

AUGUSTINE COLLEGIATE REVIEW

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AUGUSTINE COLLEGIATE REVIEW

The *Augustine Collegiate Review* is the official publication of the Augustine Honors Collegium of Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky. This undergraduate research journal is designed to present inter-disciplinary conversations about broad theological, cultural, and philosophical topics from a Christian perspective that highlight and encourage undergraduate research and academic writing. The ACR is published twice a year, and each issue features undergraduate student-written pieces, requested articles from active scholars, and a variety of book reviews from both students and scholars alike.

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AUGUSTINE COLLEGIATE REVIEW

**LETTERS FROM
THE EDITORS**

THE INAUGURAL ISSUE OF THE *AUGUSTINE* *COLLEGIATE REVIEW*

JONATHAN ARNOLD

Jonathan Arnold is the Assistant Professor of Christian Theology and Church History and the Director of The Augustine Honors Collegium at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky.

The inaugural issue of the *Augustine Collegiate Review*.

That simple phrase bears far more weight than might first appear. The journal, a product of The Augustine Honors Collegium of Boyce College, aims to stand out from amongst the vast sea of publications already on the market. In fact, the publishing world appears to be so saturated that one would certainly be excused for questioning the logic behind yet another journal. Hopefully, this first issue will demonstrate its value to the readership.

That being said, I have been involved in the academy long enough to understand the ludicrous nature of a claim of uniqueness for a publication of this sort, and I have been appropriately humbled enough to recognize both the dangers and the limitations of claims of self-importance. Thus, I have no desire to sell this project as “the next big thing”. I do not believe this journal will change your life, nor do I believe it will change the academic world. Thankfully, those are not the aims.

My hope in overseeing this project can be described in one word: potential. In my years in the classroom, I have had the great privilege of teaching some extraordinarily bright students, students with such natural giftings that even I would have to try hard to get in their way. But those students are few and

far between—even once in a generation. The vast majority of students in an undergraduate or even postgraduate classroom enter as vessels of potential, lacking only the shaping of experience and the lighting of the proverbial fire. In my mind, at its best this journal will be part of that honing, a tool for undergraduates (and their professors) to hone their skills through a rigorous academic process which includes a double-blind expert review.

The academic publishing process can be difficult and even disheartening as authors submit the product of their hard work only to have editors and expert reviewers zero in on the minutest details. For many undergraduates—if not most of them—having papers edited in such a manner is a completely new experience. In fact, several students who submitted papers for this issue responded with amazement at the level of critique their papers received. Sometimes the critique proved positive and led either to publication or at least to more constructive work on the article. At other times, the critique left a surprising wound in the mind of the author. But in all of those cases, the students began to understand the invaluable (and seemingly unending) process of researching, writing, editing, and receiving critique on academic work.

While this publishing process will certainly benefit the student authors—indeed, it already has—the journal also has the potential to benefit the greater academic community. The vast majority of academic journals purport to be publications “of the experts, for the experts,” but this journal seeks to be something different—an opportunity for the academic community to begin developing the next generation of writers and for these talented undergraduate writers to begin sharing the knowledge they have gained in their studies.

Please understand, this endeavor is not an attempt to fast-track students into the academic world—something equivalent to a participation trophy in t-ball. I firmly believe students need to work hard and develop their skills as researchers and writers in order to earn their place in the academic community. This journal is not intended to give undergraduates a false sense of importance or prematurely bestow upon them the title “expert”. The editorial team makes no claims that the undergraduate authors represented here are experts nor that these articles represent a unique contribution to the collective body of knowledge. The articles selected through this rigorous process do, however, represent the best of undergraduate academic writing, combined with some excellent, in-depth—if not exhaustive—research.

Each journal issue will present those select undergraduate-authored articles alongside others contributed by seasoned experts which will serve as entry points into the issue's theme. The goal of this format is to allow the readership to dig into the theme with as much depth as they would like. Readers are not assumed to have prior knowledge in order to benefit from the journal as authors of all ilks have been instructed to write for an educated but non-expert audience. Each of the issues will tackle a single broad theme with authors being instructed to tackle the topic from a Christian perspective.

This first issue, for instance, focuses on the joint themes of metaphysics and ontology—large topics which provide innumerable angles for research. To introduce one of those angles, experts Mark Coppenger and Douglas Blount, both well-published in the fields of philosophy and theology, have contributed articles on their conceptions of God and time. Following those articles, the undergraduate papers tackle themes from a theology of place to fantasy literature, from a philosophical foundation for art to the concept of transhumanism. With each of these articles, I hope readers can engage the topic with a critical interest which, at least for the moment, will keep from thinking about the undergraduate authors and instead will leave them inspired, educated, captivated, or even moved to disagreement. The quality of research and writing will certainly move them to return for more.

THE VISION OF THE AUGUSTINE COLLEGIATE REVIEW

RUTHANNE IRVIN, MACKENZIE MILLER,
WILLIAM D. STANDRIDGE, II

Our vision for the *Augustine Collegiate Review* is to publish an academic, Christ-honoring, and accessible journal, benefiting both the academy and the lay-person. We seek to provide an opportunity for Christian scholars to conduct independent research on topics they find personally engaging and appropriate for the building up of the church. As the next generation of Christian academics, we desire to make valuable contributions to fields ranging from metaphysics, aesthetics, apologetics, history, and more. We envision a journal that engages century old ideas with fresh words and eyes, while providing critical analysis on important cultural endeavors. These demand a Christian response, a response that perhaps only Christians reared in a rigorous academic environment are prepared to make. Remaining true to our namesake, we desire, like Augustine, to provide scholarship that also transcends this current culture and impacts readers for decades to come.

As one of the first research journals of our kind, we see a bright future for aspiring scholastics. Research journals are one of the main avenues people present groundbreaking scholarship, and the *Augustine Collegiate Review* provides a new approach to those ideas. We want to renew the idea that our generation can hold ideals and opinions worthy of consideration and respect. John Calvin published a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*

when he was only 22, and later became one of the most prolific theologians in Christian history. His renown and influence was impossible without an opportunity to publish his work as a young man.

This journal is not an echo chamber, meant only for similar ideas and opinions. Instead, students who publish this journal interact critically with the big-ideas of history and current culture in such a way that demands conversation with secular and sacred realms alike. This journal has a vision of showing there are eloquent and scholarly young men and women with an exceedingly large amount of worthwhile ideas that deserve interaction. It is intended to be ecumenical enough to provide scholarship that critically engages ideas from other Christians, and exclusive enough to clearly exemplify the importance of engaging all ages, races, denominations, and worldviews. We believe they deserve a listening ear.

The inaugural issue of the *Augustine Collegiate Review* is centered around the evaluation of various aspects of metaphysics. As one of the classic disciplines, philosophers have focused on metaphysical questions for centuries, and continue the discussion today. From evaluating the relationship between the body, the mind, and the soul to exploring the presence of personal identity as it relates to the meaning of humanity, these big questions individuals have long been asking will continue to drastically shape the life of the individual and society as a whole. Overall, developing a proper view of human nature is determined by one's ultimate reality. Thus, the men and women who contributed to the journal connected with scholars past and present in the quest for answers to these philosophical questions. They evaluate various facets of literature, personhood and technology, beauty and craftsmanship, a theology of place, and God and time. We hope readers, through critical evaluation, self-initiated research, or a simple peaked curiosity, will venture down new paths and join this journey as well.

We hope the inaugural issue of the *Augustine Collegiate Review* proves fruitful, encouraging, and challenging to a wide audience. It offers students the opportunity to engage ideas charitably while also publishing an academic work for a diverse audience. Ultimately we hope it fosters intellectual curiosity for many readers, and encourages a legacy of cultural and academic engagement from a biblical worldview.

**SCHOLARLY
ARTICLES**

DIVINE TIMELESSNESS DEFINED AND DEFENDED

DOUGLAS K. BLOUNT

Douglas K. Blount is the professor of Christian apologetics and chair of the Department of Apologetics and World Religions at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

This paper concerns itself with objections to the doctrine of divine timelessness. Since, however, the doctrine needs careful articulation before such objections can be considered, I begin by briefly defining it. In so doing, I elucidate three distinct positions that its advocates may take. Finally, I consider objections to the doctrine which have appeared in the contemporary literature, concluding that none succeeds.

THE DOCTRINE DEFINED

Some theists maintain that being eternal amounts to existing everlastingly in time.¹ In their view, God enjoys a beginningless and endless temporal existence. Thus, they affirm that

(1) For every time t , God exists at t .

¹ Theists affirm that God exists as the omnibenevolent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal Creator on whom everything else depends for its existence.

Such theists I refer to as temporalists; their view I refer to as temporalism.² Not all theists are temporalists; some deny (1). They do so not because they think God exists at some but not all times; instead, they maintain that God's existence is not temporal, that he is timeless.

Nelson Pike separates the view that God is timeless into two distinct claims. "First," he states, "if God is timeless, He has no duration, i.e., He lacks temporal extension ... Secondly, if God is timeless, God also lacks temporal location."³ Now while it might be possible for one to be temporally located without being temporally extended, it is not possible for one to be temporally extended without being temporally located. To be temporally extended is to exist for the length of some temporal interval. But since a temporal interval amounts to nothing more than an unbroken series of temporal locations, to exist for the length of such an interval is to exist during a series of such locations. Thus, one cannot be temporally extended without being temporally located. For this reason, the claim that God is timeless can be reduced simply to the claim that he lacks temporal location. Or so it can on Pike's account of it. On his account, then, advocates of divine timelessness are theists who affirm that

(2) For every time t , it is not the case that God exists at t .

Such theists I refer to as atemporalists; their view I refer to as atemporalism.⁴

Richard Swinburne attributes to atemporalists the view that "[t]here is no temporal succession of states in God."⁵ On its face, this attribution seems well-founded. Since having temporally successive states involves having some state s_1 at some time t_1 and having some other state s_2 at a later time t_2 , one has temporally successive states only if one exists at both t_1 and t_2 . But if one

2 For temporalist discussions of God and time, see William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), 144-85; R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God*, Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Alan Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992); Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken, 1970); Richard Swinburne, "God and Time," in Eleonore Stump, ed., *Reasoned Faith* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 204-22; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz, eds., *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 77-98.

3 Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 7.

4 For recent atemporalist discussions of God and time, see David B. Burrell, "God's Eternity," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), 389-406; Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *The Concept of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 219-52; and John C. Yates, *The Timelessness of God* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1990).

5 Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 216.

exists at both t_1 and t_2 , one is temporally located. Thus, if one has temporally successive states, one is not timeless. Or, at least, not on Pike's account.

So, on that account, the doctrine of divine timelessness entails the absence of successive states in God. That this follows from (2) indicates a serious inadequacy in Pike's understanding of that doctrine. For, however surprising it might be, one can coherently maintain *both* that God is timeless (in a significant sense of 'timeless') *and* that states of the divine mind are successively ordered. This follows from the fact that God might be located at a time (or times) not temporally related to the present moment.

Here I need to introduce a notion which features prominently below—the notion of a temporal array. Let a time t be temporally related to a time t^* just in case t is earlier than t^* , simultaneous with t^* , or later than t^* . Roughly put, a temporal array is a set of times temporally related to one another. The present moment happens to be a member of infinitely many different temporal arrays; and among the temporal arrays having that moment as a member is one which has no members temporally related to times not belonging to it. Such a temporal array I refer to as a complete temporal array. More formally, these points can be put as follows:

(3) For any set of times T , T is a *temporal array* if and only if every member of T is temporally related to every other member of T .

(4) For any set of times T , T is a *complete temporal array* if and only if (i) T is a temporal array, and (ii) no time which is a member of T bears a temporal relation to a time which is not a member of T .

Let the complete temporal array to which the present moment belongs be t . Atemporalists affirm that

(5) For every time t , if t is a member of t , it is not the case that God exists at t .

From (5), (2) follows only if every time is a member of t . Is every time a member of t ?

