus, one could answer no to the title question and still retain Vanhoozer’s arguments.

The matter I am bringing up is a semantic one, but in view of the longstanding difficulty in defining the term meaning, Vanhoozer might be better served by making a cleaner definition. If one wants to say that there is meaning in the text and also that meaning is a property of a communicative action, then one is speaking on the one hand of meaning in an object and on the other of meaning in an action. One would then need to speak of two kinds of meaning or find some other way of making that distinction and defining that difference. It would seem more efficient to say that texts have a potential for meaning (Vanhoozer does at times speak of the potential meaning of texts) that becomes actualized through the communicative actions of authors and readers. If meaning inheres not in objects per se but in the communicative speech actions of agents (speakers and listeners, authors and readers), then we could reduce the ambiguities that surround the term meaning and provide a more nuanced and subtle answer to the question “Is there meaning in this text?”

A third comment involves the use of the word transcendence and the argument that
hermeneutical theory is fundamentally theological because it involves the issue of transcendence. If transcendence means simply that there exists a reality outside of and beyond the consciousness of human persons, then the term does not necessarily imply a divine transcendence. Any “other” is transcendent to the self, whether that be the otherness of nature, of other persons, or of an imagined order. And if one can speak of transcendence without speaking of God, then the issue of transcendence need not be strictly speaking theological. A nonrealist atheistic theorist could deal with the question of transcendence, yet deny that the question is a theological one. Perhaps some Christian theists would argue that at some deep level the fundamental issues of hermeneutics will entail religious and theological concerns, but there seems little to be gained in asserting that all hermeneutics is fundamentally theological. The assertion seems to rest on debatable definitions. But while I question the claim that hermeneutics is at its core theological, I nevertheless think Vanhoozer’s account of theological hermeneutics is interesting and fruitful.

In spite of these three critical comments, which deal more with semantic than substantive matters, I still have high regard for this book. It is because of its substance that I heartily commend it as a strong contribution to Christian scholarship.


Reviewed by Ronald A. Wells, History, Calvin College

William J. (Beau) Weston has written a challenging (in several senses) book. His take on the history of Presbyterianism over the past century will challenge extant viewpoints from both the putative “right” and “left.” His method of presentation will be regarded either as brilliant or irritating to readers. His main thesis advances a theory about “competition,” which, if valid, would alter the way we look at the “culture wars” in American religion.

Beau Weston is a sociologist, not a historian. He freely admits that the history part of his book is derivative of the prior work done on Presbyterianism by, for example, George Marsden, Bradley Longfield, Randall Balmer, Lefferts Loetscher, Robert Handy and Daryl Hart. But, even on this level of analysis, Weston’s contention is that “the lessons” of history are not so clear as previously supposed. The Presbyterian (USA) church neither apostatized nor fulfilled its ecumenical/inclusivist destiny. Rather, the “loyalist” center held. Future historians doing primary work in the history of Presbyterianism will need to keep Weston’s suggestions in mind.

Weston’s structure in this book is, by his own admission, “unusual.” It is at least that. The reader will blink at least once when learning in the introduction that the author intends to tell essentially “the same story four times, delving deeper each time.” First is a straightforward, short narrative of controversial Presbyterian events from the 1890s onwards. Then Weston recycles to major players, then institutions, and finally to the theoretical level. Some readers may find all this to-ing and fro-ing irritating or unnecessary. While I might not have chosen this structure, I believe an author should be allowed his premise as long as it works reasonably well. Just so in this case.

The real challenge Beau Weston offers is neither historical nor literary but theoretical. He utilizes an idea first mooted by Donald Luidens and Roger Nemeth, sociologists at Hope College, in a path-breaking study a decade ago. The model suggests that in studying prote-
tant denominations too much attention has been paid to change-makers, either progressive or regressive, rather than those who persisted. The loyalists of the center are not mere survivalists who will do anything the keep the church going, though they want their church to strive and thrive. Neither are they mere compromisers, finding a middle way between the pushy folks of right and left, though compromise is not thought wrong by the loyalists. Rather, the loyalists comprise the vast majority of the church who have thought deeply about the mission of their church and—vitaly—are determined to play by the rules of the church order in keeping that mission alive. In this theory, the contending minority parties of right and left contend not with each other but for the affections and support of the majority centrists.

