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NEVILLE'S "NATURALISM" AND THE LOCATION OF GOD

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The main concern of this paper will be to come to grips with how Neville envisions the transcendence and immanence of God vis-à-vis the normative and formal properties of the world, as they obtain essentially and conditionally. This is directly related to his Schleiermacher-like sense that every determinate thing in the world (and there are no non-determinate things) is absolutely or sheerly dependent on the creator. To be determinate is to be the locus of identity and otherness within a system of infinite reciprocities and negations.¹ Primary among the "things" of the world is temporality. To grasp the fullness of the creator it will be necessary to analyze the relationship of ontological mutuality between the flow of time and eternity. At the heart of all of these analyses will be the delineation of the utter centrality, for Neville, of the reality of *creatio ex nihilo* as the ground principle, or perhaps pre-principle, that guarantees the full incarnationality of God as Logos within a world that is fully determinate and closed, yet allows for finite freedom (a position that Neville refers to as neo-Calvinism). This ontological ground creates the world in a unique sense and is held to be the case regardless of the status of the cosmological theory of the Big Bang, or any possible alternative, in astrophysics. That is, ontological creation is different in kind from any event that could be delineated by scientific inquiry, which, by definition, deals with cosmological creation.

It might help us to gage the radicality of Neville's concept of ontological creation if we remember that it is similar to the shock of the ontological difference in Heidegger. That is, there is an abyss of difference between indeterminate being-itself and any being thing that takes on essential and conditional determinate traits. Actually, for Neville there are three terms in the fundamental structure of his system. There is indeterminate being-itself and the opposite extreme of determinate being. Connecting them is the creative act

¹ Robert Neville, *God the Creator: On the Transcendence and Presence of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 49. Reprinted with new Preface by SUNY Press in 1992.

of God that brings determination to the divine precisely in the act of creating the world.

The creator makes itself creator when and as it creates; in order to do this, it must be independent, in itself, of the products it creates and even of its own role of being creator. The role of the creator is the nature the creator has in virtue of its connection with the created determinations.²

My own alternative [to the process view] is that God is creator of everything determinate, creator of things actual as well as of things possible. Apart from the relative nature the divinity gives itself as creator in creating the world, God is utterly transcendent.³

God becomes determinate in a relative way, i.e., as relevant to the world, by and through the eternal act of creation. But God as being-itself, that is, as living on the nether side of the ontological difference, is transcendent of any analogy or determinate comparison that could bring God into human purview. The God that we actually encounter in the world is the God that lives as the third term straddling the ontological difference between indetermination and determination. Put most succinctly, "being-itself is essentially indeterminate and conditionally determinate."⁴

It should be noted here that the world does not give determination to God, contra the process view, but that God gives itself determination in a strictly relative way so as to remain in eternal relevance to the determinate orders of creation. Neville's God is an extremely large God, if we may use Loomer's language, and cannot be confined in any analogical structure that would bind the divine to finite proportionality.⁵ There is nothing similar to the consequent nature of God that gains ontological weight with each objectively

² Ibid., 72.

³ Robert Neville, *Creativity and God: A Challenge to Process Theology* (New York: Seabury press, 1980), 8. Reprinted with new Preface by SUNY Press in 1995.

⁴ Neville, *God the Creator*, 41.

⁵ Ibid., 18-19.

immortal occasion as physically prehended. Nor is God an "as-if" construct or a neo-pragmatic symbol, but is sheer being-itself transcendent of analogical bridges. Even the God of Aquinas seems rather tame and domestic when placed against Neville's indeterminate ground and abyss. And the process God, especially in its now faded glory, looks like a straight put-up job when projected onto the traitless ground of being-itself. The primordial dimension of God seems too static and determined by internal contrasts, while the consequent dimension is like an omnivorous cousin that eats one out of house and home. If nothing else can be said, Neville's indeterminate ground cannot get any bigger because of what the world does; it is already and always that than which nothing greater can be conceived.

In order to grasp the full richness and scope of Neville's philosophical theology it will be necessary to address several connected themes that cumulatively show us the location of God vis-à-vis his quasi-process understanding of creation or nature. These themes are: the transcendence of God, the presence or immanence of God, the nature of eternity, and the structure of the things of the world. Insofar as Neville considers himself to be a naturalist, and in this we will give him the benefit of the doubt, his conception of nature will be probed to see how it might frame his understanding of God. By way of a proleptic hint of our conclusion, we may find that his God is too big and his nature is too small, and that he wants things from the indeterminate ground, qua self-determining, that simply might not be available.

I.

We have noted Neville's extreme version of the ontological difference between Being and a being. However, he prefers to speak of being-itself rather than Being by way of emphasizing the utter independence of the primal ground and its position prior to the divide between Being and nonbeing. God transcends the world in the sense that God can not be reached by any conceptual or analogical bridge that starts from any order of creation. As noted above, God or being-itself has no traits and cannot be predicated in any way. For Neville, only the mystic has something like direct access to the indeterminate God. Like Tillich's God beyond the God of theism, Neville's God has no internal contrasts and cannot be in dialogue with itself. This dimension of

God, God in essential indifference, has no providential reality. Indeed, Neville marks a distinct departure from so many twentieth century Protestants, for example, Moltmann and Pannenberg, who see the not yet (*noch nicht sein*) as a fundamental trait of the divine life.⁶ The indeterminate Ground, hardly unruly for Neville, can only be arrived at by contrast to the determinate things of creation that fully participate in God, but which are separated from being-itself by an abyss. While Neville is convinced that we can make a series of forceful arguments for the necessity of the ontological one, as a unifying principle that is not part of the many as a kind of super-unity *within* the world, it does not follow that we can enter into the inner life of the indeterminate God.

This position should remind us of the mature Schleiermacher who has been labeled a pietistic agnostic on the God question. For Schleiermacher, of course, the delineation of the features of self-consciousness in its three grades, animal/immediate, middle level, and religious/higher level, gives us indirect access to God through the primacy of the feeling of absolute or sheer dependence. While Neville would be friendly to aspects of this account, he prefers to work in the other direction via a cluster of interrelated arguments that refuse to privilege the human starting point. At the heart of these arguments is the sense that creation could only be what it is because of an eternal creative act that transcends creation. Yet it does not follow that we can say why God created the world, or why the world is unified in the way that it is.⁷ Neville is quite clear that Leibniz's theodicy is in error. That is, it makes no sense to see some kind of divine mind prior to creation making decisions as to which essential perfections will be granted existence in such a way as to maximize the amount of realized perfection in the world.⁸ Neville's God has

⁶ Thus Pannenberg can say, "Creation and eschatology belong together because it is only in the eschatological consummation that the destiny of the creature, especially the human creature, will come to fulfillment. . . . Nevertheless, creatures that are awakened to independence (i.e., living creatures) open themselves to the future as the dimension from which alone their existence can achieve content and fulfillment." *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 139.

⁷ Neville, *God the Creator*, 71.

⁸ Leibniz gives a clear statement of his view of essence and perfection in his 1697 essay, *On the Ultimate Origination of Things*. He states, ". . . all possibles, that is, everything that expresses essence or possible reality, strive with equal right for existence in proportion to the amount of essence or reality or the degree of perfection they contain, for perfection is nothing but the amount of essence." Taken from *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans.

no mind, and entertains no possible universes prior to the act of creation. Hence we must endure the utter mystery of why the world is as it is. There are no sufficient reasons linking a divine decision with creation.

What lies beyond the sphere of sufficient reasons, so carefully developed by seventeenth century thinkers? Shifting to more theological language, Neville emphasizes the radical novelty of creation and its grace-filled heart. The essential and indeterminate God becomes the creator through an eternal act of self-constitution:

God as source creates the world, having no determinate need to do so but strictly and purely out of divine self-constituting grace. The universe is wholly dependent for its existence as a set of determinate things on God as source. That God is source is itself a function of the world's being created.⁹

The primal and gracious act of creation is asymmetrical in the sense that the created cannot in turn act on the creator. The process account, it will be remembered, is a symmetrical one in that the subjective aims and prehensive fields of actual occasions can add to and modify the divine life through their death and simultaneous objective immortality. Hartshorne's God can indeed be surprised and transformed in a way that Neville's cannot.

God, in becoming conditionally determinate through the eternal act of creation that creates space, time, and the world, overcomes its utter transcendence. The world that the now relational God creates is a closed one. By this Neville does not mean that it is a bound but expanding totality in the sense of contemporary astrophysics, although this may be the case on the cosmological level, but that it consists of the "sum" of all determinate things.¹⁰ The bridge between the power of God the creator and the created orders is through the economic trinity. Here Neville works out of the classical distinction between the immanent trinity, namely, the trinity *an sich*, and the economic trinity seen as the time-embracing unfolding of God's glory within creation. He privileges the economic trinity precisely because his own

Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

⁹ Robert Neville, *A Theology Primer* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991), 40-41.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

conception of the indeterminate ground would make it profoundly difficult to probe into the immanent trinity prior to its self-determination under the conditions of temporality and finitude.

II.

Using traditional language, he sees God as the source of everything determinate, God the Son as the product or end point of the creative act, while the Spirit is the creative activity itself.¹¹ The economic trinity, the “how” of the indeterminate ground as it becomes determinate, moves to overcome the utter transcendence of God. The creating God, as opposed to the creator prior to creation, is immanent within all of the orders of the world. Like Tillich, Neville has a strong sacramental sense of the incarnation; namely, that it is manifest in forms of divinization or epiphanies of power that directly participate in the conditional God. In some passages that might shock Barthians, Neville insists that the human process can enter into the power of God and take on some of its divine power.¹² While we can rest assured that Neville knows what the Protestant Principle is for, he also wants to free the self from its alienation from God by his categorial sense that direct participation in creative activity is indeed part of the way of grace, as most clearly actualized in the Covenant.¹³

The paradox here is that Neville has an extreme sense of divine transcendence combined with an equally extreme sense of divine immanence. His interest in world religions has its source, so I would argue, in this deep sensitivity to the innumerable ways that the triune God can appear within the world and the human process. Like Pannenberg, Neville insists that God is robustly self-revealing in the history of religions. His theory of revelation works in consort with his ontology to show that what had been meant by revelation, as the presentation of group-specific information, can best be seen as a special kind of learning that is less bound to antecedent “messages,”

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 52.

which are often little more than demonic missives from the gods of space.¹⁴

The dialectical tension between God's essential transcendence and conditional immanence does not, however, bifurcate God into two disconnected dimensions that can only speak to each other across an abyss of nonbeing (a concept that has already been ruled out). In some mysterious sense, the indeterminate ground "chose" in a non-necessary and non-emanating way to create both itself as determined and the closed world of determinate things. We have absolutely no access with any of our philosophical tools to the inner logic of this non-chosen choice. We simply live in the continuing power of its ongoing effects. All of our spatial and temporal pictures of this event of creation shatter on the rock of the ontological difference between being-itself and the things of the world. But there is a very striking sense in which we are left with more than enough semiotic material that can serve as signs of God's radical immanence. Like Bonaventura, Neville can see the "footprints of God" within creation and can follow those footprints back to the invisible sign maker that never creates an order without leaving its traces in its product.