Since the existence of a time which is not a member of t entails the existence of at least one complete temporal array other than t ,⁶ the question of whether such a time exists amounts to the question of whether t is the only complete temporal array. Is it? Perhaps, but perhaps not. For while t *might* be the only complete temporal array, it certainly seems possible that there be others.

⁶ If a time t exists which is not a member of t , then the set of all and only those times temporally related to t constitutes a complete temporal array.

Atemporalists who believe it possible that complete temporal arrays other than *t* exist might characterize eternity as just such an array. Such atemporalists might view eternity as a complete temporal array having only one member, namely, the divine present. Or they might view it as a complete temporal array having, say, infinitely many members. On the latter view, states of the divine mind might be successively ordered, even though God is not temporally located in *t*. Hence, atemporalists holding this view could affirm *both* that there is succession in the divine mind *and* that God is in a significant sense timeless. On such a view, states of the divine mind would be successively ordered, but God would not exist at any time temporally related to the present moment. Advocates of this view would affirm (5) but deny (2). So also advocates of the view that eternity is a complete temporal array which has only one member—namely, the divine present—would affirm (5) but deny (2).

Hereafter I refer to atemporalists who affirm (5) but deny (2) as relative atemporalists and to their view as relative atemporalism.⁷ I refer to relative atemporalists who view eternity as a complete temporal array having more than one member as extrinsic atemporalists and to their view as extrinsic atemporalism; I refer to those who view eternity as a complete temporal array having only one member as intrinsic atemporalists and to their view as intrinsic atemporalism. Not all atemporalists deny (2). I refer to theists who affirm not only (5) but also (2) as absolute atemporalists and to their view as absolute atemporalism. According to absolute atemporalists, eternity is not properly characterized as a complete temporal array. Elsewhere I argue not only for atemporalism broadly construed but for absolute atemporalism.⁸ What follows, however, concerns itself not with any specific version of atemporalism but rather with atemporalism *per se*.

THE DOCTRINE DEFENDED

An examination of objections to the doctrine of divine timelessness is worth undertaking for at least two reasons. First, if any of these objections were

7 In *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time*, Padgett argues that “God is . . . ‘relatively’ timeless” in that God’s “time is immeasurable” (126). Since he affirms temporalism, Padgett clearly uses ‘relatively timeless’ differently than I do.

8 Douglas K. Blount, “An Essay on Divine Presence” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1997), 173-98.

decisive, whether God exists temporally would be a settled issue. Second, even if none of these objections were to settle the issue, they might nonetheless be instructive for its advocates, providing constraints for atemporalists and thus establishing parameters for delineating their view. Determining whether they *in fact* provide constraints and set parameters for atemporalists requires considering them carefully. So, then, the remainder of this essay comprises an examination of the more prominent objections to the doctrine of divine timelessness in the contemporary literature.⁹

The Objection from Simultaneity

Perhaps the most prosaic objection to the doctrine of divine timelessness is one which arises from the transitivity of simultaneity. This objection finds eloquent expression in the work of Anthony Kenny, who takes the doctrine's incoherence to follow from a straightforward understanding of simultaneity. His argument goes as follows:

Indeed, the whole concept of a timeless eternity, the whole of which is simultaneous with every part of time, seems to be radically incoherent. For simultaneity as ordinarily understood is a transitive relation. If A happens at the same time as B, and B happens at the same time as C, then A happens at the same time as C. . . . But, on [the atemporalist's] view, my typing of this paper is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Again, on [this] view, the great fire of Rome is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Therefore, while I type these very words, Nero fiddles heartlessly on.¹⁰

Kenny thus sees the transitivity of simultaneity as a serious threat to atemporalism.

Is he right? Well, if it follows from atemporalism that the burning of Rome is simultaneous with the typing of these words, then atemporalism is indeed untenable. So if Kenny's argument turns out to be sound, atemporalists face insuperable difficulties. Fortunately for atemporalists, however, his argument does not turn out to be sound. To see this, consider the argument more closely.

9 What follows does not consider the objection from the Incarnation; on that particular objection, see Douglas K. Blount, "On the Incarnation of a Timeless God," in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 236-48

10 Anthony Kenny, "Aquinas on Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom," in *Reason and Religion: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 129.

It goes as follows:

(6) For any times t , t^* , and t^{**} , if t is simultaneous with t^* and t^* is simultaneous with t^{**} , then t is simultaneous with t^{**} .

(7) If the doctrine of divine timelessness is true, then eternity is simultaneous with every moment in history.

(8) If eternity is simultaneous with every moment in history, then every moment in history is simultaneous with every other moment in history.

(9) But every moment in history is not simultaneous with every other moment in history.

(10) Therefore, the doctrine of divine timelessness is false.

The conclusion, (10), follows from (7), (8), and (9). (8) follows from (6). As nothing more than a statement of the transitivity of simultaneity, (6) is beyond reproach. (9) is surely true. So if (7) turns out to be true, the argument succeeds. As it turns out, however, (7) is not true. According to the doctrine of divine timelessness, eternity *is not* simultaneous with every moment in history.¹¹ Indeed, it is not simultaneous with *any* moment in history. Since the doctrine stipulates that God is not located at any moment temporally related to the present one, eternity cannot be simultaneous with any such moment according to atemporalists. Hence, on their view, it cannot be simultaneous with *every* such moment.

In attributing (7) to the atemporalist, Kenny takes too literally atemporalist attempts to characterize God's uninhibited access to every moment in history. Let us say that one has 'uninhibited access' to an event e if and only if there is no temporal distance between the occurrence of e and one's access to e . While a temporal being might enjoy uninhibited access to certain events which occur in 2014 and certain other events which occur in 2017, its uninhibited access to events occurring in 2017 comes at the expense of its uninhibited access to events occurring in 2014. To be sure, such a being might have uninhibited access to each set of events. Even so, its uninhibited access to the first set must be temporally distant from its uninhibited access to the second set.¹² But the

11 Here I assume that every 'moment in history' is a member of t .

12 For any times t and t^* , t and t^* are *temporally distant* if and only if (for some time t^{**} , either (i) t^{**} is later than t and earlier than t^* , or (ii) t^{**} is earlier than t and later than t^*). For any events e and e^* , e and e^* are *temporally distant* if and only if (for every time t at which e occurs and every time t^* at which e^* occurs, t and t^* are temporally distant).

timeless God suffers no such indignity.¹³ While he enjoys uninhibited access to events occurring in 2014 as well as uninhibited access to events occurring in 2017, no temporal distance stands between his uninhibited access to the first set and his uninhibited access to the second set. If atemporalists appropriate the language of simultaneity in order to make this point, they clearly do not use it in its ordinary sense. William Hasker is correct: “the statement about simultaneity is simply a metaphorical way of putting the point that all of time is ‘present’ in the ‘now’ of eternity.”¹⁴ So for the objection from simultaneity to succeed, atemporalist claims that eternity is simultaneous with every moment in time must be understood in a flat-footedly literal sense. Given their commitment to the doctrine of divine timelessness, however, atemporalists clearly do not intend such claims to be understood in this way. While the ordinary understanding of ‘simultaneous’ is ‘at the same time as,’ atemporalists use it to mean something like ‘at no temporal distance from.’¹⁵ By thus appropriating ‘simultaneous,’ they make the point about God’s uninhibited access to all temporal events mentioned above. So, then, the objection from simultaneity fails.

The Objection from Agency

Theists hold that God created the universe and sustains it in being. Moreover, they claim that he plays an active role in the course of temporal events. He speaks to Moses from a burning bush, protects Daniel by shutting the mouths of lions, hears Jonah’s prayer and delivers him from a great fish.¹⁶ According to Robert Cook, however, “it is difficult to fathom how an atemporal God could do anything at all.”¹⁷ Being active, J. R. Lucas claims, presupposes being temporal.¹⁸ “To act purposefully,” William Kneale tells us, “is to act

13 Or, at least, an absolutely or intrinsically timeless God suffers no such indignity. Things are more complicated for an extrinsically timeless God. For, as far as I can see, there is no compelling reason for thinking it impossible that an extrinsically timeless God so suffer. Moreover, it seems possible that such a God’s uninhibited access to one event is temporally distant from such a God’s uninhibited access to some other event. I owe this point to Thomas Flint.

14 William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), 163.

15 Thus, when one ordinarily claims that event *e* is simultaneous with event *e**, one ordinarily means that *e* occurs at the same time as *e**. But when an atemporalist claims that eternity is simultaneous with, say, the invasion of Tarawa, she means that eternity is not temporally distant from the battle for that tiny atoll.

16 Cf. Exodus 3:1-4:17, Daniel 6:16-21, and Jonah 2:1-10.

17 Robert R. Cook, “God, Time and Freedom,” *Religious Studies* 23 (1987), 81.

18 J. R. Lucas, *A Treatise on Time and Space* (London: Methuen and Co., 1973), 301.

with thought of what will come about after the beginning of the action.”¹⁹ Lucas and Kneale thus suggest the notion of atemporal agency turns out to be incoherent. Unfortunately, however, they offer little by way of argument to support their suggestion.

Still, other opponents of atemporalism *have* offered arguments for eschewing atemporal agency. Richard Gale argues that

Our ordinary concept of causation involves some sort of temporal relation, which can be that of simultaneity, between cause and effect. This holds even for the notion of agent causation in which the cause is not an event but a person. God’s timeless causation is a species of such agent causation but one that has no temporal relation to its temporal effect. Our ordinary concept of causation does not make room for timeless causation...²⁰

If one then employs the “ordinary concept of causation,” the notion of atemporal agency makes no sense. Hence, if one wants to save that notion, one must “give a mystical interpretation” to the doctrine of divine timelessness.²¹ “But,” Gale argues, “the theist must pay a significant price for going this mystical route, namely, he winds up with a God who is a nonperson.”²² Now whether the ‘mystical route’ leads to a God who is not a person is an issue which need not detain us. For given the notorious problems associated with the concept of causation, I see no reason for thinking Gale correct that only such a route can save the notion of atemporal agency from incoherence.²³ He assumes that *all* causes either *precede* or *are simultaneous* with their effects. Since an atemporal agent’s actions would neither precede nor be simultaneous with its effects, he concludes that no such agent is possible. But what atemporalist would grant the assumption upon which Gale rests this conclusion?

Even if effects cannot precede their causes (and this is a matter of debate), why can the atemporalist not claim that

(11) Necessarily, for any cause *C* and effect *E*, if *C* causes *E*, then it is not the case that *E* precedes *C*, rather than

19 William Kneale, “Time and Eternity in Theology,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 61 (1960-61), 99.

20 Richard M. Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 53.

21 Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God*, 53.

22 Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God*, 53.

23 Indeed, Gale’s claim that there is such a thing as the ordinary concept of causation seems tenuous at best.

(12) Necessarily, for any cause *C* and effect *E*, if *C* causes *E*, then either (*C* precedes *E*) or (*C* is simultaneous with *E*), is the appropriate principle here? Both (11) and (12) seem consistent with our experience of ‘ordinary causation.’ But unlike (12), (11) is also consistent with timeless agency. Since Gale’s argument hinges on eschewing (11) in favor of (12), he needs to argue for the truth of (12) over (11). Otherwise, he begs the question against the atemporalist. Unfortunately, he offers no such argument. Thus, Gale’s argument against atemporal agency fails.

The Objection from Omniscience

While those who raise the objection from agency claim that the doctrine of divine timelessness is inconsistent with the *activities* which theists traditionally ascribe to God, those who raise the objection from omniscience claim that it is inconsistent with the *knowledge* which theists traditionally ascribe to God. Perhaps the best-known statement of this objection comes in the following passage by Arthur Prior.

I want to argue against [divine timelessness], on the ground that its final effect is to restrict *what God knows* to those truths, if any, which are themselves timeless. For example, God could not, on the view I am considering, know that the 1960 final examinations at Manchester are now over; for this isn’t something that He or anyone could know timelessly, because it just isn’t true timelessly. It’s true now, but it wasn’t true a year ago (I write this on 29th August 1960) and so far as I can see all that can be said on this subject timelessly is that the finishing-date of the 1960 final examinations is an earlier one than 29th August, and this is *not* the thing we know when we know that those examinations are over.²⁴

Since, then, a timeless being could not know such propositions as
 (13) The 1960 final examinations at Manchester are *now* over,
 such a being could not be omniscient.