How does this theory work in practice? Well, in the case of the Presbyterian Church (USA) it seems to work fairly well. The conservatives rallied successfully in the 1890s against an early Presbyterian “modernist,” Charles Briggs. They won fairly easily in that first skirmish. They thought it would be a continuing formula for dominance in the church if they “held the line.” They were wrong. According to Weston the conservatives lost in the 1920s and 1930s not necessarily because of a different theology but because of angering loyalists by using unconstitutional tactics. The liberals, for their part, had learned the lesson of their loss in the Briggs case by not arguing theologically with the conservatives but by persuading the loyalists that a broad standard of tolerance was more within the Presbyterian character that doctrinal, and doctrinaire, conflict.

Weston’s analysis will not satisfy those descendants of Machen who lost in the controversies of the 1930s, nor will his sociological observations be accepted without a lot of questions. Can it really be, they will ask, that the PCUSA was lost to (what they call) “apostasy” because of mere constitutional questions? Weston, I suppose, would reply as follows: conservatives had both history and numbers on their side, but they lost because they could not grasp what loyalism actually comes to. Machen himself could not believe that so few “sound” people followed him out to join in what became the Presbyterian Church in America and other sectarian Presbyterian mini-denominations. According to Weston, Machen and his friends never learned to compete by the rules in a complex organization. Indeed, as Bradley Longfield has reminded us in *The Presbyterian Controversy* (Oxford University Press, 1991), Machen was a southerner for whom secession was an honorable alternative—an alternative that did not appeal to Clarence McCartney, who was as much committed to neo-Baconian common sense literalism as Machen, but who preferred to stay within the church.

Beau Weston’s contribution to understanding change in religious institutions may be of great use in studying other denominations and groups. But a lingering question is this: will this kind of “loyalism” be seen as specific to the time period of his study? Some recent research in religious trends—in which the baby boomers are not loyal to church, nation, family, etc.—may raise questions about the utility of “loyalism” in future studies. For now, though, this contribution seems quite compelling.
A theme linking these two volumes is the challenges facing Christian higher education in a time of relative success (despite its oft-predicted demise). “Christian colleges and universities are celebrating their success, not just in enrollment growth and fiscal solvency, but in a significant role as major players in American higher education,” remarks David McKenna in a foreword to *The University Through the Eyes of Faith* (8). He then describes that book’s purpose as follows: “At the height of success of Christian higher education, Steve Moore has asked thoughtful observers of the contemporary scene to join him in reflecting upon the key issues confronting the faith-affirming college as it comes to another defining moment” (9). The nine essays are wide-ranging and by a diverse group of contributors including Moore himself, vice president for campus life at Seattle Pacific University; SPU president Phil Eaton; Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow; and Pepperdine Distinguished Professor of Religion Richard Hughes, among others.

*The Liberal Arts in Higher Education*, as its title attests, is focused both more narrowly—on the liberal arts—and more broadly, in that it does not address itself exclusively to Christian higher education. As a project, however, of and for Azusa Pacific University, to whose faculty all the contributors belong, it considers especially the role of the liberal arts in relation to the distinctive goals of Christian institutions—particularly those achieving a certain kind of success. Alluding to Azusa Pacific’s “substantial growth, financial stability, and widening recognition” in recent years, and observing that “explosive growth prompts introspection,” the editors suggest that one of APU’s “most interesting challenges is shared with hundreds of other colleges and universities: the challenge of carving out an identity as a comprehensive university that offers both professional preparation and a liberal education” (xi). Contributions include four substantial articles and ten reviews of books important to the conversation.
Based on the third, revised edition of the German Evanglische Kirchenlexikon (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986-1997), the Encyclopedia of Christianity is to be published in five volumes over several years. It aspires to “describe the Christian faith and community in their myriad forms today and throughout the 2,000 years of Christian history” (jacket blurb), while also considering the overall religious and sociocultural context of contemporary Christianity through articles on other world religions, cultural trends, social issues, and political and economic forces. A special feature is its individual treatments of all but the smallest countries. More than simply a translation of the EKL, the EC has been adapted and enriched through the addition of articles of special interest to an English-speaking audience, tailoring and expansion of many of the translated articles, and updating and substantial “Anglicizing” of bibliographies. Finally, its narrative content has been usefully augmented with generous helpings of statistical data under the special editorship of David Barrett.