Perhaps the most dramatic footprints of the creator are found in the elusive momenta of time and time's flow. One of the most basic connecting links between creation and the created is that between time's flow and eternity. Neville has taken very great pains to develop a theory of eternity that does full justice to our own experience of time. He reworks his understanding of eternity in the context of a philosophical environment that privileges the present and has a subsidiary tendency to spatialize time as if it could be bound and contained in discrete packets. To understand eternity it is also necessary to give equal ontological standing to all three modes of time and to despatialize our understanding of any or all of these modes.

The analysis of eternity and time also opens up the basic ontology of things, insofar as each determinate thing is what it is vis-à-vis the mode of time in which it obtains. Here we begin to get a glimpse of Neville's quasi-process form of naturalism. I call it a "quasi-process" form because of the centrality of such notions as decision, spontaneous creativity, actualization,

¹⁴ Paul Tillich, *Die Sozialistische Entscheidung* (Potsdam: Alfred Protte, 1933). The English translation is by Franklin Sherman, *The Socialist Decision* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

objective everlastingness, and pure normative form. While Neville will, of course, deny that these terms denote or imply an anthropomorphic structure, we shall see that they do serve to give an honorific and zoösemiotic (even anthroposemiotic) stamp to the delineation of the fundamental traits of the orders of the world. While he has gone beyond the mythology of the actual occasion, thereby refusing to reduce the things of the world to some kind of primal atomic whatness, he still clings to notions that can only blunt the generic sweep of a naturalism that wishes to honor the utter complexity of the world's traits, many of which obtain in utter semiotic darkness.

The first thing to note is that time is created, that is, it is not an emergent product, perhaps from spatial extension, and that its creation is rooted in the eternal. Thus the ultimate source of time and time's flow is in the indeterminate ground, "God is the living dynamism of the eternal act creating time's flow."¹⁵ It is interesting that Neville brings in rather dynamic language at this point to indicate the living connection between eternity and the three modes of time known to the human process. He also prefers to talk of "time's flow" rather than the moments of time so as to stress the gathering and sustaining power of eternity that continually erases any ultimate atomicity or epochal quality for the moments of time.

Philosophical and theological perspectives often unwittingly privilege one mode of time, thus putting the other two into a kind of ontological eclipse. Earlier we noted that Neville's indeterminate being-itself does not have the features of many of the more recent eschatological Gods, who groan through creation, read in politically correct terms, toward an ultimate theophany on the nether side of *chronos*. At the other extreme are those perspectives driven by the myth of origin that make antecedent orders numinous per se. Tillich, more forcefully than anyone else, has brilliantly deconstructed these powers of "blood and soil" and shown that they must be chastened by the God of time. Of course, he ends up privileging the future in this move, thereby blunting the efficacy of his framework. There is a sense in which the process view of epochal time privileges the present, insofar as the only living realities are those that are in the infinitesimal moment of becoming in which the past ingresses according to the lure of the future.

¹⁵ Robert Neville, *Eternity and Time's Flow* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 13.

A further problem with the process reading of epochal time and ingression is that it cannot allow for genuine otherness or discontinuity within the finite orders of the world. The self is the world from the perspective of a subjective form. Neville makes a bold move at this point to rescue a strong sense of difference or otherness for the orders of time so that they are not reduced to a common set of traits or gathered into the power of an omnivorous subjective form. Above we noted some of the differentia for the three modes of time in their essential constitution. The present is characterized by decision and spontaneous creativity. This is, of course, a strongly flavored process account. The past is essentially the fixed reality of objective everlastingness, not, however, as preserved in some alleged consequent nature of God but in the eternity that cannot be consequent *to* anything within the determinate orders of the world. The past is "the fixed achievements of the universe, all structurally ordered and determinate with respect to one another and each embodying an actualized value."¹⁶ The future is essentially a kind of normative reality, the locus of value. Interestingly, Neville rejects anything like a static primordial mind in which compossible forms would reside, and affirms a kind of Peircean "would be" or conditional. His formulation is precise, "Form is what would integrate a plurality, real or subjunctive."¹⁷

The three modes of time are both distinct from each other, and deeply relevant to each other. Neville, as always, wants to avoid any static or container analogies that would compartmentalize time. The differentia among the modes are related to their essential and conditional ways of being, rather than to some kind of locatedness that has fixed boundaries. The way of being for the modes of time in consort is to flow together in a kind of "ontological context of mutual relevance."¹⁸ But the foundation for this relevance is not through ingression of the past and responsiveness to the divine lure in the future. Rather, it is through a direct and total participation in eternity, "Eternity is the condition for and inclusion of time's flow."¹⁹

Looking more directly at eternity, if such language is not too guilty of hubris, we can rule out some misguided conceptions that have plagued generic

¹⁶ Neville, *A Theology Primer*, 68-69.

¹⁷ Neville, *Eternity and Time's Flow*, 102.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

level analysis. For Neville, eternity cannot be: 1) static form, 2) the *totum simul* (a position he sees embodied in Augustine and Hartshorne), 3) a total determinate fact, 4) normative goodness, or 5) an Aristotelian unmoved mover. For one thing, the future is still open in the sense that it is the dimension of the "would be," thus ruling out 1, 3 (which privileges the past), and 5. Number 4 is ruled out on the grounds that eternity is the measure of form and thus the reality that empowers and sustains form from outside of itself, shades of Plato's *Euthyphro*. Number 2 is ruled out because the concept of the divine mind grasping all reality at once privileges the present and makes genuine future novelty impossible.

III.

It is crucial that time's flow be understood from the perspective of eternity. That is, one cannot separate human time from eternity as they entail each other in any sustained analysis of the way of God and God's created world. The mutual relevance of the three modes of time to each other is made possible by the presence of eternity, "the only thing that could constitute an ontological context of mutual relevance is an eternal divine creative act and that the eternal dynamism of time's flow constitutes what we should mean by the life of God."²⁰ Hence God approaches us with a special power and intimacy in the flow of time that we learn to experience when we overcome the idolatry and any one mode of time. The past is ontologically different from the present and future, and the same applies to the other two modes. Difference is preserved while identity is secured through the flow of time that participates in eternity. Put in stronger terms, eternity is as close to us as our own breath. Eternity and the flow of time are grace-filled even if things *in* time often suffer blindly and have no sense of their whence and whither.

Neville's conception of the future is particularly fascinating because it represents an alternative to the process view while still using some of the more basic process categories. The future is tied to form and different forms entail different values. "It is the forms in things that make the difference in value."²¹ Yet we must always ask: just where are the forms? Whitehead would

²⁰ Ibid., 113.

²¹ Ibid., 89.

have us believe that they are resident in the primordial mind of God, waiting to be sent out as tantalizing lures to hungry actual occasions. Neville, a reconstructed process thinker and Platonist, prefers to let the future have its own distinctive features. Hence, forms are not mental quasi-actualizations in a divine mind, but realities awaiting actualization via the other modes of time. "Far better to say that form is the essential feature of the future and that determinate forms are the ways the future is made determinate by concrete actualities in the past and by the shifting decisions of present moments."²² Actualities and decisions work together to render certain forms actual to the things of the world. These forms are located in a kind of cosmic "would be" that is not a form-bank so much as a potential for actualization. By putting form in this special ontological niche, Neville preserves a more genuine sense of novelty than Whitehead for whom all eternal entities are already attained.

The function of form, as the locus of value, is to sustain the togetherness of things. The relation between form and the future prepares the way for an analysis of things in their essential and conditional reality. By looking at the determinate things in the closed world of time we can gain access to the most basic "where" of God vis-à-vis nature, understood here as creation or *nature natured*. It is at this point that many of Neville's most creative categorial elaborations come home to roost. We have noted that a fundamental distinction in his system is that between the essential aspect of a thing and its conditional aspect. Creation is constituted by the "sum" of all determinate things that each share in some mixture of essence and conditionality. Each and every thing is determinate in some, but not all respects. "That a thing is determinate does not mean it is wholly determinate: the future is not wholly determinate, for instance, although it is what it is at least by being future to something in its past."²³ Hence anything occupying a time process will have some of its future open to it, even though this opening may be infinitesimally small in a given case. A Peircean would even say that the laws of nature are themselves only partially determinate and that they could take on new habits in the future as they are punctuated by firstness and secondness.

²² Ibid.

²³ Neville, *A Theology Primer*, 30.

Thus we should be clear that the word “determinateness” in no way denotes or connotes a closed deterministic system for Neville, although my suspicion is that his universe is a little less rambunctious than Hartshorne’s on this issue. Be that as it may, each and every thing (and the word “thing” is used as an extremely generic place holder for the differentia of the world) has an essential core and a deep relational or conditioned dimension. Neville is very much aware of the issue of identity over time and faults the process epochal view for failing to give a depth structure to the human character and the other things of the world.²⁴ Instead of little epochal pulses that hand the torch of identity down the line, he prefers to see each thing as having an essential core that endures per se and that helps to order the conditional features by and through which the thing takes on relations and relata. More precisely, normative form relates to essential features to sustain identity, “the continuity, the irreducible unity of a life, the subjectivity of the whole, is a matter of the normative side of the forms, of essential features.”²⁵ He refers to his perspective on things as an “axiological pluralism,” where the focus is on the role normative form plays in the ultimate constitution of the things of the world.

Even more important is his sense that things are not relational in a totalistic sense. For a process thinker, any given actual occasion will positively or negativelyprehend all non-contemporary occasions, thus entering into what could be called an absolute web of robust internal relations. Neville’s naturalism comes to the fore when he denies that such relational totalities exist. A given thing will have “multiple effective locations,”²⁶ but these locations will not belong to some kind of super-field that envelops all subaltern realities. Arguing against Weiss’s view that space-time fields are antecedent to their “occupants,” Neville insists that fields are themselves products or functions of harmonies, and harmonies are subject to change over time. Therefore the cosmos cannot be a totality that is in some sense prior to all things. No thing will be related to all other things. There are genuine

²⁴ Robert Neville, *The Cosmology of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 40-51. Reprinted with a new Preface by SUNY Press in 1995.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

²⁶ Robert Neville, *Recovery of the Measure: Interpretation and Nature* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), 148.

ontological breaks in the world that cannot be filled in, especially by an idealistic system that refuses to grasp the utter power of secondness within continua.