What Prior claims a timeless being could not know are tensed propositions. It might seem that such propositions can be reduced to dated, tenseless ones. So, for instance, one might think that

²⁴ Arthur Prior, “The Formalities of Omniscience,” in *Papers on Time and Tense* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 29.

(13) The 1960 final examinations at Manchester are *now* over, expressed on August 29, 1960, can be reduced to

(14) The 1960 final examinations at Manchester are (tenselessly) over on (or before) August 29, 1960.

If such a reduction were plausible, atemporalists could offer as a plausible response to Prior the argument that a timeless being could know propositions such as (14) and thus know ones such as (13) as well.

According to Prior, however, such a reduction is not plausible. Here, he states,

I cannot think of any better way of showing this than one I've used before, namely, the argument that what we know when we know that the 1960 final examinations are over can't be just a timeless relation between dates because this isn't the thing we're *pleased* about when we're pleased that the examinations are over.²⁵

So, on Prior's view, propositions such as (13) are *essentially* tensed and cannot be reduced to tenseless ones. If propositions such as (13) turn out to be essentially tensed, it seems that no timeless being could so much as entertain them; and propositions one cannot entertain are also propositions one cannot know.

Although Prior's claim that tensed propositions cannot be reduced to dated, tenseless ones is far from true, let us suppose it to be correct. Given this supposition, what plausible response can atemporalists make to the objection from omniscience? Well, as Patrick Grim points out, being omniscient seems no more compatible with the truth of essentially indexical statements such as 'I am making a mess' than it is with those such as 'the 1960 final examinations at Manchester are *now* over.'²⁶ It thus follows that first-person knowledge creates for temporalists whatever problems knowledge of the present creates for atemporalists. So if arguments involving essentially indexical statements raise problems for atemporalists, they do so for temporalists as well. Or, to put the point differently, whatever force the objection from omniscience has against atemporalists, similar objections have the same force against theists more generally.

²⁵ Prior, "The Formalities of Omniscience," 29.

²⁶ See Patrick Grim, "Against Omniscience: The Case from Essential Indexicals," *The Review of Metaphysics* 38 (1985), 151-80, and "Some Neglected Problems of Omniscience," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1983), 265-76.

Given these considerations, then, *all* theists have good reason to conceive of divine knowledge in a way that does not fall prey to objections involving essentially indexed statements. This can be accomplished by understanding omniscience not in terms of what an omnipotent being knows but rather in terms of the cognitive power possessed by such a being.²⁷ On such an understanding, being omniscient amounts to having unsurpassable cognitive power. Since one's having unsurpassable cognitive power does not preclude the possibility that there are truths which one could not know, such an account provides atemporalists who agree with Prior about the irreducibility of tensed statements to tenseless ones with an obvious response to the objection from omniscience. Even if a timeless being could not know what time it is now, such a being may nonetheless possess unsurpassable cognitive power.

The Objection from Personhood

Stewart Sutherland claims timeless beings cannot utter, represent to themselves, create, deliberate, reflect, anticipate, intend, remember, suspect, confirm, or love. "The question which inevitably arises," he tells us, "concerns what sense, if any, could be attached to the claim that a God who cannot do any of these could be regarded as a person, or even as 'personal'."²⁸ He thus argues against the possibility of a timeless person. Since God's personhood is an essential tenet of theism, a successful argument against the possibility of a timeless person would thoroughly undermine atemporalism.

Since this objection involves claiming both that there are certain activities in which a timeless being could not engage and that a necessary condition of being a person is being able to engage in those activities, atemporalists have two available responses. First, they can deny that being able to engage in the activities in question is necessary for being a person. Given the notorious difficulty of delineating an adequate conception of personhood, atemporalists can simply maintain that any conception of personhood according to which no timeless being could be a person ought *ipso facto* to be rejected. If Sutherland expects the objection from personhood to be persuasive, he

27 I use "cognitive power" to mean "power to know." To conceive of omniscience in terms of the cognitive power possessed by an omniscient being (as opposed to what such a being knows) is akin to conceiving of omnipotence in terms of the power possessed by an omnipotent being (as opposed to what such a being can do).

28 Stewart Sutherland, "God, Time and Eternity," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79 (1978), 107.

needs to provide compelling reasons for thinking that the conception of personhood underlying it ought to be accepted; he provides no such reasons.

Second, atemporalists can argue that a timeless being could engage in at least some of the activities in question and thus count as a person. Consider, for instance, Moses' request that God show him his ways.²⁹ This request pleases God and Moses receives a favorable answer to it. If God is timeless, his being pleased does not occur *after* Moses makes the request. Moreover, Moses' making the request does not occur *before* God answers it. It nonetheless remains true that both God's being pleased and his answering Moses' request result from Moses' making it. If Moses had not made the request, God would neither have been pleased about his doing so nor have answered it favorably. In such a case, then, it makes perfectly good sense to maintain that Moses' making the request *affects* God and that God's answering it amounts to his *responding* to Moses. As far as I see, Sutherland does nothing to show such a case to be impossible. Thus, he fails to show that the conception of personhood he employs precludes the possibility of a timeless person.

The Objection from Theological Inadequacy

Although coherent, William Hasker maintains, the doctrine of divine timelessness turns out to be religiously inadequate. This follows, he tells us, from the account of divine knowledge to which the doctrine commits its advocates. On this, he states,

It seems inescapable . . . that if God is eternal, he knows us only by contemplating in eternity his own unchangeable "similitudes," "images," or representations of us. But I find this extremely difficult to accept as the truth of the matter. I can tell myself that an eternal God can still cause there to exist in time all of the events that we experience as his historical interventions, as his gracious presence in our lives, and the like. But that God in very truth knows us, and relates to us, only as the eternal representations in his own essence—this is a hard doctrine.³⁰

So in the end, Hasker concludes, the doctrine of divine timelessness "leaves too great a distance between the God who is affirmed theologically and the

²⁹ Cf. Exodus 33:12-23.

³⁰ Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 184.

God who is known through Scripture and experience.”³¹

Let us regard as too hard to accept a doctrine according to which God knows and relates to us only as “eternal representations.” Still, the question remains, why think the doctrine of divine timelessness is such a doctrine? Hasker gives his reasons for thinking this in the following passage.

One can be immediately aware only of what is *present* for one to be aware of; what else, after all, can “immediate” mean? If God is timeless, he can be immediately aware of (supposedly) temporal facts only if these facts *really are* timeless after all. If, on the other hand, the world really is temporal, only a temporal God can be immediately aware of it—and then only of its *present*, not of its past or future.³²

From the claim that objects of immediate awareness must be present to their knowers, Hasker thus concludes that a timeless God could not be immediately aware of temporal beings.

Put more formally, his argument goes as follows.

(15) For any knower *K* and object of knowledge *O*, if *K* is immediately aware of *O*, then *O* is present to *K*.

(16) Thus, if God is timeless, then God is not immediately aware of temporal beings.

Now, as it stands, this argument is invalid. In order to deduce (16) from (15), Hasker needs something like

(17) For any knower *K* and object of knowledge *O*, if *K* is timeless and *O* is temporal, then *O* is not present to *K*,

to be true. Of course, from (15) and (17) it follows that

(18) Thus, for any knower *K* and object of knowledge, if *K* is timeless and *O* is temporal, then *K* is not immediately aware of *O*.

And, moreover, (16) follows from (18).

In order for Hasker’s argument to succeed, then, both (15) and (17) must be true. In support of (15), Hasker simply asks what else ‘immediate’ can mean. But one is *immediately* aware of something if *both* one is aware of it *and* one’s awareness of it is not mediated by something else. That (15) follows from this is far from obvious. In fact, as I see it, such an understanding of

31 *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 184.

32 *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 169.

‘immediate’ provides no reason whatsoever for accepting (15).³³ Moreover, while Hasker claims that a timeless being’s awareness of temporal beings would be mediated, he does not tell us what would mediate it.

Let us suppose that a timeless being is indirectly aware of some temporal being. What is mediating its awareness? The most plausible answer to this question is that those ‘eternal representations’ to which Hasker refers are mediating its awareness. Such representations amount to ideas (i.e., ‘images’ or ‘similitudes’) within a timeless being’s mind which correspond to the temporal beings known by such a being. Were he so to answer, however, Hasker would undercut his argument against the possibility of a timeless being’s immediately knowing temporal beings. For if such representations were mediating a timeless being’s knowledge of temporal beings, it seems that *they* would be directly related in some way to the temporal beings which they represent. But if they could be so related, why could not the timeless being itself be so related? So, then, Hasker’s admission that a timeless being could know temporal beings indirectly undercuts his argument that such a being could not know them directly.

Here it also seems worth noting that what it means for an object of knowledge to be ‘present’ to its knower is far from clear; and as long as this remains the case, determining what (15) means will be a difficult task. Still more difficult will be the task of determining whether it is true. Of course, if its meaning were perspicuous, *perhaps* the truth of (15) would be evident. Even so, Hasker will find little comfort in this fact. For, even if (15) were to turn out to be true, it also might turn out that temporal beings *can* be present to a timeless being in the sense of ‘present’ at issue. Thus, even if (15) is true, (17) might nonetheless be false.

For (17)’s truth, Hasker offers no argument. Since he himself does not invoke (17), this is hardly surprising. Still, if his argument is to succeed, he needs (17) (or something like it) to be true. Unfortunately, as Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann point out, he seems simply to assume the truth of something like

(19) x can be directly aware of or epistemically present to y only if x and y share the same mode of existence.³⁴

33 I owe this point to William Alston, “Response to Critics,” unpublished manuscript, 2-4.

34 Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity, Awareness, and Action,” *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992), 476. My (19) is their (GP).

Such an assumption, however, has little to commend it. Few theists would accept (19) with respect to space. In fact, since theists have traditionally maintained that God is spaceless, no traditional theist would accept (19). “And,” Stump and Kretzmann argue, “if traditional theists cannot accept [(19)] as applied to space, they cannot reasonably apply it to time.”³⁵ So, then, traditional theists—both temporalists and atemporalists alike—have compelling reasons to reject (19). Moreover, given the apparent incompatibility between (17) and a timeless God’s direct awareness of temporal beings, few committed atemporalists are likely to grant the truth of (17). If then Hasker expects his argument to succeed, he needs to offer compelling arguments for affirming (17) (or something like it). Since he fails to provide such arguments and since the general principle which underlies (17) is inconsistent with traditional theism’s view of omnipresence, I conclude that the argument for (16) from (15) and (17) fails.

CONCLUSION

Having weighted five of the most prominent objections to atemporalism in the recent literature, I find them wanting. Of course, the failure of objections to the doctrine of divine timelessness does not entail its truth. So whether some version of atemporalism succeeds remains an open question. As mentioned above, I argue elsewhere for absolute atemporalism.³⁶ Here I have attempted to show that atemporalism *per se* is neither indefensible nor one-dimensional.

35 Stump and Kretzmann, “Eternity, Awareness, and Action,” 476.

36 Blount, “An Essay on Divine Presence,” 173-98.

THE EVERLASTING GOD

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I had not given the subject of time much thought until, as a fairly new professor at Wheaton, I picked up a 1975 Eerdmans *Festschrift* for a long-time Calvin professor — *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob*. One of the chapters was “God Everlasting” by Nicholas Wolterstorff, a piece that has been anthologized frequently in the philosophy of religion. Therein, he argued it was unnecessary and puzzling to say God existed outside of time, and that he was “atemporal.” Besides, the Bible did not require or even suggest that we must talk this way.