Fuller Seminary’s redoubtable Geoffrey Bromiley adds the EC to an imposing record of translation and/or editing projects that already includes such formidable achievements as Kittel and Friedrich’s Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Barth’s Church Dogmatics, and the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.


McKim’s Handbook surveys, in broadly chronological fashion, around a hundred of the most influential biblical interpreters over the course of Christian history, in individual sketches by an almost equal number of contributors. Many of its subjects are household names to anyone having even a nodding acquaintance with the history of Christian thought—Augustine, Origen, Aquinas, Erasmus, Calvin, Luther, Edwards, Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, Wesley, Scofield, Bultmann, Barth. But while such major figures are amply represented in numerous reference works, concise treatments with specific focus on their approaches to biblical interpretation may not be so readily come by. And the Handbook’s coverage of less prominent names—Theodore of Mopsuestia in the fourth and fifth centuries, Denys the Carthusian in the fifteenth, Pilgram Marpeck in the sixteenth, Charles Hodge in the nineteenth, or in the twentieth century Gerhard von Rad, Norman Perrin, and Phyllis Trible—makes it uniquely valuable for the student or teacher of biblical interpretation.


The Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology, ancestor to this re-titled second edition, has performed important service since its publication in 1985 as a resource for those seeking treatments of psychology from Christian perspectives, and as a supporting player in the ongoing efforts toward “integration of faith and learning” in this field. The present revision and ex-
 Expansion, as indicated by its new title, gives considerably more attention than its predecessor to the areas of pastoral care and counseling, and claims to include “a large number of articles exploring issues of particular interest to clergy” (5). But professional psychologists, mental health practitioners, college professors, and students in psychology will also welcome the updated content. This incorporates, for example, changes in classification and understanding of the major psychological disorders reflected in the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV, published in 1994), and revised treatment approaches based on recent research.


The safest prophecy, perhaps, is that eschatological prophecies, claims, and speculations increase dramatically at the turn of a millennium, along with popular interest in and concern about them. These three resources are timely—self-consciously so in at least two cases—in providing scholarly perspective and framing for this phenomenon. Well-known evangelical historians Robert Clouse and Richard Pierard (both of Indiana State University) joined with free-lance writer and editor Robert Hosack to offer “a popular guide to the issues, people, and movements relevant to the coming Big Calendar Turn” (cover blurb), surveying church history, theology, and contemporary culture to bring balance and perspective to what they dub “millennial madness” (11). Their presentation, though unmistakably aimed at a popular audience, is deeply informed by their grasp of Christian history. For that reason it will be valuable to college professors and their students, and may well remain so long after Y2K has come and gone—barring, of course, fulfillment of the more dramatic prophecies.

In Till Jesus Comes, Charles Holman (New Testament, Regent University) seeks to place Christian eschatological expectation in perspective by tracing the origins of the tension between expectation and delay, which characterized the early Christian sense of living in the end-times, to Old Testament and Jewish eschatological traditions. Noted Durham University scholar James D. G. Dunn commends Holman’s study as “a voice of sober and sound biblical proportions in a period when issues of expectation and delay will once again come to the fore” (cover blurb).

The three-volume Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism undertakes to explore in great depth religious and religiously inspired conceptions of the end of history. Though it encompasses “the three Western faiths”—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—two-thirds of its essays de-
scribe and analyze the past and present of Christian apocalypticism, defined broadly as “the belief that God has revealed the imminent end of the ongoing struggle between good and evil in history” (vol. 1, p. vii). Its approach is not that of an encyclopedic dictionary, with alphabetically arranged entries for persons, concepts, places, texts, etc. Rather, it features forty-three thematic essays on broad topics, for example, “Messianism and Apocalypticism,” “Interpretations of the Revelation of John, 1500-1800,” “Millennialism,” “Apocalyptic Themes and Imagery in Medieval and Renaissance Literature,” “Apocalypticism in an Age of Science.” These essays, says the general introduction, “seek neither to apologize for the extravagance of apocalyptic thinkers nor to excuse the perverse actions of their followers,” but “to understand a powerful . . . element in the history of Western religions that has been the source of both good and evil.” None of the contributors, it acknowledges, are themselves “literal believers in apocalypticism.” Readers will need to make their own judgments as to the balance and fairness of the work over-all, as well as the individual contributions. There is no doubt, however, that this is a treasure trove of sheer information on its subject, and a guide to important parts of the huge body of scholarship on apocalypticism generated especially in the last thirty years.