Thus a thing, the constituent of creation (*nature natured*), will sustain itself against decay by having intrinsic and essential features. Its conditional features will, of course, be subject to spoliation or augmentation as environing conditions change. As we have just seen, the concept of "harmony" now makes its entrance as the togetherness of the essential and the conditional features of the thing. Neville rejects the atomistic view that would confine harmony to the essential features alone (a position defended in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*), and wants us to understand it as a strong bridge connecting the essential and the conditional. The concept of harmony is, of course, one found in process perspectives, and has a decided aesthetic cast. The harmony of any given thing does not come to it from outside, but is its own structure of togetherness. We gain access to it by a kind of aesthetic intuition. We are cautioned, however, not to assume that the word "harmony" always denotes a stability or a peaceful process of regular change. Harmonies can be profoundly displeasing and need not reflect anything congenial to human aspiration or desire. In this sense, the concept of harmony is morally neutral.

Neville accepts Whitehead's general cosmological view that harmony brings a multiplicity into a unity; namely, "that the reality of the event for itself is the processive becoming of the unity."²⁷ But the internal creativity of any event/thing is deeply related to the ontological creativity of God. Remember, for Neville the process tradition has erred in separating creativity, as some kind of ultimate ground, from God. In particular, this muddies the relation between God and the world by making divine presence almost a secondary reality. He sees an intimate relationship between self-becoming in time's flow and the continuing power of ontological creativity. Put in theological terms, it is as if the creation is actually the same event as the act of sustaining the world. If Tillich can identify creation as the Fall into finitude, I suppose Neville is allowed to see the creative power of the in-determinate ground as continually present in the things/events of the world. Again, his sense of utter transcendence is richly balanced by his sense of the radical immanence of eternal creativity in the movement of self-forming events toward

²⁷ Neville, *Creativity and God*, 8.

harmony and unity.

Things/events are thus in formation in the present, responsive to that which obtains everlastingly in the past, and open to prospects of transformation in the future. While Neville is hardly a thinker of the groaning *not yet*, he does understand that self-formation requires an intimate relation between God and the future. However, this relation is one of divine otherness in which God remains deeply elusive to our present desires and inquiries. In a particularly striking passage which I quote at some length, he lays out the correlation of human or thingly temporality and divine eternity:

From our limited standpoint, where the future is still open and at which point the eternal actual resolution of our future connection does not exist, the future of God's address to us is "other." The character God will take in response to our needs and to our deserts remains alien to us in the present, however real it is in eternity. From the standpoint of the present, God's creation in the future is really other; this issue is not one of our ignorance. Even God does not *now* know what the future holds because God is never only *now*. For ourselves, who truly are temporal, existing now with a future still future, the future and God's special presence as redemptive or condemnatory, helpful or negligent, merciful or punitive, remains other.²⁸

Insofar as pre-human orders are also to some extent self-choosing, this categorial framework can be applied across the board. What is interesting is that our temporality is clearly blind to its own whence and whither, and can only see God, qua future, as an alien otherness that may or may not be punitive or helpful, etc. Yet I do not see Neville as affirming a kind of Hartshornian blindness on the part of *God*, insofar as God truly lives in and as eternity. It takes a great stretching of mind to understand the seeming paradox between God's blindness in the *now*, which is, of course, a misconception on our part, and God's omniscience in eternity. In structural terms I would say that there

²⁸ Neville, *Eternity and Time's Flow*, 211-12.

is no room for a *not yet being* in eternity, while there can be an energizing otherness/future for finite and perspectival orders.

Things/events are self-forming creatures of time and eternity that combine essential and conditional features, participate in the primal creative act that is still with us, harmonize from within their diverse traits, contain form qua value, and occasionally show forth the glory of the creator in their sacramental splendor. Nature, which is "constituted" by these things, is the measure within which things can form themselves the way that they do. Neville rejects anything like some super order of nature that would measure each and every thing in some kind of prescient way. Rather, the measure of nature comes from the orders themselves as they participate in each other and in the divine creative ground. From the human perspective, our own interpretive acts are validated insofar as they bind themselves to a measure that is extra-human. "Interpretation is a special kind of participation in the natural world by natural beings."²⁹ In a quasi-process form of naturalism it follows that other beings beside the human interpret, and that they too must participate in envioning conditions that can provide a powerful goad to hermeneutic success, since the cost of interpretive failure could be death.

IV.

Now that we have arrived at the concept of nature that is implied in Neville's concepts of the divine and the divine's creation, we can begin the far more difficult task of appraisal and critique. I have devoted a great deal of energy to the task of exposition because of the painfully reiterated experience that philosophers rarely take the time and care to *truly* understand each other. In a perspective as rich and powerful as Neville's, it is imperative that the basic categories be delineated with sensitivity and care. Whether I have succeeded in this remains to be seen, but my hope is that at least the rudimentary topology of this landscape has been charted by the preceding reflections.

Neville's arguments against the process account are compelling in the main. But my own rejection of the process perspective comes from a sense that the world is fundamentally a sad place and that naturalism, not quasi-process

²⁹ Neville, *Recovery of the Measure*, 5.

naturalism, is the one perspective that has the courage to be sad in an informed way. From this it follows that I do not think that Neville has enough ontological sadness to be a true naturalist, certainly not of the ecstatic variety that must face the utter indifference of the ground to anything that issues from it, even while honoring the self-transforming energies that do obtain in the innumerable orders of *nature natured*. While this evocation of ontological sadness may not sound like an *argument*, and I hesitate to place it before an interlocutor who is a master of rigorous argumentation, it does emerge out of a perspective that is to some extent an articulation of what this ground feeling has uncovered. For me, the fruitful interchange between thinkers involves an exhibition and articulation of what they each *see* as well as the underlying strategies that may support the infrastructure that corresponds to their vision. After all, any significant philosophical framework is overdetermined as to antecedents and no one argumentative trail or strategy can exhaust the richness, and occasional internal contradictions, of the nurturing streams.

On the other hand, I do not want to end up with a kind of morphological comparison in which you are asked to pick the metaphysical flavor that is most appealing. Therefore, something like arguments will make their appearance in our remaining reflections, remembering that all such strategies are at the service of a vision that has deep unconscious roots and motivations. It is one thing to say that one is ontologically sad, it is another to say why. My hope is that the reader will share this sadness by the end of our reflections, and will know the reasons why this must be so.

Following our wayward trail, then, I wish to focus on three distinct issues. The first is the nature of the things of the world as articulated in a quasi-process account verses a semiotic one rooted in ecstatic naturalism. The second is with the nature of the indifferent ground and its relation, or lack thereof, to unity. The third is with the twin concepts of nature and God as they refract each other through different prisms. The primal feeling-tone of ecstatic naturalism will weave itself in and around the categorial elaborations, bringing us to the boundary where ontological sadness envelops but remains open to a kind of naturalist *jouissance*, understood as the eros that is the true meaning of agape.

We have seen how Neville still uses mentalistic language to describe the trajectory of given things within time's flow. Things decide, are spontaneous, shape a harmony that unites essential and conditional traits, and

embody value. Neville gives great weight to the concept of value in his system. Even truth, and the search for validation, is related to the disclosure of value, "If reality is the achievement of value, then truth must say what that value is; and if this is so, then saying what properties a thing has contributes to truth telling only insofar as the bearing of properties is tied to the achieved value."³⁰ And, of course, form is never far away, "value is the implicit contribution of form."³¹ Like John Cobb, Neville envisions the world as the locus of increments of value, all participating in nature itself. It should be pointed out that Neville does stress participation as a key ingredient in his naturalism and theory of interpretation. Signs, values, objects, and selves all participate in an infinitely complex nature that is enveloping, at least in a secondary sense *vis-à-vis* the creator.

What are we to make of concepts like "harmony" and "value"? Are they innocent descriptors within an otherwise healthy metaphysical system, or are they really Trojan horses of an anti-naturalist perspective that still clings to honorific language? Neville has stated more than once that he rejects the process understanding of a di-polar God, while affirming a process understanding of the things of the world. However, as noted, he goes beyond the windowed monads of Whitehead toward a more judicious macro or meso account of the orders of the world. Of even greater importance is his stated rejection of panpsychism for what he calls pan-naturalism that allows for different levels of reality, some of which are indeed material and opaque to any form of mentality. The process account in its classical form, i.e., before it is reconstructed by Neville, privileges the present experience of the actual occasion. Neville wants to speak of what he calls "discursive actualities" that are "enduring," and "temporally thick." The concept of the "discursive actuality" covers most of the discriminda of experience. Neville refers to a human being as a "discursive individual." In either case, the important point is that the things of the world are equally embodied in all three modes of time, even though each mode will prevail in a different way.

In rejecting panpsychism, does Neville escape the net of idealism that wishes to mentalize the world? Is his axiological pluralism the real Trojan horse because it smuggles in normative structures where we should remain on

³⁰ Ibid., 68.

³¹ Ibid., 161.

the level of description? To put the question differently, does Neville conflate honorific with descriptive language, precisely because his creator God is immanent within things somehow supporting value in an otherwise cold and entropic universe? Could he talk at all about things as “discursive actualities” without God and eternity propping them up against what might still be called absolute nonbeing? The answer seems to be no. And I might make an even stronger claim. If eternity and God are present within creation in the way that Neville intends, can he really outflank panpsychism in his categorial delineation of things?

The issue of value in the ontology of things is a sticky one. On the one hand, Neville is to be commended for his unrelenting efforts to deprivilege the anthropocentric starting point. While I think that his quasi-process form of naturalism fails in this task, it fails less dreadfully than almost all of the alternatives. On the other hand, Neville seems to fall prey to a kind of cosmic mythology that wants things to be far more meaningful and structurally loaded with positivity than they can possibly be. I have in mind his idea that there is “an infinitely dense achievement of value presented in each component.”³² This is a principle of plenitude that might make even Leibniz blush. Neville is a very subtle Plato scholar and knows what happened to Plato when he made his Forms (assuming that they “exist” at all) into normative structures; namely, “Plato had a profound insight in associating the Good with form.”³³ Plato’s later dialogues, however, show his awakening to this problem, as well as his awareness of the need to counter Aristotle’s analysis of four-fold causation. Neville, of course, wants harmony to be in and through things, rather than functioning as an outside principle that somehow hovers in an indeterminate way before instantiation in particulars.

It is not just a problem of terminology, although I doubt that *merely* terminological problems exist on this level of reflection, but a sense that the terms chosen, especially those that have a process pedigree, subtly extrude a kind of semi-conscious mental aura onto the things of the world. The Trojan horse comes into the naturalist settlement and begins to leak, not Greek soldiers, but brightly shining values and harmonies that gather around things that are otherwise opaque or semiotically dense. I have stated that the quasi-

³² Ibid., 155.