I was fresh from a doctoral program where I was most impressed with the empiricist and pragmatist philosophers, and impatient with the way in which metaphysicians spun all sorts of fantastical schemes from their dubious presuppositions and postulates, generating systems of thought which were untestable and unaccountable to common sense. Their schemes, floating in air, if you will, were, to use a technical expression, “very cool,” but it was not clear how you might adjudicate among them, for each had its own internal logic and conceptual splendor. And though we did not have the notion of “post-modernism” at hand in that day, these metaphysicians, with their rival, unverifiable conceits, were setting us up for the day when we would throw up our hands and deny that there could be any valid metanarrative. You had your truth, I had mine. This worked for you, and that for me. Of course, the metaphysicians did not mean it that way, for each was sure that his overarching account was correct. But the futility of validating one as over against the other tended to give metanarratives a bad odor.

My first-semester course in German Idealism at Vanderbilt showed me how much fun the spawning of rival systems could be, but how hopeless it could be to declare one the winner. We began with Kant, who argued for a “Copernican Revolution” against the empiricists, such as Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. These were the Brits who more or less bought into the notion that the mind was, at first, a passive receptor of sense impressions (a *tabula rasa*, or “blank slate,” to used Locke’s terms), and that it then had the task of sorting what it had received into a workable system of thought. Kant tried to blow up this thinking, saying the mind was comprehensively aggressive in pre-sorting whatever was out there, so once it reached our consciousness, it was bundled into discrete, countable entities, embedded in causal series, located in space, varying in magnitudes, and so on. He gave us a double-decker world, with readily grasped *phenomena* at hand, backed up by more-or-less inscrutable *noumena*, realities as they really were.

Once, Kant gave the mind such organizing power, the Germans were off to the races. Fichte argued that it was his mind rather than each and every other mind that ran things—a kind of solipsism (though he did wax eloquent over the splendor of the German *people*). The professor (an energetic, demonstrative, Hungarian refugee who repeatedly won the Chancellor’s Cup for excellence in teaching) gave us a particularly dramatic lecture on Fichte’s *The Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre)*, one in which he stacked up an imaginary wall of blocks, only to knock it down with relish (something we kids used to do in the church nursery, as I recall). The point was that the mind constructed a challenging world for itself, one in which it could grow by overcoming self-imposed difficulties.

And then came Hegel, who said that, no, it was not our minds or my mind in charge, but The Mind, the *Weltgeist*, the Absolute Spirit, which ran the whole show. History itself was its “thinking” as worked through developmental challenges (“antitheses”), whose conflict with current notions and events (“theses”) generated brand new things (“syntheses”), which, in turn, became theses, against which rose antitheses, and so on.

Other Germans riffed on this theme of the marching, powerful mind. (You can almost hear the rhythmic tramp of Reich battalion boots, accompanied by *Deutschland, Deutschland, über Alles.*) Marx (along with Engels and Lenin) espoused a “dialectical materialism” (a dialogue of matter) to supplant Hegel’s “dialectical idealism” (a conversation of concepts), thus

giving us the naturalistic base for Communistic atheism. Schopenhauer, in *The World as Will and Representation* (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*) got depressed over the pervasive grind of willful struggle that is human living, and he waxed rhapsodic over the arts, which he called a sort of Sabbath, a place of relief from the dog-eat-dog workings of our circumstances and natures. (Ricky Stark recently received his Ph.D. from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary after defending a dissertation on the similarities and dissimilarities between the Lord's Day and Schopenhauer's Sabbath.) Not surprisingly, Schopenhauer was taken with Eastern thought, since Buddhism advanced a regimen of deliverance from the strivings and worries of desire.

Nietzsche followed with his *Will to Power* (*Der Wille zur Macht*) and "Superman" (*Übermensch*), who should lord it over the wimpy Judeo-Christians, who had replaced original, intimidating nobility with pathetic values such as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control," the only personality features that losers could manage. And, this sort of thinking trickled down to France, where existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre said that we create our own values. (Our "existence precedes our essence," so that we are not at all answerable to such silly things as pre-existing human nature or universal ethical norms.) On and on it went in this triumphal mode, thanks, in large measure to Kant's anointing of the mind as the world-shaper.

By the turn of the 20th century, a Germanic idealism had made its way into the British heartland of empiricism, thanks to F.H. Bradley, who was quite the rage in his day. Indeed, the English were capable of spinning out their own metaphysical tales, as in the case of Alfred North Whitehead (later of Harvard), whose "Process Philosophy" gave us the neologisms *appetition, concrescence, comformal, formaliter, ingression, prehension, regnant society, and superject*.

But then came the revolt in both the UK and America (with some major help from Vienna). A group calling themselves "logical positivists" insisted that enough was enough, and hereafter, the only legitimate propositions were those which entailed scientifically-testable results. No more of these gaseous speculations which could neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed. And in the U.S., men like Charles S. Peirce and William James said you had to be able to find "cash value" in a claim—cash in terms of actionable intelligence and real-live eventualities—for it to be meaningful. While A.J. Ayer said a proposition should be "verifiable," Karl Popper said it should be "falsifiable,"

but they agreed on the need for testability. So you can have your fun with Fichte, Hegel, and Schopenhauer all you want, but your ratiocinations and fulminations come to naught in the light of a cognitively-responsible day.

Unfortunately, the positivists cleared out more than the weeds of groundless speculation. They also wiped out ethics, aesthetics, and religion, saying these matters came to no more than personal emoting, just a matter of booing or cheering. But, to the contrary, most people understood that “God exists” and “Slaughtering and eating babies is wrong” and “Rembrandt is a better artist than my grandchild, whose work I put on my refrigerator door” are more than mere subjectivities, relativities, and proclivities. Indeed, it became clear to most that the pendulum had swung too far back in the other direction, the direction in which Hume took empiricism when he discounted religion, undermined causality, and deconstructed the notion of the human soul. A sign of this discontent was the establishment of *The Review of Metaphysics* in 1947, edited by Jewish philosopher Paul Weiss and sponsored primarily by The Catholic University of America.

Observing this back-and-forth through the years, I have turned to the biblical image of Jacob’s Ladder, upon which the angels were descending to earth and ascending to heaven (Gen 28:10-19). In my estimation, the German metaphysicians were comfortable at the top of the ladder, offering a “God’s eye” view of the universe (albeit a false one), but they were not at all adept at producing testable entailments that might show their theories to be either sound or bogus. (The same goes for the pantheistic, Amsterdam Jewish philosopher, Spinoza, but that is another story.) On the other end of the ladder, the positivists were good at earthly tests (e.g., water boiling at 100 degrees centigrade; the economic impact of mercantilism; the psychological effects of opioids), but they were indifferent, indeed, contemptuous, toward the important things going on at the top of the ladder e.g., intelligent design in the universe.

This is not to say that all the empiricists were stuck at the bottom end. John Locke and George Berkeley were confessing and argumentative believers, as was twentieth century Anglican bishop, Ian Ramsey, who rebuked the positivists with the simple observation that “God exists” is indeed testable—at least eschatologically—for it is logically possible that one day (when “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess”) that even A.J. Ayer would have to admit that Yahweh is real.

Unfortunately, self-professed Christians sometimes cling to the upper levels with little regard for the lower rungs. George Berkeley called out the Roman Catholics for this very thing when he dismissed “transubstantiation,” wherein the elements of the mass supposedly become the body of Christ. While the wine continues to look, smell, taste, feel, and sound like wine throughout the observance, it actually flips from wine substance to blood-of-Christ substance, or so the story goes. Berkeley, a good Protestant bishop, asked, rhetorically, what sort of thing substance might be. Could they describe it? Could they cash it in experientially? His answer was no, and thus he declared the sacrament delusional, literally nonsense.

Locke made a similar move when, in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he picked up on the free-will dispute. He said he understood what will was, for he was familiar with exercising it regularly, as in choosing to pick up a pen and then doing so, with accompanying decisional and kinesthetic experiences. But what, he asked, was the extra experience that signaled that this was a “free” act? Was this to distinguish it from an unconscious act, like sleep walking, or an involuntary act, like plunging into a ravine when a foot-bridge collapses, or maybe a non-human eventuation, like the rusting of an iron gate? Well, yes, certainly. But beyond this, what sense could be attached to the question of whether taking up the pen was free? He concluded it was an empty question since the term ‘free’ was undefined. And thus he helped open the door to the widely-accepted notion of compatibilism (popular with many Christians), whereby the sovereignty of God coheres with human freedom: We are free in that we do what we want to do, but we are not free in the sense that we do not choose our wantings. The latter are a function of our nature, whether in bondage to sin or born again, a new creation, indwelt by the Holy Spirit—all a matter of God’s pleasure.

Which brings us to our original conundrum: Is God atemporal or “merely” everlasting? What in the world would it mean for one to be “inside” or “outside” of time? What, exactly, is time?

I am perfectly aware that it is piously fashionable to say God is not in time. Indeed, I work with a website whose video series about the biblical story begins with the words, “Before there was space, before there was time, there was God.” But following Wolterstorff (and, in his way, Swinburne), I am not there yet. For one thing, I cannot see that the Bible demands it (or allows it, for that matter). Some point to Genesis 1:1 to suggest God existed

before the beginning (of time), but the beginning of earthly time does not rule out previous activity on God's part, activity that took time. They also might point to the ESV translation of Jude 25: "to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." But the NIV sticks closer to the Greek with "before all ages," and, indeed, the ESV offers the footnote, "or before any age." For one thing, the word in question is *aionon*, not *chronos*. And, of course, Jesus existed before historical ages (whether Bronze, Middle, and Machine).

Besides, the Bible is full of accounts of God doing things, actions spread out through time. Over the centuries, he has brought down some rulers and exalted others (Luke 1:52); prompted Balaam's donkey to rebuke the prophet on his back (Num 22:21-23); sent a great fish to swallow the fleeing, disobedient Jonah (Jonah 1:17); providentially gobsmacked Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6), and thousands of other things reported in the Bible. Each involved a before, during, and after, to which God was a party.

So what might time be? I think Aristotle was in the ball park when, in *Physics* (Book IV, 11), he tied it to movement and succession. It is a matter of change, of one state of affairs' giving way to another. And it is not just physically external, as in the rotation or circumnavigation of planets, for it can be extended to thought, as when one idea succeeds another. And these successions are not *in* some sort of atmosphere or solution or locale we might call time; rather, they constitute time itself. So, on this understanding, there was no such thing as "before time" as long as the Trinitarian God was doing something, whether thinking or otherwise acting, including deeds of loving fellowship among the persons of the Trinity.

Recall, if you will, the story of *Sleeping Beauty*, where a spell is cast upon the whole kingdom so that everyone falls asleep and stays that way until she awakens. Extend that big freeze to not only their bodies, but to their dreams, the growth of vegetation, the scurrying of insects and other animals, sunrise and sunset. Everything. And imagine there is no supernatural observer, conflagration on the sun, race of asteroids, incidents of aging. No change in composition or place anywhere. Then, all of a sudden, it all cranks up again. People are talking. The moon is running through its cycles. The crickets are chirping. So then the question arises: How long was everything stopped? The answer is that the question makes no sense. For it is only with

reference to something moving, e.g., the sweep of a second hand, a shift in mood, radioactive decay, that we can speak meaningfully of the passage of time. A river needs a bank to be a river, or perhaps it is better to say a riverbank needs a river to be a riverbank. But, of course, there has been no such time stoppage, for God has always been doing things, “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:2).

But I can hear the philosophers asking, rhetorically, “How can you say there was a succession of thoughts and actions in the Godhead when ratiocination and rumination require some sort of lack, a chain of reasoning as yet incomplete, a goal not yet achieved?” Surely God does not have to sort things out. He knows immediately. And if you are suggesting that in the Trinity’s internal love relationship, there were needs to be fulfilled, instances of deprivation needing amelioration, then you slight either God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit, or any combination thereof.

In this connection, I am reminded of a question a trustee asked me when I was interviewing for a position at Midwestern Seminary. He wondered if I believed God was impassible, untouched by and incapable of emotion. After all, since he was not subject to surprises, disappointment, dread, bio-rhythms, and such, he could not be subject to the roller-coaster of mood swings that we humans suffer. He must surely sail serenely above the tumult.