³³ Ibid., 154.

process form of naturalism is in tension with a semiotic understanding of the orders of *nature natures*. This is an especially ticklish point because Neville and I both have deep roots in Peirce's semiotics, as opposed to the minor and glottocentric tradition of Saussure, where roots can hardly even be said to exist. Yet I suspect that Neville and I do very different things with the Peirce we inherit, and that his crypto-idealism surfaces at this point.

Put in Peircean terms, a framework on the semiosis of things can, but need not, stress one of Peirce's three primal categories: firstness, which is a kind of swirling and indeterminate "could be;" secondness, which is brute diadicity without intelligibility; or thirdness, which for Neville would be normative form and value as related to harmony, that is, a potentially determinate "would be." Quasi-process naturalism will stress thirdness, its own rhetoric notwithstanding, while ecstatic naturalism understands that the depth mystery of nature and "its" things lies in firstness. Of course, it goes without saying that to be a discrimandum at all is to embody all three categories, even if in a degenerate form. Firstness has no degenerate case since it does not admit of comparisons.

My sense is that Peirce remained profoundly ambivalent about the relation between God and the three categories.³⁴ Is God an emergent and developmental force that is self-clothing in thirdness, or is God the material maternal³⁵ that is mysteriously tied to the heterogeneous momenta of nature? This ambivalence about the locatedness of the divine is directly relevant to the way things are envisioned. A quasi-process reading of Peirce and of God and God's creation will privilege thirdness, almost in spite of itself, thereby bringing the lucidity of concrete reasonableness to the things of the world. Neville's being-itself is, of course, prior to thirdness. But his God the creator as self-determining in the eternal *act* of creation, clothes itself in the Logos structures that bring an ultimate intelligibility to nature and things. For Neville, thirdness qua Logos involves pattern, components, actuality, and value.³⁶ Logos is God's character as expressed in each thing. This character

³⁴ Robert Corrington, *An Introduction to C. S. Peirce: Philosopher, Semiotician, and Ecstatic Naturalist* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993).

³⁵ Robert Corrington, "Nature's God and the Return of the Material Maternal," *The American Journal of Semiotics* X (1993): 115-132.

³⁶ Neville, *A Theology Primer*, 30.

is intelligible and available to semiotic scrutiny. Divine footprints are, by definition, examples of thirdness. Of course, one can fall directly under one and experience divine secondness, much like Job.

Hence, for Neville, God's character, as loving creator, appears within the semiotic structures of things. Philosophical theology is the description and appraisal of semiotic thirds as they manifest themselves within religious experience. The first and fourth aspect of Logos come to the fore; namely, pattern and value. But what happens if semiosis moves in the opposite direction, toward the ground of absolute indifference that has no obligation to any of its offspring? Thirdness does not collapse in secondness, nor does firstness pull the world back into the material maternal. Something far less dramatic happens, even though this movement will transform thirdness and make it translucent to something that always hovers around its edges.

For the ecstatic naturalist, semiosis consists of a series of reminders of the ejective ground that lies trembling within the heart of each thing. Any thing within the domain of *nature natured* will be the potential locus of signs and interpretants.³⁷ We can feel the dyadic pressure of things, and we can gage their intelligibility (Logos as pattern and value). But we must also develop something darkly analogous to Neville's aesthetic intuition. This special night vision, if you will, is a kind of melancholy tinged eros that hungers to return to the ejective, but non-nurturing ground. Firstness is that "within" each thing that pulls it back to the origin that has no semiotic density, nor any possible relation to Logos or thirdness, however defined.

Things interact and open out thirdness. Yet they also contain traces of the elusive primal otherness that made them possible in the first place. For the human process, the most basic ground feeling is that of loss, experienced in each and every form of suffering that punctuates life. Signs become transparent to this loss when the sign-using organism sees that elusive space between the sign and its object, between the sign and its interpretant, and

³⁷ Within the Peirce community there is a continuing debate as to whether or not interpretants (signs emerging from previous and less interpreted signs) require some entertaining mind in order to exist. Peirce's texts fail to give a definitive answer. For the pansemiotician, all orders can generate signs, and many, whether funded by mind or not, can create or sustain interpretants. From the perspective of my own ecstatic naturalism, it makes the most sense to see just how far "down" we can envision interpretants, perhaps erring on the side of ontological generosity.

between the interpretant and its inheritor. In this ontologically unique space of betweenness, there is something like an open draft or pull toward the unconscious of nature. Signs struggle toward lucidity and toward consciousness, yet their betweenness structures all point in the opposite direction, toward the far more pervasive unconscious of nature, an unconscious in which even gods and goddesses disappear, perhaps even the Gods of Western monotheism.

The unconscious heart of signs and their corollary things is not simply to be equated with entropy, which is, of course, a cosmological notion. The image is not so much disorder and loss of heat in a closed system as it is the haunting presence/absence of an ejective ground and abyss that has absolutely no teleology, no thirdness, no agape, and no ultimate plan for the human process. Things harbor a place where the prepositional ground can enter into and alter positionality, thereby making thirdness vibrate to a deeper melody of loss. This break thorough of *nature naturing* is far from being a harmony, or a value, or a form that could somehow constitute a divinely supported unity of the thing. In a fundamental sense, things are "on their own" against the churning night of the unconscious of nature.

Signs and sign systems live in a nature that has more semiotic fecundity than it has semiotic space. Spoliation and loss permeate the orders of *nature natured*, leaving each and every foundling of *nature naturing* without a positive ontological creative ground. Unities exist within the manifest orders of the world, but there is no creative ground that somehow supports or even "wants" unities. Unities are in and among finite orders or not at all. We have seen that Neville envisions the indeterminate ground as the ultimate source of the one that can permeate the many. The one, in his sense, is, by definition, a unity within things and for the closed world as a whole, although this latter sense is tempered by the awareness that this unity is not some kind of bound order or container, a heteronomous Logos, if you will.

Thus Neville envisions a unity that is emergent from the ground as that ground gives itself the Logos that can be manifest in the flow of time. From my perspective, unity is an ideal within the fragmented orders of *nature natured* and has absolutely no relation to the heterogenous ground of *nature naturing*. I confess to being one of those thinkers of the groaning *not yet being*, but I try to confine these groans to emergent interpretants and spiritual pulsations within the orders of the world. Each thing of the world is a foundling, cast out of the dark garden of *nature naturing*, carried forward by

signs and interpretants into the promiscuous orders of *nature natures*, and, where mental, caught in the painful dialectic of melancholy longing for the lost object and the hope for erotic transfiguration in the *not yet*. Now, as we conclude our reflections, we must ask: where is God in all of this?

V.

We should now have a fairly clear picture of what Neville means by God, even though we need to be mystics to become permeable to the “way” of being-itself. How does an ecstatic naturalist see God? Neville, of course, thinks that I have it wrong. In a recent review of my second book he states that my first and second divine dimensions, that is God as fragmented origin and God as fragmented goal within the innumerable orders of the world, are “merely spooky and secularly moral, respectively.”³⁸ I certainly do not want to foist a “spooky” God on the world, as we have enough frightening ephemera as it is. Nor do I want to pawn off a kind of secular moralist who tells us how to clean up our corrupt social orders. As to my fourth divine dimension, where God is self-overcoming in the face of the almost mocking unconscious of nature (*nature naturing* or the Encompassing), and my third divine dimension where God is sheerly relevant to all of the orders of *nature natures*, Neville sees only a novel but weak Gnosticism in which the ancient and nasty Gnostic God is replaced by one that is “politically correct.”³⁹ Why not, he asks, just worship *nature naturing* and “eliminate middling gods?”⁴⁰ Why not? Because they are there as complex products of an “eternally” ejective nature that spawns the numinous and its carrier for reasons that will forever remain beyond our ken.

It is at this point that I can make my final observation, one that is clearly adumbrated in Neville’s critique. Quasi-process naturalism has generated a picture of nature that is too small and too tied to a creative ground that seems to privilege human traits. The nature that is delineated is too small and too ready to enter into semiotic lucidity. The God that creates/sustains this

³⁸ Robert Neville, Review of Robert Corrington’s *Nature and Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism*, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXIV (December, 1994) 504-5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 504-5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 505.

wonderful world is so large as to become thin and spooky in its own right. Nature shrinks, God grows, things hum to the tune of the loving Logos, and the human process knows that there is a fitting home, if not here and now, at least in the embrace of eternity that weaves itself in and through time's flow, although the weaving, of course, does not take place *in* time.⁴¹

In ecstatic naturalism nature is understood to be both the indeterminate unconscious of *nature naturing* and the impossibly complex and fragmented domain of *nature natured*. God is an emergent product of the unconscious of nature while also being located within the orders of the world in reasonably specifiable ways. Yet God is not processive in the romantic sense of Whitehead and Hartshorne, but in a far more fitful way in which the divine can be at war with itself. Thus the epiphanies of power of the first divine dimension (God as fragmented origin) can be in tension with the lure toward justice in the second divine dimension (God as fragmented goal). The first two dimensions of God are thus fully orders within the world. The third dimension is somewhat akin to Neville's sustaining aspect of God with the strong proviso that God is absolutely indifferent to the orders of the world in this mode of sheer relevance (that is, God cannot alter a single trait of the world).

For an ecstatic naturalist, God is encountered in those erotic moments in which the melancholy lure of the lost object is briefly overcome by the encompassing presence of the *not yet*. Nature per se is absolutely indifferent to its most semiotically complex product (in our small corner of the galaxy), but there is a presence/absence *within* nature that has traits that are unique among all of the other orders of the world. We are all expelled from the garden of *nature naturing*, an ontologically unique garden without a gardener. Once we are ejected, we can never return. But we can become permeable to the movements of the divine and reconfigure the lost object just as God must do again and again. Ontological sadness can never be fully erased, as there is genuine loss and tragedy in the world, but we can enter into an erotic

⁴¹ In terms of our home in eternity we are told that "God is the mansion's perfect host." Robert Neville, *The Truth of Broken Symbols* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 271). We are even assured that there will be cigars in heaven, that, if not Cuban, will at least be worthy of our divinized taste buds.

momentum that lives on the edges of ecstatically transfiguring orders that in turn lead us into the rich ambiguities of the divine life, not just our own.