Okay, I see the argument, but, as I told him/them, I was first of all a biblicalist, and whatever philosophical march I chose to follow, I must answer to the drumbeat of the text. And it seemed clear to me that the text said God was capable of emotion, as when his *wrath* toward sin was appeased by Christ on the cross (propitiation), when the Holy Spirit was *grieved*, and when he was *pleased* with righteous worship.

When I read in Genesis 1:26 that he/they said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness . . .” it seems to me to say, on the face of it, the Trinity came to the point of initiating our species, and they did not have to go slumming into some temporary Timeland, situated after “Before There Was Time” and before “Time Will Be No More” in order to implement this choice. No, it is perfectly reasonable to say God set his mind upon making us prior to the first day of creation. And the initiating act of the whole earthly shebang followed an eternity of Trinitarian activity, an endless succession of godly initiatives and responses, characteristic of a loving relationship within the Trinity, so often stipulated in Christian meta-ethics as the source and

template for our own congregational mutuality. And where there is succession of thought and deed, whether earthly or pre-earthly, there is time.

As I read it, the Kalam version of the cosmological argument claims there cannot be an infinite number of prior events culminating in the current moment, for it is impossible to traverse an infinity, so we would have never arrived at the present. Therefore, there had to be a beginning in time. Therefore, we had to have an initiator of time, viz. God. The problem is, we do, in fact, have an infinity of preceding events, namely the pre-Creation activities of an eternal God. And I am disinclined to say we have a firm enough grasp on infinity-theory to insist otherwise.

Of course, I understand why one might want to say that God is outside time. For one thing, the *pre* in *predestination* is less troublesome. An atemporal God would not really lock in your choices before you made them since he does not work in the realm of before and after. Also, time seems to be a form of bondage, and we do not want God to suffer restraints, he being omnipotent. But just because I grasp the motives, it does not follow that I have to accept the conclusions. For instance, I understand the impetus for practicing infant baptism. The child is not able to choose Christ on his own, so you want to give him some sort of coverage in case he dies before he can muster a decision. In this vein, the Roman Catholics invented Limbo to give unbaptized babies who die in infancy a better fate than Purgatory or Hell. Similarly, the Presbyterians drew on Old Testament circumcision to analogize the family-of-God advantages that came from the sprinkling of water. But I cannot see good intentions and earnest aspirations suffice. The Bible just will not support the conceit of *paedobaptism*. (And, I would argue, great harm has ensued since there are millions of church attendees who assume, incorrectly, that something of spiritual significance happened to them because of a hold-over ceremony from pre-Reformation days—a case where the theological apple did not roll far enough from the tree).

But what about God's ability (or inability) to see the future? If time is a succession of events and some events have not yet happened, then what is there to see? But does not the Bible say he looks into the future, as in Romans 8:29-30?

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

How can you foreknow something that does not exist? Would it not be more sensible to appropriate Boethius's image of God gazing down upon the road of time from a hilltop outside of time, whereby, to one side, he looks directly at 1517, and then, to the other side, he looks directly at 1994, without being temporally tainted by either? But I have two big problems with that. First, the biblical passage does not make good sense if we read it in a libertarian fashion, where God is able to see what choice this or that person will make and then act accordingly, bringing blessings to bear on those whom he sees will choose him. If that is the reading, why would he have to do any predestinating at all? He sees that the fellow has picked up on salvation, so he can just say Amen! and wait for the happy eventuality.

Would not I think it would be better to read it, "For whom he did set his mind upon, he also did predestinate . . ."? His sovereign choice results in the good things that follow—predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. So how might he know the deliverances of the future? He knows since he is Lord of all that happens, and the future will unfold exactly as he pleases and insures by whatever means he chooses.

I have another problem with the hilltop analogy. I cannot imagine what it would be like to experience all of history simultaneously. It cannot just be a matter of God's sitting in a studio with a massive bank of TV screens, one showing Noah at work on the ark, another what is going on in the Final Four in Phoenix, and yet another covering what President Trump's press secretary is saying in a briefing three months from now. No, to make this work, you need to have a separate screen for each one thousandth of an inch (for starters) of the trajectory of each shot taken in each game, etc. And, on this model, God would not be able to scan the bank of screens to get a summary of the sequence or a composite, for that would take time, which, so the story goes, God does not do. You would get some sort of Edward Muybridge freeze-frame chronicle of the instants of a horse in motion. But that would not be to see the event, but rather a dissection of it, where the living action is cut up and pinned down on a tar-filled tray. Or, to put it otherwise, it would be like listening to Ravel's *Bolero* instantaneously, with its tens of thousands of notes, all up and down and across the score, each assigned to a particular

instrumentalist to play and hold. You would have white noise, not melody; chaos, not symphony. It would make more sense to say God observed the collapse of Jericho's walls in "real time," and that he was not simultaneously viewing Luther's defense of himself at Worms. That would come later. Would that really do theological damage?

But wait, what about the bondage of time? Surely you would not want to put God in such a straitjacket, whereby he is limited by time, unable to travel and act freely outside the limits of temporality? But what sort of limit would that be? Certainly, it makes sense to speak of our time limitations. We work with time constraints, with a writing assignment due Tuesday. We miss our plane because we did not leave the house soon enough. We want to get a project completed, but we worry that in our 91st year, we will not be around to see it through. But none of that is a problem for God. He does whatever he pleases, within the bounds of logic. (He cannot make a square simultaneously a circle or preserve the bachelorhood of a married man. Those are simply contradictions, another kind of nonsense.)

But am I saying he cannot return to the day of Moses on Sinai? Well, yes, of course. The past has passed. But, if he so pleased, he could instantly recreate the scene, replete with drowned Egyptians in the rear, deluded Golden Calfers in the flatlands, and a Moses up the hill, with a mind as yet unaware of what would be inscribed on the tablets. But that would be the work of replication in the present. I cannot imagine why the Lord would want to do that, but he could without a hitch. So again, where is the bondage?

Ah, but what about the different time frames mentioned in 2 Peter 3:8, where we read that, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (NIV). Well, a couple of things come to mind. First, God is not a clock watcher, anxious as the hours tick away. He does not see his opportunities or energy or prospects slipping away as the shadows lengthen. So he can relax and take the long view, where we operate in an antsy frame of mind. Second, we are all familiar with phenomenological time, where a thirty minute sermon can seem to take an hour, and a two-hour sermon can seem to run forty-five minutes. And judging from my experience in a batting cage, the same seventy-five mile per hour pitch that seems like a blur to me would have seemed languorous to Ted Williams, who could read the rotation of the stitching as it made its way to the plate.

But you see, Coppenger, you are ignoring anthropomorphisms and insisting that God fit into your experiential straightjacket. Your empiricism is legislative and parochial.

No, it is confessional. I just do not know what you are talking about when you say God is “outside of time.” When I say it is nonsense, I am not doing so contemptuously, as I would be if you told me Billy Graham was a closet atheist. Not at all. I am simply pleading, “Please do not push me in this direction. It makes no sense to me.” And, besides, I do not see that the Bible asks me to head that way at all.

The other evening at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center in Nashville (there for an evening of Debussy and Ravel), I saw a poster on sale in the gift shop, one published for the January 2011 reopening after the hall after the damage from the 2010 flood had been repaired. It featured a quote from the composer, Aaron Copland, one that read, “To stop the flow of music would be like the stopping of time itself, incredible and inconceivable.” I would amend it to say, “To stop the flow of absolutely everything would be like the stopping of time itself, incredible and inconceivable,” and that has never happened. For the Trinity has been doing things forever.

Look, there is so much more to say. So many interlocutors to engage, whether McTaggart, Einstein, Stump, Craig, or Helm. But time is up, and I hope that I have at least shown where I am coming from in this conversation, with a measure of warrant.

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BOOK REVIEWS

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TOTIS (J. JOSEPH KAZDEN)

JANAE LEEKE

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A slim, unassuming book, J Joseph Kazden's *TotIs* is an unusual blend of Eastern mysticism, quantum mechanics, Socratic dialogues, and a healthy dose of perceptual denial. With a background in mathematics, chemistry, and psychology, Kazden has devoted his life to a pursuit of the nature of perception and reality. His current work as an artist lends itself to the creation of his book, which he describes as the culmination of his journey. Claimed on his website to be the product of a personal epiphany, *TotIs* is a nosedive into topics most would not even broach, all to see if individuals can make sense of the immense structure the concept of time has placed on their understanding of reality. Kazden, through the perspective of a modern Socrates dialoguing with modern day scientists and philosophers, is attempting to convince his audience that reality as they know it is an illusion.

But he is not taking the red pill or unplugging from some sort of simulation. One's reality is very real, in the understanding that it is all he can know. Limited by faulty senses—Kazden uses the illustrations of cataracts—and the delayed biomechanical process of sensory organs relaying to the brain, the actual reality an individual perceives through the senses is not the reality of the *now* moment. Rather, it is an understanding of what has just occurred. This is complicated by the fact that mankind is a sensory dependent being. One comes to know the world around him by way of his senses. It is almost impossible to think of an experience that does not impact the senses in some fashion. Kazden, however, says people create an experience of the world they live in, rather than an accurate portrayal of how things really are.

Taking things a step further, Kazden demonstrates how even one's experience of time is impacted by this "false" reality. The key to understanding time is remembering the faulty reality as delayed by one's biomechanical sensory organs. By the time someone recognizes a now moment, it has already past. Mankind is constantly moving through time which assumes that future points in time already exist. Given one's role as an observer of time, he is limited again by his sensory experience. Every understanding of human experience is dependent upon man being the observer. As such, reality is dependent upon man observing it. For Kazden, reality is created by human experience. Actual reality, or *TotIs* exists, but it is not the one that individuals experience. He likens it to Schrodinger's cat—reality both is and is not. Time is a chemical creation of the mind, a way to understand what humanity is observing, but in the *TotIs* reality, time is null.

If one takes Kazden's point so far, there are troubling implications for the Christian. If Scripture is the authority for truth—not the sensory observances of man—then believers can stand on the creation of time in this universe as solid and purposeful in God's design. Day and night, seasons and moon cycles, all these are placed by God in this world purposefully. Even such things as wrinkles, growth spurts, and death are chronicles of time in the universe. Kazden, however, places the universe outside of time. For the atemporalist, this is a near equating of the universe to God. Existing outside of time, unchanging, omnipotent, omnipresent. What is particularly startling about Kazden's view of this 'null time' is that this new found understanding is to have no impact on how people live their lives. As one character says, "But then aren't we just living a lie, if knowing more exists, yet we simply live with these illusions?" Kazden's Socrates claims it changes nothing in regards to how one lives or who he is. Like a perpetual carrot dangling before him, he is to be content in not being able to obtain it. Kazden revels in the knowledge that this unobtainable universe is right there and he cannot reach it. He calls it paradise.

For the believer, this is a horrific view of paradise. If one takes Kazden's parallels to their logical ends, this implies a Creator who has placed a timeless, endless expanse of a true and perfect reality, invites one to see it, and then keeps it just out of reach. Kazden's paradise sounds much more like Lazarus' description of hell—begging Abraham for just one drop. Yet the most disturbing implication creeps in at the last moment. If the *TotIs* universe

exists in null time, there are no future or past events, no causality, no purpose, no meaning. Without causality, there is no purpose to life and creation, no meaning to the events that occur in our lives, and ultimately no consequences for these experiences.

Kazden is looking for a solution to the ravages of time, something to pacify his anxieties of existence. For him, crafting an argument for reality as illusion assuages his fears. Fate, as he understands it, requires time to flow, which in the *TotIs* universe is null. There is no yesterday, no today, no tomorrow, and thus there is no fate to come. “We are each beyond timeless or eternal.” Kazden may call it fate, but no fate means no purposeful will; no will, no predetermined plan. Without a purposeful will, there is no meaning, no end goal for existence. Thus, there is no need for a personal God.