REPLY TO SERIOUS CRITICS

Robert Cummings Neville / Boston University

Few thinkers have the good fortune to be subjected to such searching critical reflection as I enjoy in the papers here by David L. Hall, Hermann Deuser, Delwin Brown, and Robert S. Corrington. I thank them all, and the editor of this journal, and the membership of the Highlands Institute for American Religious Thought at which they were discussed in June of 1996, and J. Harley Chapman and Charley D. Hardwick who arranged that meeting. It is my further good fortune that these papers are included with eleven others in a volume entitled *Critical Studies in the Thought of Robert Cummings Neville*, edited by J. Harley Chapman and Nancy Frankenberry (Albany: State University of New York Press, scheduled 1998), which also includes a response from me called "Robert Neville Replies." So I have two cracks at these four papers. In the essay for that volume I discuss the papers mainly in terms of their criticisms of my overall project, treated thematically. In this essay I shall focus on issues these papers raise about how to approach the understanding of religion, philosophy, and theology because these are of prime interest to readers of this journal.¹

1. Reply to David Hall

David Hall rightly notes in this brilliant presentation of his position that we have been close friends for a long time, over thirty years, and that our respective philosophies bear many marks of agreeing and disagreeing with one another. Just as he means in this essay to save my project from my conviction that the pursuit of truth encompassing cultures is good, worthy, and can be respectful of others, so I have tried to save him, obviously without success, from three unnatural seductions, unnatural to his own bent and background. Those seductions are Chicago Aristotelianism, Analytic-Philosophy-in-China, and Guilty Neo-Marxism. I shall comment on the first here, the second in

¹ The papers are being written together, first at Ring Lake Ranch in Wyoming overlooking Ring Lake, Big Whiskey and Little Whiskey Mountains, and Middle Mountain, and then at Hart's Core, Montana, overlooking the continental divide in Glacier National Park.

“Robert Neville Replies,” and the third in the discussion of Delwin Brown below. David is also mistaken in being a nominalist; but that is a free fall, not a seduction.²

Chicago Aristotelianism is the philosophic practice perfected by Richard McKeon of claiming that philosophies differ by essential principles that can be laid out in comparative fashion by analyzing them according to grids of categories.³ The categories, interdefined in whatever scheme is employed, determine what is important, and the elements of a philosophy that do not register in those categories are simply not registered at all and are declared not important, not mainstream, in conflict with dominant themes, and so forth.

Hall’s essay is premised on a Chicago-style Aristotelian categorial grid that claims that a great gulf exists between Western and Chinese cultures and philosophies and that I have to be limited to the categories and intellectual strategies of the West.⁴ He argues that Western philosophy is defined by a Parmenidean quest for Being behind beings and for Truth behind appearances, and that China has little or nothing like that, being determined by other issues

² One measure of our long affection for one another through obvious and not-so-obvious differences is in our attempts at mutual correction, beginning with my suggestions as publisher’s referee for his *The Civilization of Experience* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1973), his counterarguments in *Eros and Irony* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1982) and *The Uncertain Phoenix* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), my rebuttals in *The Puritan Smile* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), and his systematic treatments of Chinese culture in opposition to mine in his books with Roger Ames, *Thinking through Confucius* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987) and *Anticipating China* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995); my counter interpretations of China are mainly in *The Tao and the Daimon* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1982), *Behind the Masks of God* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991), and *Normative Cultures* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995).

³ The contemporary masters of Chicago Aristotelianism in the sense I characterize here are David A. Dilworth, *Philosophy in World Perspective: A Comparative Hermeneutic of the Major Theories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) and Walter Watson, *The Architectonics of Meaning: Foundations of the New Pluralism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985)

⁴ He and Roger Ames have spelled out many of the categorial dimensions of this in their *Thinking through Confucius* and *Anticipating China*.

allowing no "quest for the hidden behind."⁵ David has to admit here that my philosophy exhibits many exceptions to his characterization of a vast otherness between China and the West.

So what is the point of such a categorical Chicago Aristotelian philosophy of culture? The point seems to be that all philosophies are local and that, despite the appearance of similar ideas, their concrete configurations have local integrity that is destroyed when read through one another's different configurations.⁶ But that is an apriori judgment. Perhaps some local philosophies are enriched by interactions with others, and in fact the history of philosophy East and West is the story of critical dialogue, not face-offs and posturings.

I suggest an alternative methodology for understanding differences in philosophical cultures and relating to those differences philosophically. Every tradition has core texts and intellectual motifs to which subsequent thinkers respond. The responses might be to attempt to repeat them, creatively to re-embody them in a subsequent intellectual setting, or to criticize, misinterpret, or even deliberately reconstruct them, or all of the above. The history of the tradition can be understood in large part in terms of how those core texts and motifs are subsequently and cumulatively treated. Moreover, at important junctures where shifts in the construal and use of the core texts and motifs take place, new core texts and motifs are produced marking the shifts.

There are several advantages to this approach. First, we do not have to establish an "essence" for a tradition and can avoid large normative generalizations about China and the West. Second, we can take proper historic note when different local traditions comment on one another's core texts and

⁵ I want to say that I have never taken Parmenides seriously in a positive sense, and in fourteen published books have almost never discussed him or his problematic (he is mentioned in three books, in two of them in a list of Pre-Socratics and in the third as holding a reductio ad absurdam position. I am far more sympathetic to Heraclitus's process emphasis for the setting of antique themes, and am devoted to Plato as a thinker who showed that all these issues are far more complex than the Pre-Socratics thought. For Plato both being and truth are so complicated that no straightforward doctrine about them is possible and they can be approached only through dialectic.

⁶ This is Hall's point, it seems to me, but not that of Watson and Dilworth who believe in diverse philosophies as coordinated wisdoms.

⁷ See my discussion of how to protect the integrity of local systems in *The Highroad around Modernism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), chapter 6.

motifs, sometimes creating a synthesis as in Augustine, sometimes developing a sophisticated set of counterpositions, as in the perduring difference between Platonists and Aristotelians. When social circumstances allow for communication, traditions have very little non-permeable integrity and crossover to borrow from and comment on one another very often. Third, we can acknowledge the legitimacy of a philosopher such as myself (or Hall, for goodness sake) taking up the core texts and motifs of a tradition other than that of one's genetic heritage. Philosophers can engage a variety of traditions and make many their own. This is not to say that one easily understands the other's core texts and motifs, and it surely is important to be responsible in a variety of senses when construing them.

If David is right that I have seriously misunderstood Chinese philosophy, that is a powerful criticism; but his case is not established by saying that I cannot understand Chinese core texts and motifs just because I am a Westerner, nor because I do not accept his large generalizations about what the main drift of Chinese and Western thought is supposed to be. Maybe my philosophy is not part of the dominant Western tradition as interpreted by its legitimators and delegitimators such as Richard Rorty, and maybe the Chinese ideas I find interesting are not dominant there either according to some lights. That says little about their truth or interest.⁸ Ironically, the Aristotelian pigeon-holing of philosophers according to univocal categories is one of the things David likes least about Western philosophy, and so it is unnatural for him to be seduced into it.

I think there is a confusion in David's critique bearing on philosophic method, namely, that between saying my philosophy is mistaken and saying that my interpretation of the history of Chinese philosophy is mistaken. If he really meant the latter, he would have to address my interpretation of Chinese philosophy, which he does not here; he only gives his own. If he meant the former he would have to criticize my positions on being, truth, and related

⁸ Fortunately, by tracing core texts and motifs, we can avoid judgments about dominance and minor positions entirely, noting that what dominates in one period might sink into obscure and degenerate forms in the next, only to rise in new and powerful forms later, witness the story of ancient Confucianism, its subordination to Buddhism, and its recovery in Neo-Confucianism. I am convinced myself that Western philosophy, like Chinese philosophy, contains a great many different traditions; the ways those traditions comment on the core texts of ancient Greece, for instance, do not allow of any summary generalization.

matters, which he does not; he only relates them to Chinese and Western philosophy as he understands them. Like any philosopher, I am a singular thinker who has learned from many sources and addresses many audiences.⁹

In sum, my response to David Hall is threefold. First, he is mistaken in attempting to distinguish China and the West as two radically different monolithic cultures, and the claims he makes here about being, the Dao, and truth simply do not hold with the generality he requires. On the contrary, while there are ancient core texts in both cultures, each tradition has developed those core texts in diverse ways that cannot be generalized but should be understood as pluriform. Moreover, the traditions at various times have commented on and thus internalized one another's core texts. Second, even if he were right about the cultures being monolithic and distinguishable according to his categories, I don't fit either one neatly, or at all, appropriating and developing what he would have to regard as minority and losing positions. So what good is his classification as a critical analysis of my work?¹⁰ Third, the attempt to employ philosophy of culture, as David does, to make normative judgments about the truth of a particular philosophic position or its interpretation of other positions is heavy handed and question-begging. Though David often gives excellent thumbnail sketches of my positions, he does not examine my arguments for them or give counterarguments except by saying they fail to fit the grid of possible positions in which he believes.

2. Reply to Hermann Deuser

I should begin by acknowledging my very great pleasure at being interpreted so closely by a German (Protestant) theologian with the erudition and fierce analytical power of Hermann Deuser. This is not only because of the obvious quality and finesse of his essay. It is also because every American philosopher-theologian of my generation harbors a dread that what we do just does not measure up to the seriousness of German theology, especially as

⁹ Perhaps in my eclecticism I am most like P.D.Q. Bach in the realm of musical composition.

¹⁰ Surely Whitehead, Dewey, Wittgenstein, Husserl, Heidegger, Mou Tsung-san, Cheng Chung-ying, Antonio Cua, Tu Wei-ming, and Liu Shu-hsien also could not be fitted into Western or Chinese philosophy as he defines them. Of what use is his classification if it does not apply to these far more important thinkers than I?

embodied in the work of the giants of the early and mid twentieth century who were our teachers' idols and bete noirs.¹¹ For reasons better and worse, to be engaged by a thinker like Deuser is a kind of reality test for people of my generation, even if his essay has a density that places demands on readers Americans are not wont to meet.

Hermann Deuser is no ordinary German super-erudite theologian, however. He is one of the very first to master the technical intricacies of American philosophy, especially that of Charles Peirce, and to see the usefulness of that for the recovery of philosophical theology in Germany.¹² In Germany as elsewhere Christian theology has run aground the conditions of contemporary science, global ethics, and the necessary human reorientation to the environment occasioned by ecology that have undermined the philosophy that had served previously to make theology plausible. Now the problem is that Christian (and other religions') theology seems not to be possible; that is, its suppositions about the world and God that would be articulated by philosophy do not meet contemporary plausibility conditions.¹³ What is needed—which Deuser hopes to supply—is a properly philosophical theology that provides a rich enough interpretation of the Christian symbols that a faith

¹¹ What a treat it is to discover that Deuser can bring to bear his penetrating historical knowledge of European theology and philosophy, his thorough training in the dialectical moves of Christian philosophical theology from Augustine through the medievals to modern theology—an erudition very rare in America—and his comprehensive sensitivity to the multifariousness of the contemporary situation—all traits associated with German theology—and still find something solid in my work against which to push. I should add in this regard that David Hall has never participated in the generational Angst about the superior profundity of the German; he is right about them as a class, of course: Deuser is far superior to the humorous American caricature of the German professor.

¹² He translated Peirce's religious writings (with Helmut Maassen) *Charles Sanders Peirce: Religionsphilosophische Schriften* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1995) and developed its consequences in *Gott: Geist und Natur: Theologische Konsequenzen aus Charles S. Peirce's Religionsphilosophie* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1993).

¹³ Some German theologians, for instance Jürgen Moltmann, take theology to be an autonomous discipline of organizing Christian symbols to meet deep human needs but lack the philosophy to show how those symbols might be true. Others such as Wolfhart Pannenberg postpone the judgment of plausibility to the future and affirm a conservative and, I fear, mainly implausible theory by current standards in the hope that all is not lost for it in the long run.

as radical as Kierkegaard's can be proclaimed. I am proud to be part of his project.

He is right in his interpretation of my own assessment of the relation between philosophy and theology. I was trained in the 1950's and '60's as a philosopher, not as a church theologian. Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus and Augustine, Maimonides and Ghazali, Anselm and Thomas, Scotus and Occam, Descartes and Locke, Spinoza and Leibniz, Hume and Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard, Edwards and Emerson, Peirce and Royce, Whitehead and Dewey, Wittgenstein and Russell, Jaspers and Heidegger, were the thinkers whose ideas about God were important to me and my philosophical fellows.¹⁴ So although my first book, *God the Creator*, was about God, and hence on the topic of theology in a literal sense, I called it philosophy in contrast to theology so as not to be associated with "Church theology."¹⁵

But as I got older and bolder I asked why theology should be given over to "Church theology" when Christian theology itself had been formed so much by the Pagan Plotinus (through Augustine) and the Jew Spinoza (through Hegel). I determined to take back the discipline as the study of God and related matters, and alternatives to these, which is of interest to Christians but only among others. Hence in the 1992 edition I called *God the Creator* "theology."

Deuser points out that the situation in Germany until recently was something of the opposite. Protestant theology was quite comfortable with philosophy so long as it was not speculative philosophy that could raise the question of the nature and existence of God in the light of modern science. German philosophies of positivism, phenomenology, and existentialism were

¹⁴ What a shock to meet people for whom the word "theology" means only or primarily "Christian theology," the "Church thinking for itself," or "Christian faith seeking understanding"!

¹⁵ That was the period, it will be remembered, in which the European Barthians and their American followers were scourging seminaries of their opponents on grounds that non-Neo-Orthodox theology could not be faithful Christianity, delegitimizing them rather than refuting them by careful argument, just as the philosophical logical positivists did for the non-positivists in philosophy departments throughout the United States. My university, Yale, divided religious thought between the Barthian theologians who eventually dominated the Divinity School and the Tillich-inspired philosophers. My major teacher, John E. Smith, was a student of Tillich and so with one generation lapse was I.

not congenial to speculative philosophies of the sort practiced by Peirce and Whitehead, and hence theologians were stuck with philosophical conceptions of God too lame to meet the challenges of science and the encounter with other cultures. Now it is opportune to introduce speculative thought into German theology.

As for myself, I would say that theology "in the best sense" has at least three integrated moments. One is philosophical theology of the sort under discussion that in its first pass inquires into basic questions about God and how God might be related to the world. A second is comparative theology that inquires into how various intellectual and cultural traditions have responded to problems of the sort to which monotheism is a response. This kind of inquiry requires getting around the arguments of David Hall to the effect that other traditions simply do not have "problems of the sort." I recommend dialogical inquiry in which the various core texts and motifs of different traditions are traced down to conversation points among the traditions. This second theological moment plays back on the first, which in its second pass needs to inquire into philosophical conditions where *all* the world's philosophic traditions are brought into the dialogue so that the problematic of monotheism is set alongside other problematics. A world-wide philosophical theology needs critical commentary on the core texts and motifs of all, insofar as they relate to contemporary conditions of plausibility. The third kind of theological inquiry is about the reconstruction of a given tradition's symbols to have contemporary meaning and truth; this can be "church theology" with the added contribution of a philosophy to interpret plausibility conditions for contemporary meaning and truth. Christian theology can do this, but then so can Buddhist or Muslim. In the long run, any theologian involved in the world theological conversation needs to be conversant with the symbols of all traditions and the issues concerning their reconstruction.

Deuser raises a crucial point about religious experience, and here again he is right about the American readiness to appeal to that for theological purposes. This thrust lies behind his own interest in pragmatism, and I shall discuss it at greater length in connection with the other two essays.

3. Reply to Delwin Brown

The multifaceted essay by Delwin Brown makes many cogent metaphysical points but is most important for its use of experience. Let me begin by responding to one small critical point. He notes that I object to the process conception of God because the concrescent moment of subjectivity for human beings (and other creatures) is unavailable to God, when in fact our experience is that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves, closer than our jugular vein as the Muslims say. At the same time I complain about the process God being a smother-mother on some interpretations. The issue here is whether we experience God as outside our most intimate moments of self-determination, or as the most intimate force of our own determination. The process conception says that God is an external object to be prehended, whence our subjective aim (an objectified proposition from God) and an external agent who can prehend us insofar as we have attained actual full determination. My alternative conception construes God as creating in the creativity of subjective concrescence; so we arise out of divine creativity as well as encounter past and future acts of creativity in our environment (to adapt the process model to my theory, without divine subjective aim). I maintain the controversial view that although we are responsible for our own actions insofar as they result from our decisions our decisions are also part of the overall singular creative act of God, and thus God and we are both authors of those actions in appropriately different senses.¹⁶ Issues of consistency and coherence aside, how does the *experience* of God bear upon this? Surely God is sometimes experienced as external, and we sometimes experience the perversity of our hearts, if not our moral successes, as being both non-divine and in opposition to God. But surely also we sometimes experience the loss of self, its evaporation, in the singular act of God, with the consequence that personal identity, including negative (or positive) moral identity, is trivialized and all is appreciated as a divine movement beyond good, evil, or personal significance. The constant fight against antinomianism in nearly all religions testifies to the latter kind of experience. I don't know which is most basic of the two experiences, but my theory allows for both and the process theory for only the first. Process theology in the long run is hostile to mysticism.

¹⁶ See *Soldier, Sage, Saint* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1978), chapter 5.

The more important experiential question Brown raises is the cultural experience of religious (and other) imperialism. Hall raises a similar question under the rubric of what I called the seduction of Guilty Marxism. The cultural experiences to which they refer are similar, though interpreted differently. Hall is concerned with what happens to the representations of Chinese philosophy when they are filtered through the lens of Western philosophy and claims that the result necessarily is destructive. Brown is concerned with that but also with the more general problem of distortion and sometimes oppression that comes when one set of categories or doctrines is claimed to be true and other experiential perspectives forced to conform to it. I use the phrase "Guilty Marxism" to describe Hall's position because of its delicious ironies. His position is a version of late Marxist "colonialist theory" which asserts that cultures have a fragile integrity that is corrupted even by mere interest on the part of other cultures, coupled with the view that economic imperialism in fact funds any such interest. The ironic part is the guilt that accrues to Westerners asserting their interest (economic or scholarly) and that does not accrue to China's predicted hegemony about which Hall warns and that seems to be under no obligation to understand the non-Chinese world that it will dominate. My own position is that dialogue is good, that it has to start somewhere and be corrected, and that China and the West not only can be in dialogue but have been for a long time, to the enhancement of both cultures and the diminishment of the distinctions between them.

As to Brown's interpretation of the experience of dogmatism, I am in almost thorough agreement with his criticism of its evils. My sole hesitation is the observation that one of the functions of dogma is to provide psychological stability for people of beginning faith; doctrine that is obviously false to the rest of us often functions for that purpose as well as doctrine that has a good claim to truth. But with regard to truth, Brown's fallibilism is the way to go. There is no dogma or doctrine, no truth claim, that is not subject to correction as we discover new evidence, see it in new contexts, appreciate hidden implications, and so forth.

He is right that my own apophatic theology is directly intended to prevent the attachment of the infinite passions of religion to any finite truth claim. I do want to say some kataphatic things about God; but these are intended to be fallible in the general sense and under apophatic criticism in particular, and they all are derived as interpretations of the world I claim God

creates.¹⁷ The mysticism to which I referred above is a powerful positive reinforcement to the apophatic turn. So is the abiding interest in the question of why there is a world at all.

One more methodological point needs emphasis here. Is Delwin Brown a "church theologian" in the senses I mentioned earlier? He identifies himself as an academic theologian working in a North American context and therefore a Christian because that is the dominant religion in this place. The business of a theologian, according to him, "is to evaluate and reconstruct the dominant religious symbols of a people in order to address the needs of the day." This is a fairly straightforward rejection of the view of church theology as faith seeking understanding or the "church thinking for itself." It is very close to affirming the third of my moments of theological inquiry, namely, the reconstruction of one or several traditions' symbols to allow for truth claims in light of the best plausibility conditions that can be stated. I have two hesitations with his statement of the task, in addition to the fact he does not break out the philosophical and comparative moments of theology for special mention (though he includes them in the reconstruction). The first is that he ties theology so closely to needs that the question of truth can easily be subordinated. In the long run, of course, the pursuit of the truth provides the interpretation of what society and individuals really need. But in the short run the needs of easy belief, comfort, and preservation of the theistic custom of fixing God up to be a moral agent in the face of theodicy issues can genuinely pervert the issues of truth. What we really need religiously is the truth, even if it is iconoclastic. The second hesitation is with his limitation of his audience to North America, or to any geographical area. One can do theology *for an audience* for whom one is providing a service, that is, meeting a predetermined need. But to keep the question of truth at the fore, it is necessary to write *for anyone who might correct you*. This is one side of the principle of fallibilism so important to Brown's and my project. I would go so far as to say, pace Hall, that one of the serious tests of one's theology or philosophy is whether it can give intelligent readings of the symbols of other cultures.

Brown also raises the question of how a theology (mine or his) registers and responds to tragedy. Acknowledging his fine discussion I want to treat the issue in connection with the way Robert Corrington raises it.

¹⁷ See "Robert Neville Replies" in Chapman and Frankenberry.

4. Reply to Robert S. Corrington

I have no doubt that Robert Corrington's essay here is the most accurate and penetrating study of my philosophical theology that I have read. He has seen the connection of creation, time, and eternity—the most important ideas—as no one else has. Partly this is because we have read much the same canon and have been deeply influenced by the same thinkers, especially Spinoza, Peirce, Whitehead, and Buchler (I more by Paul Weiss than Buchler, but with much the same effect). But mainly it is because we are tracking the same beast, driven by the same daimon, haunted by the same unaskable questions. It seems to me we have come to the edge of the abyss at about the same place and hold hands while we stare over. Perhaps it is because there are so few who approach the edge and the enterprise of doing so with philosophic discipline is so lonely, that a feeling of comradeship is the most powerful response I have to this essay.