*RELIGION, METAPHYSICS,
AND THE POSTMODERN:
WILLIAM DESMOND
AND JOHN D. CAPUTO
(CHRISTOPHER
BEN SIMPSON)*

J. DANIEL McDONALD

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Nietzsche's assertion, "God is dead," in the late nineteenth century ushered in a new age of Western philosophy. Prior to the Enlightenment, metaphysical questions were viewed as prior to epistemological questions. As story goes, the Enlightenment converted the order of priority, not only giving epistemology priority over metaphysics, but also relegating metaphysical questions to the proverbial back burner. Because metaphysical questions are unobservable to and unapproachable by one's sensory experience, one studies them only through the lens of Enlightenment epistemology. Western philosophy in the twentieth century, particularly Analytic philosophy, eventually reduced metaphysics to philosophical relics of ages past. Continental philosophy eventually followed suit.

Though presumed dead, metaphysical questions gained a new life in the last third of the twentieth century. Both Continental and Analytic philosophy

approached metaphysics with fresh eyes and a renewed sense of purpose. Yet, despite metaphysics' new life, debate remains among philosophers regarding its value and purpose. Christopher Ben Simpson's *Religion, Metaphysics, and the Postmodern* is set squarely in the middle of this ongoing debate regarding metaphysics.

Simpson's work addresses the work of John D. Caputo, an American Continental philosopher who teaches at both Syracuse University and Villanova University. Caputo focuses on both philosophical and theological themes that "deny fixed and rigorous boundaries" between the two disciplines.¹ Of particular interest to Simpson's book, Caputo operates within the vein of Jacques Derrida's "religion without religion."²

Per Simpson, Caputo is a "prime representative" of the current anti-metaphysical strain in modern Continental philosophy (2). Caputo affirms the Nietzschean declaration of God's death (and thus of metaphysics), placing the discussion of God within onto-theology. Caputo does affirm talk of God and metaphysical questions, but only in its reduction to "one's... ethical obligation to the other" (3).

In answer to Caputo's and like-minded Continental philosopher's anti-metaphysical approach, Simpson appeals to William Desmond. An Irish philosopher who teaches in both Belgium and the United States, Desmond operates from a more "positive" view of metaphysics. Contrary to most anti-metaphysical philosophers, Desmond rejects viewing metaphysics in "terms of a rigid, totalizing univocity—a fascism of concepts" (24). Instead, metaphysics lacks an "end" or a "completion," for metaphysical questions and tasks are "perennial" and defy completion (24). Metaphysics is "inescapable" and arises from one's need to think (24). Questions regarding God and other metaphysical matters are interpreted through one's *being* in the "middle of things, and represent a turn toward "pure thought and disengaged speculation" (50). Such an approach frees one from the Enlightenment's unnatural objectification of reality.

Religion, Metaphysics, and the Postmodern, though a short work (134), is a significant contribution to the ongoing debate regarding metaphysics (in general) and of God (in particular) as worthy of philosophical investigation in

1 "John D. Caputo," *Syracuse College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Directory*. Accessed April 24, 2017, <http://asfaculty.syr.edu/pages/rel/caputo-john.html>.

2 *Ibid.*

today's post-modern world. One should note, however, that Simpson's book assumes that a reader brings to the table some background in Continental philosophy to be conversant with his thesis. Without this working background, one can quickly become lost in the discussion. Further, Simpson assumes the validity of the postmodern approach to understanding reality—an approach not without its own problems and controversies. For many (including this reviewer), postmodernism does not sit well with Christianity's appeal to absolute truth and the reality of a metanarrative. Nevertheless, Simpson's work should be commended for its attempt to take seriously the question of God's existence and its impact on other metaphysical and philosophical questions.

**UNDERGRADUATE
ARTICLES**

FANTASTICAL IDEALS

MARK HUGHES

Mark Hughes earned a Bachelor of Science in Humanities in May 2017.

All people are philosophers. What we believe, think, and feel about the substance and experience of life forms our comprehensive philosophy. The degree of thought we put into the differing subjects of “traditional” philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology and axiology) will determine whether we classify ourselves as professional philosophers, laypersons, or the uninitiated. Our beliefs are reflected in everything we do; nothing is untouched by them. How we choose a profession, read a book, eat a meal, or create a piece of art all follow a thread that leads back to what we believe, think, and feel that the world and life *really* is, an undergirding metaphysic.

It should not be surprising, then, that the books we read also contain assumptions, theories, and viewpoints about the essence of life. Writing, as with all art, is a breathing out, bit by bit, of one’s own life (intellect, beliefs, presuppositions, skill, and personality) and put on display. An author who accomplishes this task well is esteemed a master and lauded.

Besides mere conveyance of ideas, another important matter to address is how one communicates those ideas. In literature, the basic form of communication is obviously the written word. But words can be collected, molded into prose or poetry, and evaluated as formal, conversational, or aesthetically pleasing. Another way in which writing is categorized is genre. Genre in some measure defines what is and is not done in a narrative piece of writing. As a concept, genre is fairly simple, it can be defined as a comprehensive story structure, which can be repeatedly utilized with a degree of individuality. For example, in romance, generally, two persons fall in love and begin a

relationship. While in fantasy, often an adventure (of the quest variety) occurs in places and realities which we would deem fantastical (i.e., not found in reality as we empirically understand it).

The fantasy genre is where I would like now to turn our attention. Fantasy literature has many enthusiastic readers and in recent decades has achieved a lasting place in cultural appreciation. Today, we owe recognition to two authors who cultivated a widespread interest in fantasy: C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. Both authors were professors of Medieval literature and found inspiration in mythology and fairy-tales. Also, both Lewis and Tolkien operated from a Christian understanding of the world. The unique background of enthusiastic Medieval scholars and Christian imagination led to the production of two series, which have delighted millions of readers: *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

As I stated earlier, we are all philosophers and our philosophy makes its way into our art. In the case of Lewis and Tolkien, both writers created stories saturated with a Christian understanding of reality, steeped in Platonic tradition and utilizing the unique qualities of “the fantastic” to communicate what they believed to be essential to our world. Their works bring to life many aspects of their philosophy, giving personality, charm, and embodiment to the ideas by which they lived.

Before we move on to an examination of the ontological thought present in the work of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, there are two topics which deserve examination: the idea of Platonic Forms and Christian teaching. Both form an intellectual backdrop to the output of Lewis and Tolkien. As we shall see Platonic Forms and Christian doctrine are fundamental to what the reader receives in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

THE FORMS EXAMINED

Plato figures prominently in the history of Western metaphysical thought. He lived several hundred years before Christ and has influenced the entirety of Western culture, thought, and practice. Among his many important theories, the Forms are one of his most enduring legacies. Peter Kreeft, describing the theory of the Forms, writes,

. . . Ideas [of Forms] are not subjects of thought, not minds; they are objects of thought. But they are not material, spatial, or even temporal objects. For instance, in addition to tigers (material objects) and our subjective minds with their ideas of tigers, there is also Tigerness, the essence of tigers. In addition to rocks there is Rockiness. In addition to good swords and good lawyers and good arguments, there is Goodness itself—not just our ideas of goodness, but the true, objective, eternal, universal, unchangeable essence of goodness itself, which is dimly reflected or shared (“participated in”) in different ways by good swords and good lawyers and good arguments, and by our ideas of them.¹

At their core, the Forms are the root essences of all things. As Kreeft writes there is not only the creature that is the Tiger, but also the “Tigerness” of the tiger. The Forms are the summations and perfection of qualities, almost it seems, the personalities of things or their “spirit.” These immaterial forms are contained in the world, but are represented in all material things.

Important to Plato’s idea of the Forms is the understanding that Plato did not see them as flowing from the mind of God, but rather existing separate from and outside of God, yet informing the work of his creation (although Plato’s conception of God was different than the orthodox Christian understanding of God). Frederick Copleston, commenting on the separation of the Forms from the mind of God, writes,

In the *Timaeus* Plato clearly teaches that God or the “Demiurge” forms the things of this world according to the model of the Forms. This implies that the Forms or Ideas exist apart, not only from the sensible things that are modelled on them, but also from God, Who takes them as His model. They are there hanging in the air, as it were.²

The location of where the Forms are found is important. Orthodox Christian doctrine has many things which can agree with Plato’s idea of the Forms, but on the origin and location of the Forms it differs.

1 Peter J. Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview Behind The Lord of the Rings* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 40-41.

2 Frederick Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, vol. 1 of *A History of Philosophy*. (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1956), 167.

CHRISTIAN TEACHING EXAMINED

As we saw in Plato's ideas, the Forms are above all, removed from all and inform all. Although Christianity agrees with much of the concept of the Forms, the first area where it diverges is that Forms are not "out there" in the invisibles, but rather contained in the mind of God. Peter Kreeft says,

Plato never took the next step; he never said these perfect unchangeable ideas must exist in a perfect, unchangeable Mind. But when Christianity entered Greek culture, it supplied the metaphysical house for Plato's Ideas: the Mind of God, the Word of God, the Logos. . . . Platonic Ideas vastly expand our vision of what is real by adding the world outside the cave, the Mind of God, the realm of Ideas, and also by transforming this material world into a world of *signs*, not just things. If Plato is right, everything we see is a shadow, copy, image, imitation, or sign of something unseen.³

The concept of Forms being found in the mind of God makes sense in view of the biblical doctrine of creation. If God was the sole One before anything else was made, then all things as were conceptualized in his mind. A right understanding of Christian doctrine informs us that the original intention for God's creation forms the basis of all future judgments regarding what we see about us today.

Christian teaching also agrees with Plato on the separation of the Forms. For Plato there is distance between the Forms and us on earth. In order to obtain the Forms in a personal way, according to Plato, earthly affairs must be shunned and undistracted attention given to seeking after the exalted world of the invisible.⁴

Plato realized that things are not wholly good on earth; there is genuine evil to be found. A separation occurred at some point between the perfect Ideals and where we are today. Many systems of thought agree with this belief in the imperfection of things as we know them presently. People seem to have an innate knowledge that things could be better. Where we

3 Kreeft, 41-42.

4 Plato, *Republic* in *Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1997. 1133-1137.

believe this knowledge comes from and how we respond to it is informed by the system of beliefs we hold. For Plato, the answer to recapturing the Forms was to leave behind the material things of life and grasp after eternal realities.

Conservative Christianity also understands our current state as one of separation, of failing to attain what originally was meant to be. The Bible teaches about the Fall, when man sinned, became subject to death and was exposed to suffering. Because of this foundation of thought, we are not surprised by the evil we see in the world. We also are not surprised when we see good. Those who stand in the Augustinian tradition are comfortable in saying that evil was never created, but only “the privation of good.”⁵ Our world is fallen, but much goodness is left. Indeed, happily for us, a lot of goodness remains.

Christian writers have been aware of the reality of lingering goodness. Because we are creatures made in God’s image, and because we have an innate sense of goodness and evil, we still retain hopes and dreams about what we would like the world to be. In *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, Cornelius Plantinga says,

Every one of us does possess the *notion* of a world in which things are as they ought to be. Moreover, though we would stock this world and arrange its workings differently according to our varying ideas of what the Bible calls “good” . . . we would nonetheless agree on many of the broad outlines and main ingredients of a transformed world.⁶

We live with a sense of calamity, but we also live with hope, each day rising to do things we think will make our lives happier, better. This hope—that the world can be better—drives us to do what we do. We operate in the second of a three-stage process: things were better, now things are worse, and we hope and believe that one day everything thing will be better.

In *Echoes of Eden* Jerram Barrs explains the three phases of this condition,

5 Augustine, excerpt from *The City of God*, in *The Problem of Evil: A Reader*, ed. Mark Larrimore (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001), 56.

6 Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 11.

All over the world there is a sense that our present life in this world is one of having lost our way from our original dwelling place, a place that was better and more beautiful than the place in which people now live.

All over the world there is the knowledge that our present condition is one of alienation and rebellion, that we are not all we should be, that there is brokenness and tragedy in all of human life.