There is one important methodological difference between us, namely his deep use of psychoanalytic metaphors in metaphysical ways. I have had a pragmatist's suspicion of consciousness as an important category, and this has been reinforced by my comparative studies of Chinese thought. Of course I recognize the phenomena psychoanalysis articulates in its various theories of unconscious and subconscious thought, but I give more behavioral than consciousness-oriented interpretations. Corrington, however, takes the psychodynamic sense of the unconscious generation of images and acts as a model for creation, a subjective way of parsing Spinoza's objective claim that *natura naturans* gives rise to *natura naturata*. To give a crude and quick summary of his very complicated theory, we and our world are unconsciously "ejected" like products of primary process. However much we might long for origins, we discover that we are only ejects in a totally natural (by which he means, among other things, impersonal) process, abandoned like orphans. In a true naturalism, Corrington believes, our ground is not "mother" or a loving God but sheer impersonal force, giving rise to a cosmic world of impersonal forces in which our purposive human projects are small and trifling. Hence he criticizes me for smuggling in purposive metaphysical mentalism from process philosophy.

I shall answer some of his arguments in "Robert Neville Replies." Here I want to focus on the experiential issue and the methodological

questions it raises. He claims that my philosophy cannot register the sadness in the world, the tragedy when that is set in the human context. This is a very profound claim, and I read it in connection with Delwin Brown's discussion of tragedy.

Corrington and I agree on the intent to express a philosophical naturalism. We agree that the universe is a vast rush of expanding gasses, clumping briefly in our solar system (and perhaps others) to create the conditions for human life; we agree that human beings are shaped by signs, and that these tie into other natural processes. But human beings employ signs so as to have purposes, to distinguish better and worse courses, to have responsibilities to do the better, and to build a civilization where those purposes can be pursued with power and some stability, and with intelligent correction. But neither nature beyond the human sphere nor any transcendent intentional God guarantees those purposes which have to stand on their own. Moreover, the vast forces of the universe treat human beings as straw dogs, as the *Daodejing* says, and human meaning is vulnerable to earthquake, wind, and fire. Because of this, sentient suffering is high overwhelming. Such is the sadness of the universe.

What should we make of this? The temptation is to suggest that the amount of suffering and evil in the universe is an empirical matter and that we should wait to tote up the balance in order to say whether God the Creator or *Natura naturans* or the Dao or Brahman is good, bad, or indifferent on the whole. But I can't imagine what the toting measure would be.

I think rather that the question is how we respond to the ground of being that creates the natural world with such indifference, and here Corrington and I are not together. He says that sadness has the last word and that the proper response is lamentation. So his philosophy is a brilliant naturalistic theory that laments the fact that the mother who ejects us is cold indifferent effulgence.

My response was forged in the grief of the death in infancy of our first daughter, which occurred a few short weeks before I had to deal with the copy editing of *God the Creator*. There was a passage toward the end of that book where I originally had quoted with approval the line from Job: "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord." My wife and I had loved our daughter with a love whose limits had not been reached, and she was taken away. Could I leave that line in? The result of much soul-searching was

to leave it in as the mark of my response to the Giver and Taker. What it meant was that I could still adore the creator of a world whose forces of disease are blind to the purposes and passions of the human economy. The Dao is simply like that. That was in 1966, and nearly everything I have written since then has aimed to search out the ways, hows, and whys of that world, and the loveliness of its creator whose ways are not our own. *Eternity and Time's Flow* is my most explicit treatment of the shortness of life and other kinds of sadness. It's looking into the abyss no matter how you cut it. The issue is whether to rage like an abandoned orphan or melt in bliss at the loveliness of that power.

The deepest difference between Corrington and myself is experiential, in that rich sense of ongoing interpreted experience. There are some dialectical issues between us, but not of much significance, I suspect. Our respective theologies and metaphysical theories are signs we share with one another, and each allows both of us to experience reality from the other's point of view, at least for a bit. We agree that there is no brute experience unaffected by interpretation, and thus experience is vulnerable to modification as the interpretants change. And we agree that theories need to be tied to experience. So the only adjudication I can think of is that we live with one another's theories, follow out the modifications, continue the debate and dialogue, and encourage one another to keep standing on the edge.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David L. Hall is Professor of Philosophy at University of Texas at El Paso. Among other books, he is the author of *The Civilization of Experience: A Whiteheadian Theory of Culture* (Fordham, 1973), and *Richard Rorty: Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism* (SUNY, 1994).

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Delwin Brown is Harvey H. Potthoff Professor of Christian Theology and Academic Dean at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver. His most recent book, *Boundaries of Our Habitations: Tradition and Theological Construction*, is the subject of a recent special issue of *AJTP*.

Robert S. Corrington is Professor of Philosophical Theology in the graduate and graduate theological schools at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. Among his numerous books are *An Introduction to C. S. Peirce: Philosopher, Semiotician, and Ecstatic Naturalist* (1993), and *Ecstatic Naturalism: Signs of the World* (1994).

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BOOK REVIEWS

Religion, Science and Naturalism. Willem B. Drees. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 314 pages. Hardcover. \$59.95. (Reviewed by J. Wesley Robbins, Indiana University South Bend)

Willem Drees is the Nicolette Bruining Professor of Science and of Technology from a Liberal Protestant Perspective, University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands. He is an associate of The Chicago Center for Religion and Science and author of *Beyond the Big Bang: Quantum Cosmologies and God*.

Drees tells us in his Introduction (5) that this book serves two purposes: to survey and critique various positions in the religion and science field and to spell out his own view of the most plausible way to relate the two areas. Broadly speaking, Drees attends to both purposes throughout the book rather than addressing them separately in distinct sections. In the course of his survey of the religion and science field, he considers positions ranging from those of Ralph Burhoe, Gordon Kaufman, and Philip Hefner that take evolution as a starting point (section 26) to Alvin Plantinga's call for sciences that take classical theism as their starting point (section 18).

Drees describes himself as a naturalist and a scientific realist (section 2). The latter, he notes, commits him to "the standard view of matter as constituted of atoms (physics) and . . . the standard view of organisms as having arisen through an evolutionary process" (11-12). He is a non-reductive physicalist, committed to the proposition that everything in the natural world is composed of constituents described in particle physics (14), although complex aspects of the natural world are also describable and explainable in terms of theories formulated in other scientific disciplines. (16).

Religion, for Drees, typically has two different dimensions, mystical and prophetic (33-34). The former involves positive relationship to "aspects of reality which we may not understand or control." The latter involves "articulating a contrast between what is and what should be."

Drees's view of the most plausible way to understand the relationship between religion and science is a kind of transcendentalism. He advocates postulating a timeless transcendent God on whom the natural world as a whole is constantly dependent (section 31). This posit, according to Drees, serves

both theoretical and practical purposes. It answers "limit questions" about the natural world as a whole that are beyond the scope of the special sciences. And it provides a needed, relativizing, corrective to the prophetic elements of particular religious traditions. This way of relating religion and science leaves Drees's scientific realism intact. He does not have to claim, in order to take religion seriously, that the natural world is something other than contemporary physics says that it is.

This brings me to the portion of Drees's book that is most significant for readers of this journal. That is his discussion, and ultimate rejection, of religious naturalism or religious empiricism as a way to relate religion and science (section 30). Proponents of this position opt, in Drees's words, for a "richer" view of the natural world than his own scientific realism would countenance. "They seek to stay clear from approaches considered unattractive, such as 'reductionism', 'determinism', 'materialism', 'selectionism', and 'mechanism', to mention just a few labels which are occasionally used perjoratively, and to find value, self-organization, meaning, consciousness, or some other feature considered desirable, as fundamental aspects of reality" (252).

Drees finds fault with such positions for two reasons. He thinks that their interpretation of the sciences is indefensible. And he finds their account of religion to be too "mystical," accepting of the world as it is rather than generating a "prophetic" critique of the world as it is in terms of a vision of what it should be. Since he discusses only the first of these two reasons in any detail, I will limit myself to it as well.

Religious naturalists or religious empiricists, according to Drees, take the natural world to be different in some respect than it is depicted in particle physics, which he takes to be "the best available description" of its constituents (14). They take the natural world to be organic and holistic rather than mechanical and atomistic. And they take such things as values and choices to be characteristic of nature at its most fundamental levels. Drees mentions Karl Peters, co-editor of *Zygon*, Nancy Frankenberry, and Frederick Ferré in this connection. He also distinguishes two different ways in which religious naturalists/empiricists might make their case.

First, one might claim that there has been an historical sea-change in the sciences from theories that are typically mechanistic to theories that are typically organicist. Drees cites Frankenberry and Ferré as advocates of this

historical thesis. Second, following Whitehead, one might claim that scientific descriptions are abstract in a way that metaphysical ones are not. Consequently, while the natural world may seem mechanistic in abstract terms, it is really, or concretely, organic, value laden, choiceful.

Drees rejects the first of these positions on the grounds that it involves a non sequitur. It does not follow, he claims, from the fact that there have been changes in the character of scientific analyses that the natural world at its most fundamental levels shares valuational and volitional characteristics with us. For instance, it does not follow from the fact that contemporary physics is formulated in terms of fields rather than particles that the natural world is holistic in a way that has anything to do with values (256-7).

Drees rejects the second of these positions not because it is impossible, but because he thinks it unlikely that it will satisfy certain legitimate conditions. These are, first, that a process metaphysics should generate "alternative accounts of all well-confirmed phenomena" and, second, that these alternative theories should have "a degree of detail and precision comparable to those of the currently dominant view" (258). After registering his skepticism that process metaphysics does these things, he concludes, "I thus see no reason to abandon a materialist version of naturalism."

Drees points out that scientific realism poses a problem for would-be religious naturalists/empiricists in the following respect. If we take scientific theories realistically, they turn out to provide explanations of certain of our experiences that differ dramatically from how we account for them in commonsensical terms. Explanations of our experiences of color in microphysical terms make no reference to the colors red, blue, yellow, etc. Similarly, explanations of our experiences of peace with, or trust in, the world in scientific terms may very well make no reference to "persons, values, meaning" (259). The moral is that while "science enlarges our world beyond experience" it also "forces us to a critical reconsideration of our experiences, coming up with counter-intuitive views of them" (259).

Drees is right, in my opinion, that standard theories in physics and biology today are no more hospitable to religious interests than the "mechanistic" theories of our scientific past were. This leaves religious empiricists, in particular, in a bind. They can try to find signs, clouds no bigger than the size of a man's hand, in these scientific disciplines that their current lack of religious significance is only temporary. This leaves them hoping

against hope that today's fringe theory in physics or biology, which they find to be fraught with religious significance, will become tomorrow's scientific orthodoxy. Or, they can argue that scientific theories, however mechanistic they may turn out to be, will always be trumped by metaphysical systems. Then they have the unenviable task of making a plausible case that, out of all such systems, theirs, which is unlike other possible ones in being hospitable to religious interests, has the soundest experiential backing.