All over the world there is a longing for this brokenness to be set right, and there is the hope for a redeemer. Some of these elements of the biblical story are present in almost every nation's story about the past.⁷

Barrs understands the three phases as an understanding springing from biblical teaching. How we think about the ideals, reality, and the ultimate issues all people face is communicated in what we create. For professors C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, their thoughts found substance in the faraway lands of the fantastical.

FANTASY WRITING EXAMINED

J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis made worlds that were permeated with a Christian understanding of reality and used the unique genre of fantasy to communicate Platonic ideas. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, thought carefully about the realities of our world. In a letter written to his son, Christopher, in 1945, Tolkien speaks of the vestigial realities of a post-Edenic world:

Certainly there was an Eden on this very unhappy earth. We all long for it, and we are constantly glimpsing it: our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most humane, is still soaked with the sense of 'exile'. . . . As far as we can go back the nobler part of the human mind is filled with the thoughts of *sibb*, peace and goodwill, and with the thought of its *loss*. We shall never recover it, for that is not the way of repentance, which works spirally and not in a closed circle; we may recover something like it, but on a higher plane.⁸

7 Jerram Barrs, *Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature, and the Arts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 75.

8 J. R. R. Tolkien to Christopher Tolkien, Oxford, 30 January 1945, in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 110.

Understanding Tolkien's personal worldview is important to grasping what his art was about. Tolkien not only believed in the "three phase plan," but also sought to communicate it through his writings.

Tolkien and Lewis recognized a potential hidden in an apparently innocuous form of communication: the fairy-story or myth. A unique quality of the imagined world of fairy is that it may act as a magnifying glass to the existing but not easily examined realities of our world. When a "sub-creator" (to borrow a term from Tolkien) makes his own world, he may highlight the hidden aspects of reality and the Forms. In a lecture Tolkien gave at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland titled "On Fairy-stories," he says,

Fairy-stories deal largely, or (the better ones) mainly, with simple or fundamental things, untouched by Fantasy, but these simplicities are made all the more luminous by their setting. For the story-maker who allows himself to be 'free with' Nature can be her lover not her slave. It was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine.⁹

Tolkien acknowledges something crucial to our study: it was in the imaginary that he began to understand the root realities of things. In the realms of the impossible, we can look with "unveiled-eye" upon things which we may but struggle to see in the usual world. We begin to behold the Forms. For Lewis and Tolkien, when a Form is given substance in a story, it can show the object possessing all the qualities we feel a thing should have. It is a literary nod toward the standards by which we judge.

Peter Kreeft, analyzing the Platonic tradition evident in Tolkien's work, (as well as Lewis') says,

In *The Lord of the Rings* everything seems to be more itself, more Platonic. The earth is more earthy, nature is more natural, the history is more historical, the genealogies more genealogical, the tragedy more tragic, the joy more joyful, the caverns more cavernous, the forest more foresty, and the heroes more heroic.¹⁰

9 J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. C. S. Lewis (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 75.

10 Kreeft, 45.

The ability to communicate the Forms in literature comes from taking the commonplace in our world and endowing it with as much personality and essence as we might a human character. The strength of the fantasy author is to actualize Ideals. This brings us closer to the world of the Forms than we might ever know. In the present world, the veil occasionally parts and we see for a moment something very much like Tolkien's world: perhaps a particularly gnarled tree or a bird which is not afraid to sit near us. In that moment we get a sense of things at their root essence. For much of the time however, realms like Middle-Earth must serve as our lights to the view the hidden Ideals.

Tolkien's work incarnated the invisible, making it almost touchable. Writing of the power to visualize the unseen, Tolkien said, "I might say that in my myth I have used 'subcreation' in a special way . . . to make visible and physical the effects of Sin or misused Free Will by men."¹¹ Although here speaking of personifying evil, Tolkien also brought to life many good things like Hobbits or Elves. Writing about the essence of the Elves, Tolkien explained, "Elves are certain aspects of Men and their talents and desires, incarnated in my little world. They have certain freedoms and powers we should like to have, and the beauty and peril and sorrow of the possession of these things is exhibited in them. . . ."¹²

Lewis approached the writing of fantasy differently than Tolkien. Tolkien, in contrast, was indirect in his worldview; disdaining overt allegory.¹³ He was extremely detailed, making notes upon notes, creating stories and back-history. Middle-Earth was his *magnum opus*. Lewis, however, operated on a simpler scale. Yet he, like Tolkien, communicated the same kernels of reality through what he wrote.

Lewis thought that the story could be used as a means of sharing the essential elements of reality. In an essay called "On Stories," Lewis says, "The story does what no theorem can quite do. It may not be 'like real life' in the superficial sense: but it sets before us an image of what reality may well be like at some more central region."¹⁴ Here we see once more the Ideals contained in so much of Lewis' and Tolkien's thought and writing.

11 Tolkien to Peter Hastings, September 1945, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 195.

12 Tolkien to Hastings, 189.

13 One such reference to Tolkien's dislike of allegory appears in a letter he wrote to Milton Waldman, though other comments appear in his writing about his dislike of the literary form. Tolkien to Milton Waldman, 1951, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 145.

14 C. S. Lewis, "On Stories," in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, 101.

In a letter to a young girl, Lewis described the effects the Forms had upon him through the writing of Tolkien:

[A Platonic myth] reminds you of something you can't quite place. I think the something is "the whole *quality* of life as we actually experience it." . . . I've never met Orcs or Ents or Elves—but [I have met] the feel of it, the sense of a huge past, of lowering danger, of heroic feats achieved by the most apparently unheroic people.¹⁵

We can say with Lewis, that we have felt "the feel of" many things, but it is in stories, music, or other art that we actually see them.

Lewis' concept of Ideals appeared at the heart of many of his non-fiction and fictional works. One of the best known examples of Platonic myth in Lewis's work comes in *The Last Battle*. At the end of the story characters are united and experience the new Narnia. Lewis's description shows the central role of the Ideals in his thinking:

"Those hills," said Lucy, "the nice woody ones and the blue ones behind – aren't they very like the southern border of Narnia?"

"Like!" cried Edmund after a moment's silence. "Why they're exactly like. Look, there's Mount Pire with his forked head, and there's the pass into Archenland and everything!"

"And yet they're not like," said Lucy. "They're different. They have more colours on them and they look further away than I remembered and they're more... more... oh, I don't know..."

"More like the real thing," said the Lord Digory softly.¹⁶

And again just a little further down,

"Listen, Peter [said Lord Digory]. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of

15 C. S. Lewis to Lucy Barfield, 11 September 1958, in *Letters to Children*, Lyle W. Dorset and Marjorie Lamp Mead (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 81-82, quoted in Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien*, 47.

16 C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle, The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1956), 758-759.

the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here: just as our own world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan's real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream."

"... It's all in Plato, all in Plato, bless me, what *do* they teach them at these schools?"¹⁷

In both these sections Lewis is communicating two things he longed for: the triumph of goodness—the world being set right again—and things in their Ideal forms. Everything is more itself in the new Narnia. At last, it has the chance to be so, for evil was done away with. Like Tolkien's Middle-Earth, Lewis' Narnia paints the world we want to join. By sharing a simple picture with words, Lewis communicates what is for many their core desires.

CONCLUSION

Stories afford an author a unique opportunity to share their passions. What is assumed about the world and what is believed make their way into writing. In the case of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, both authors took to the form of fantasy and crafted worlds of their own. Each author shared his values about life and in turn sought to bring alive those things which he loved. Through their works, and others like them, we can look behind the curtain of the visible world and get a glimpse of the realms beyond.

¹⁷ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 759.

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REDEEMING HOME: A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF PLACE IN A PLACELESS WORLD

RUTHANNE IRVIN

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In 2011, a sleepy southern town gave everything to one of its own. Ruthie Leming was a wife, a mother of three daughters, and a well-loved middle school teacher in Starhill, Louisiana. And she was dying.

When Ruthie and her brother Rod were growing up, Starhill was a town of nearly 2,000 people. It was the kind of town people liked to watch in movies: Friday night football games, family dinners on Sundays after church, and graveyards filled with multiple generations of families who lived and died within the city limits.

When doctors diagnosed Ruthie with terminal cancer, she found the community at her door: they cleaned her house, fed her family, and paid for medical bills while her husband continued to work at the local fire station to try and make ends meet. As her prognosis worsened, Ruthie carried on loving her family and community, praying God would heal her body and preserve her life. Her friends and family watched as she endured treatment without complaint, and this deepened the sense of community shared by those around her, rooted in their commitment to her family and wonder at her strength and resilience. When she died, they celebrated her life: the

community gathered and rejoiced in her faith, determination, and love. Starhill's residents paid for her funeral, started a college fund for her daughters, and continued to love Ruthie's family like their own. Starhill is a small town with deep roots.

In his book about his sister's life, *The Little Way of Ruthie Leming*, Rod Dreher notes the fundamental difference between Ruthie's life and his: she *stayed*.¹ She stayed close to her roots in Starhill, and invested in the lives of people around her even while she was dying. Through their commitment to place, Ruthie and the people of Starhill created a community that carried on in her absence. Some people who never experience a community like this long for Starhill, with its picket fences, front-porch swings, and mild summer evenings. But the longing for a community like Starhill points to something deeper than material comfort: it expresses the innate desire to be known and cared for, as Ruthie Leming was. People long for place as it was meant to be, place as it will be one day. Places surround and shape a person's identity as they move through life, often from one city or region to another. People "live, move, and have their being" in places. We create new places—cathedrals, villages, and homes—for refuge and rest, seeking some form of consistency and peace in an unsettled world.

WHAT IS PLACE?

Places, beautiful and mundane, may be found in cities, villages, seaside ports, and people as well as in structures. Place is the emerald-green British Isles with their rich history and dying churches, their prosperous families and urban poor communities. Place is the familiar, wrinkled faces of loved ones who have seen more hardship and joy than most people around them. Place is the coffee shop that invites you to stay. Sometimes places are warm and welcoming, sometimes dark and distressing. Place is both the garden of Gethsemane and the empty tomb. It is a complex phenomenon, filled with many unanswered questions. But it is also as ancient as the earth: God created the world as a place for his people, and called it good. He implaced humanity, creating a home for Adam and Eve in Eden. At their most basic, "places are the ground of shared human

¹ Rod Dreher, *The Little Way of Ruthie Leming: A Southern Girl, a Small Town, and the Secret of a Good Life* (New York: Hachette Book Group), 2013.

experience as well as the product of shared human experience.² Place, according to Jennifer Allen Craft, is “not just a piece of ground—it is the undeniable fact of our existence *in relationship with* the whole of creation.”³

In Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, God sent his people to various places for diverse reasons. God spoke the world into being, into places. He made Adam, breathing life into him and giving him dominion over the Garden of Eden. From Adam he created Eve and placed her in the Garden to help and complete Adam. Throughout the Old Testament, God continued to use places to draw his people to himself: Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years before God gave them a place of rest in Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. God used places for both restoration and destruction, often creating parables from places. He used places to demonstrate his holiness, power, and covenant-keeping love toward his people through his promises to bring peace and justice. The New Testament is also filled with the idea of significant place and placemaking. Mary and Joseph left their home to be registered in the census at Bethlehem. God placed himself into the story physically, sending Jesus, who was born in a stable. His implacement into the world he created is striking and beautiful, as he became “the God made low to raise us up”⁴ from sin, death, and ultimately hell. The Word became flesh and dwelt among his people. Jesus’ life was full of places and people who were shaped by his influence: his twelve disciples, the Roman guards and centurions, the Garden of Gethsemane and the cross. The empty tomb and the upper room are indispensable elements in Jesus’ story. Places are integral to the human story, from beginning to end. In *Where All Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today*, Craig Bartholomew explains that

Place is never fully place without God as co-inhabitant. Place is thus always, in one way or another, a theological concept... After Eden the challenge of implacement and the danger of displacement are a constant part of the human condition. Humans remain placed, but displacement is a constant threat.⁵

2 Jennifer Allen Craft, “Making a Place on Earth: Participation in Creation and Redemption Through Placemaking and the Arts” (Ph.D.thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2013), 23.