Drees's treatment of religious naturalism/empiricism is regrettably, even if understandably, short. Even so, it merits serious consideration by, and response from, those who, unlike myself, still find these positions defensible. For a pragmatic humanist critique of Drees's position see my "Broken-backed Naturalism" in a symposium on his book that is forthcoming in *Zygon*.

The Chicago School of Theology—Pioneers in Religious Inquiry. Eds. W. Creighton Peden and Jerome A. Stone. 2 Volumes. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996. Hardcover. \$99.95 and \$109.95.
(Reviewed by Jennifer G. Jesse, University of Chicago Divinity School)

The editors of this project have taken up the daunting task of providing, in two volumes, a representative sampling of the major ideas of eleven figures of the Chicago School of Theology, presented through selections of their works. Published in the Studies in American Religion series of The Edwin Mellen Press, these volumes include all the major figures identified with the Chicago School, the group of scholars associated with the Divinity School of the University of Chicago from the turn of the century to the 1980s, who set out to revise inherited Christian beliefs in light of modern modes of thought available through the natural and social sciences, and new psychological, cultural, and historical methodologies.

The volumes reproduce portions of previously published works by these authors, with a separate introduction for each. Volume one, covering the early Chicago School figures (1906-1959)—indicated here with the scholar who contributed the introduction—includes George Burman Foster (Edgar A. Towne), Edward Scribner Ames (W. Clark Gilpin), Shailer Mathews (Leslie

A. Muray), Gerald Birney Smith (Larry L. Greenfield), and Shirley Jackson Case (William J. Hynes). The second volume covers the later Chicago School of Albert Eustace Haydon (W. Creighton Peden), Henry Nelson Wieman (Emanuel S. Goldsmith), Daniel Day Williams (Perry LeFevre), Bernard E. Meland (Tyron Inbody), Bernard M. Loomer (Nancy Frankenberry), and James Luther Adams (John R. Wilcox).

The editors' intention for this collection, as stated in the preface by Jerome Stone, is to "further the current process of the scholarly study and creative reappropriation of this movement" by providing access to the significant works of these authors that are out of print or not easily accessible (iii). Some of the works that scholars of the Chicago School will be especially gratified to see reprinted here include Mathews' *The Atonement and the Social Process* (1930), Haydon's "The Theological Trend of Pragmatism" (1919), and Loomer's intriguing presentation of "The Aim of Divinity Education" (1949), and his "S-I-Z-E Is the Measure" (1974), forerunner to his later "Size of God" essay (also presented here in abridged form). Many also will note with approval the inclusion of Adams in the Chicago School, though the value of the space devoted to him in this collection is somewhat dubious: the works reproduced are limited to reprints from an easily accessible anthology of his works published in 1991.

The material included here demonstrates the continuing relevance of these works for the contemporary study of religion, in spite of factors that inevitably date the ideas of any generation's thinkers. In his preface, Stone candidly exposes these elements—their "naive faith in science, progress, and democracy," their lack of the pluralistic sensitivity we expect in religious thought and methodology today, and the aspects of their thought conditioned "by the white, Euro-centric male-oriented culture in which they grew up" (xii-xiii). While these factors must be examined carefully and critically by contemporary students, such elements do not invalidate these thinkers' contributions. The theological currents, ideas, and inventions associated with the Chicago School—its process orientation, its radical empirical strands, its naturalism, its pragmatic perspective, and its socio-historical method—have influenced many contemporary American theologians and philosophers, and continue to provide valuable resources for constructive thought that intelligibly and persuasively challenges the neo-Kantian, deconstructive, and narrative methodologies that dominate the contemporary scene. Ready access to the

primary texts of these thinkers in one collection is an invaluable instrument for facilitating this constructive process.

Having said this, I must also note several disturbing aspects of this project that undermine the usefulness of these particular volumes. There are many minor annoyances along the way, including typographical errors, the lack of page headings noting divisions between authors, and the quality of the printing (too small and, in the first volume, too light).

Somewhat more problematic is the minimalist approach to introducing these figures. Granted, this project does not set out to provide a critical examination of the authors. However, the introductions are extraordinarily brief (3-6 pages each), and serve in most cases only to give the barest biographical information, and brief summaries of the works included. Muray's introduction to Mathews, Greenfield's treatment of Smith, and Inbody's description of Meland stand out for the clarity and succinctness with which they offer a critical assessment of why and how their author's work is valuable for the contemporary study of religion. But most of the introductions, while interesting and insightful, give few indications about this, and offer little historical or ideological contextualization to aid the reader's understanding or evaluation of the selections reprinted in the volumes. If this project is aimed in part at introducing these figures to new readers, and at situating the works of the Chicago School in the broader corpus of American theology and philosophy for purposes of creative reappropriation of their ideas, such a skeletal presentation tends to defeat the purpose. An additional difficulty when dealing with the thinkers of the Chicago School is that their chief critical maneuver is applying modernist ideas and methods to inherited tradition. But those ideas and methods are what have become so problematic for the contemporary student of religion, after all; the modernist approaches are precisely what postmodern thinkers have deconstructed. If these volumes are to be used effectively for the purpose the editors propose, these issues need to be addressed in some fashion.

By far the most distressing aspect of this project, however, is the radically abridged form in which most of the reprinted works are presented. Rather than selecting essays or whole chapters to represent a particular aspect of an author's thought, the editors have in most cases attempted to extract the substance of the author's major ideas from the whole work, often an entire book. Any given work is strung together by ellipses, which occur not only

between paragraphs but between sentences, and sometimes within sentences. The first work, for example, is Foster's *The Finality of the Christian Religion* (1906), an alarming condensation of a work originally over 500 pages to 37 pages. The editors indicate excised portions with ellipses, in almost every paragraph, and then indicate at the end of the paragraph or a series of paragraphs what page numbers of the original work this portion represents. What the reader loses through this treatment is not simply the particular passages excised but, chiefly, a sense of the continuity and coherence of the author's argument.

Here is an example of how a portion of Chapter 7 of Williams' *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* reads as presented in this collection:

Take not simply the will to be, but the will to belong as the key to human action and feeling....

Being [sic] with the assertion that the fundamental human craving is to belong, to count in the community of being, to have one's freedom in and with the response of others, to enjoy God as one who makes us members of one society.... When we ask what really constitutes being for man the answer is that it is belonging, or communion which constitutes its heart....

There are two facts about contemporary culture which rise starkly before us. First, the abandonment of personal freedom and judgment to the passions of group loyalty and idolatry; and second, the cruel and wanton destruction of human life....

To be human is to desire to belong.... But this love is always a troubled love, for no group can give all the security we crave.... Any non-conformity is a warning signal that my group is challenged....

Thus the passion of the will to belong becomes the passion of self-deification. The superior must defend itself against the evil and inferior.... (II.177)

The reader's confusion in following the argument presented in this manner is exacerbated by the inconsistent way editorial notations are

indicated, explaining what portions of the authors' works are actually represented. For some works, placing page numbers at the ends of paragraphs is the only method used, but even here some of those notations are missing. In most cases, when a chapter heading or the page numbers of a journal are provided at the beginning of the selection, no indication is given as to whether this text reproduces the whole of that chapter or essay or, if not, how much it represents. (Given the character of this particular collection, the reader assumes only a portion of the work is reproduced unless informed otherwise.) Other editorial devices are applied inconsistently throughout the volume, without explanation. Especially when producing an omnibus of this nature, careful attention to these editorial aids is critical.

The decision to produce an anthology in this manner suggests a presumption on the part of the editors which I find questionable, and which seems especially inappropriate to the radical empirical thought represented here. This strategy trades on the assumption that ideas can be conveyed whole and intact without much consideration for the expressive style through which those ideas are communicated, or for the concerns and events that motivate and contextualize them. I find my own reading of these volumes a sufficient and convincing demonstration that the opposite is true, that an adequate and accurate understanding and "feel" for the author—not only for his central concerns but for what is at stake for him in writing, and for the power and persuasiveness of his words—is communicated only through a presentation that accurately conveys his sense of style, imagery, and pacing. Style is not merely an extraneous ornament adorning the ideas of these thinkers; the style in which their ideas are conveyed is an inextricable part of the content of those ideas. This is especially evident in the case of someone like Foster who means to argue his point about the poetic nature of religious ideas and language through an expressive style that is itself highly poetic (e.g., *The Function of Religion in Man's Struggle for Existence*, presented here in abridged form).

For this reviewer, the experience of reading the material in these volumes is largely an unhappy one, much like buying a used book that has been highlighted by the previous reader but, in this instance, being able to see only the highlighted words. When one picks up an anthology, one of course acquiesces to the judgment of the editor in choosing the particular works or sections of the author to include. But here, where ellipses occur everywhere, even in the middle of sentences, where paragraphs sometimes seem completely

disjointed from the ones around it, and where editorial notations not infrequently are lacking about how much or exactly what portions of a given work are reproduced, all ability to form coherent ideas and accurate assessments of the material on the part of the reader is forfeit.

The same abridgement method is used, to some degree, for every author in this collection. In my judgment, the results are most unfortunate in the cases of Foster and Williams. Some authors fare better than others, either because the works selected are more amenable to this type of treatment, like those of Mathews, Smith, and Wieman, or because the editors have chosen to present whole chapters or essays for some, or at least have kept the internal excisions to a minimum, as with Ames, Haydon, Meland, and portions of Loomer and Adams. By far the happiest presentation in this collection is that of Meland, whose works are presented in a different format. Nine topics are chosen from Meland's thought and each is presented separately, exemplified (usually) through whole blocks of texts from various works. Thus, while still out of context, we gain a fair comprehension of the core of Meland's thought expressed in its own integrity.

One of the most beneficial features of this project is the bibliographical listing at the end of each volume. These supply the major writings (both books and articles) of each author as well as major secondary sources relative to each figure. Also helpful are some of the introductory materials that offer bibliographical information and recommend readings on various topics.

Certainly anyone who uses this collection will recognize the difficulty of the project its editors have undertaken. And there are some inclusions that every scholar of the Chicago School will find advantageous. Overall though, I find the usefulness of these texts, as presented, is limited. Readers not already familiar with these figures are likely to find that understanding and appropriating the material is prohibited by the abridgment format. Even scholars versed in other works by these authors may have a difficult time using or referring to the texts presented here because such references rely on one's ability to make accurate judgments about the author's meaning at any given point, a meaning that always depends in part on the surrounding textual context, which often is unavailable here. We can hope, however, that this project of reproducing the works of the Chicago School will continue, perhaps

with shorter and more complete offerings from these authors, which can provide the means for the creative interchange we seek with these works.