3 Craft, “Making a Place on Earth,” 10.

4 Bob Kaufin, “God Made Low,” *Prepare Him Room*. Recorded with Sovereign Grace Praise (BMI). Sovereign Grace Music, 2014, 1 CD.

5 Craig Bartholomew, *Where All Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 31.

God gave the creation mandate—the call to make a place in the world—to Adam and Eve first, and it remains binding on the church today. As Christians redeem little parts of the world, working faithfully to care for others and their places, reflecting the gospel, they reflect Christ.

A theology of place should begin and end with God as the ultimate place-maker, the one who creates places and people for times and seasons only he knows. But the idea of place also involves human lives, choices, and ideas. In addition to the physical connotations of “place,” the word “can also become a metaphor for theological, philosophical, social, or political ideas.”⁶ Place is more than a location, the spot where someone takes a holiday, or where a student sits through courses each semester. Place both embodies and shapes human society. Starhill, Louisiana, shaped Ruthie Leming and her family, both directly and indirectly, and was shaped by them. The small town shaped her brother Rod in different ways, however, pushing him away from the farms and simple rural lifestyle to bigger cities, graduate schools, and places dedicated to intellect, beauty, and power. Places shape souls and seasons of a person’s life whether they realize it or not.

THE EPIDEMIC OF ROOTLESSNESS

Rootlessness is the antithesis of the steady, settled home, the central place in most human lives, and it has reached epidemic proportions, especially in America. For authors like Wendell Berry—agrarian essayist, activist, and poet—this rootlessness is a result of industrialization and the loss of real community. While Berry settled his family in rural Kentucky, making a career out of farming and writing, others chased the American dream in cities, foregoing a quiet life for money, prestige, and fame. His life was shaped by a small town in Kentucky as he worked to shape it for the better, through diligence and hard work. Berry writes with a sense of peace about his place in the world, saying “My work has been motivated by a desire to make myself responsibly at home in this world and in my native and chosen place.”⁷ For Berry, his chosen and native place supplied the sense of rest

6 Craft, “Making a Place on Earth,” 20.

7 Ragan Sutterfield, “Imagining a Different Way to Live: Wendell Berry is Inspiring a New Generation of Christians to Care for the Land,” *Christianity Today*, November 15, 2006. Accessed November 25, 2016.

his soul needed. He understood where he belonged in the world—rural Kentucky—and he stayed there, just as Ruthie Leming stayed in Starhill, where she felt she belonged.

Modern urbanization has changed small communities since the Industrial Revolution, which in America began in the early nineteenth century. This technological shift began as an endeavor to help communities provide for their own, but also came with sacrifices as people lost valuable jobs on farms, and automation changed manual labor forever. Since this time, urbanization only continued to grow, and many people have moved out of rural areas into metropolitan cities seeking better jobs, more cultural diversity, and the glittering allure of prosperity and prestige. Nevertheless, as Robert Brueggemann suggests, “It is now clear that a *sense of place* is a human hunger that urban promise has not met.”⁸ Modern urbanization has led to a growth in travel, both abroad and across the United States, leaving many people in airport terminals, hotels, and taxi cabs more often than not. As Walsh explains in *Beyond Homelessness*, “mobility produces homelessness;” a fear of “missing out” plagues most contemporary Americans, causing them to bristle at the notion of stillness or a slower pace of life.⁹ According to Walsh, corporate America is the primary cause of this migratory way of life. Loyalty to place is commonly undermined by a desire for wealth, and the pursuit of independence and autonomy:

Both postmodern tourists and global capitalists want to keep their options open, whether for the identities they will construct in cyberspace or the products they will buy at the mall. Both value choice over loyalty. And both remain deeply homeless because being at home is seen to be a limiting of choices and requires an acknowledgement that we are not autonomous but interdependent and interrelated homemakers.¹⁰

As Walsh suggests, the problem is not just urbanization; technological advances allow people to be in many places vicariously, which gives them a

8 Robert Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 3-4.

9 Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).

10 Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, 263.

false sense of connectedness while disregarding the importance of face-to-face human interaction. A sense of rootedness, whether acquired organically or deliberately, is critical to human flourishing. Brueggeman emphasizes that “it is *rootlessness* and not *meaninglessness* that characterizes the current crisis. There are no meanings apart from roots.”¹¹ Humanity struggles to fix what has been broken since Genesis, since the introduction of sin into every crevice of the world.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve alienated themselves from God, each other, and the Garden of Eden. They said “yes” to the forbidden fruit, and darkness entered both the world and the home. The first human beings doubted God’s goodness, and sought autonomy and independence. They became “homebreakers,” passing down this estrangement for generations.¹² Genesis describes both the creation of places and their desecration through sin, and Adam and Eve inaugurated an exile, which impacts people even today.

PLACEMAKING: HOUSES, HOMES, AND WHAT MAKES A PLACE

This epidemic of rootlessness makes the idea of place an important issue for Christians. In Genesis, God gave Adam and Eve a place, roots and a duty to gently care for that place as he commanded them. When they desecrated this place through sin, rootlessness entered the world as men and women struggled to find their place in a broken world. Placemaking, then, is essential to a Christian understanding of identity and home, where a person belongs. The notion that place is neither merely physical nor primarily an abstraction is also important. Instead, God instituted places for the good of people and the world.

There is a difference between a house and a home. Home, however, can carry many connotations, some less than pleasant. Walsh and Bouma-Prediger explain this in *Beyond Homelessness*, pointing out that houses are mere structures, walls and floors with ceilings and doors. A home, in contrast, is an abode. The word “abode” is the archaic past form of the word “abide,” which describes a kind of home-making, a persistent choice of dwelling: “A house is a space of residence, while a home is a place of (in)dwelling. ... A

¹¹ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 3-4.

¹² Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, 291.

house becomes a home when it is transformed by memory-shaped meaning into a place of identity, connectedness, order, and care.”¹³ Home is also a place of permanence, a storied place, a refuge, a place of hospitality, a place of “embodied habitation,” a place of orientation, and a place of affiliation and belonging.¹⁴ These words describe the ideal, yet homes can be places of brokenness, too.

Some stiffen at the thought of home, since for them it is an embattled place, where peace and rest are illusive or scarce. The idea of home shapes individuals profoundly, for better or worse. A perfect home does not exist in this world, but many agree there are basic principles that influence settled, rhythmic, and quieter lives like those of Ruthie Leming and her community.

ATTRIBUTES OF PLACEMAKING

At their best, places are permanent, resilient refuges from the world. The Christian’s calling to make a place, as seen from the beginning in Genesis with Adam and Eve, is now complicated by the transient nature of life, both in an urbanized culture and a sojourning community of the Church. In *Where All Mortals Dwell*, Bartholomew offers several attributes of placemaking that help inform a Christian’s worldview as they invest their lives in the dwellings, cities, and relationships that fill their everyday lives. These attributes include attentiveness, familiarity, silence, slowness, stability, repetition, particularity, hope, respect, and love, as well as engagement with God, ourselves, and others.¹⁵ Wendell Berry often echoes these attributes, encouraging his readers to find rest in the stillness of nature, where everything works as intended. Berry elaborates on this theme in his poem, “The Peace of the Wild Things”:

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

13 Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, 57-58.

14 Ibid.

15 Bartholomew, *Where All Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today*, 320.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.¹⁶

In this poem, Berry encourages his readers to remember the “wild things” and live in peace instead of constant mobility that often feels like chaos. People worry about their careers and children; about their aging parents, and about stock market crashes; about fresh tragedies and those still to come. Berry reminds himself of the rhythms of nature, which live and flow as they should: in grace and elegance that humans forgo for busier schedules and fuller bank accounts. But words like “stillness,” “silence,” and “stability” do not often characterize modern life; “chaotic,” “unstable,” and “frustrating” seem closer to the mark for most of us. This is partly due to busyness, a hyperactivity that arises not out of necessity but out of fear. We fear silence and attentiveness to our own souls because silence confronts us with ourselves—our insecurities, struggles, and even our unfulfilled hopes and dreams. But silence and stillness, along with these other qualities are what a Christian theology of place should try to recapture in the face of a transient and hostile world. In *Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America*, Wilfred M. McClay discusses the need for stability and rest in a frantic world. He describes how

in a frenetically mobile and ever more porous and inexorably globalizing world, we stand powerfully in need of such stable and coherent places in our lives—to ground us and orient us, and mark off a finite arena, rich with memory, for our activity as parents and children, as friends and neighbors, and as free and productive citizens.¹⁷

16 David Kern, “Wendell Berry Loves Your Nowhere Place,” *Christ and Pop Culture*. Accessed August 13, 2016. http://christandpopculture.com/wendell-berry-loves-nowhereplace/?utm_content=bufferb-575d&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer.

17 Ted McAllister and Wilfred M. McClay, *Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America* (New York: New Atlantic Books, 2014), 3.

In order to live healthy lives, humans need stability and the freedom to slow down and settle into a life that may never be praised by Wall Street, but is beneficial for the soul. One of the ways people can do this is by engaging—that is, communing—fully with God, themselves, and others.

COMMUNION WITH GOD, OURSELVES, AND OTHERS

Before a person can rightly interact with and understand concepts of home, place, and rest, he must come to terms with the sovereign God who rules over all the people and places in his life. God created the world as a habitat for thriving and building; even the rhythm of its spinning sustains life and glorifies its maker. In Romans, Paul tells his readers that many have gone astray, chasing after sin, even though they possess the knowledge of God in their hearts (Romans 1:22-25). Berry expresses the consequences of this waywardness well, declaring that “in the circle of the human we are weary with striving, and are without rest.”¹⁸ This unfulfilled longing points to a deeper need for the eternity God has placed in people’s hearts, though they cannot attain it yet (Ecc 3:11). This longing is for something that lasts longer than a fleeting moment, yet eternity is something people cannot know apart from God (Eph 2:8-10). Communion with God will therefore begin with a humble acknowledgement that he is God and there is no other God besides him. One must recognize he is good, forgiving, steadfast in love, and just in his declarations of sin and righteousness.

True communion with God then leads to true engagement with a person’s own soul. In the Psalms, David and other writers consistently remind themselves to look to God who is righteous, gracious, and merciful. In Psalm 116:5-7 David writes “Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful. The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.” The Psalmists are always reminding their souls to remember God’s faithfulness and rejoice. This purposeful rest and remembering brings Christians to a point of healthy engagement with their own souls. Communion with the Lord reminds the frail soul that God sits enthroned over the earth, therefore they can “cease striving” and know he is God (Psalm 46:10,

18 Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), 12.

NASB). These verses exhort someone to be still in the peace Christ gives his followers. Christians engage with themselves well when they accept that humanity is limited, frail, and in need of grace on a moment-by-moment basis. Engagement with self thus includes the experience of true rest, an understanding of personal limits, and adequate care for soul and body.

Healthy places are made by healthy people, and setting aside enough time to find rest for the soul is essential to engagement with God and others. Engagement with others is often more difficult because it is not just ourselves, as Christians are called to love each other as God has loved them (John 13:34-35). The church is the primary setting in which Christians are called to love others, living in harmony with the body of Christ. Engaging with others is necessary for a healthy relationship with God and a healthy soul. Berry notes this need for community outside ourselves in his book, *The Art of Commonplace*, claiming that “[O]ur sense of wholeness is not just the sense of completeness in ourselves, but also is the sense of belonging to others and to our place; it is an unconscious awareness of community, of having in common.”¹⁹ The Christian community provides people with this sense of belonging when they treat each other with dignity, as fellow image-bearers of God. Communion in these areas—with God, ourselves, and others—are key characteristics for Christian placemaking. When believers implement these into their lives, places will begin to heal souls as refuges of solitude and stability for the weary world around them.

MAKING A PLACE AS SOJOURNERS IN A GROANING WORLD

When Adam and Eve displaced themselves from Eden, they began to sojourn throughout the world, roaming from place to place. The Israelites sojourned for forty years, longing for a home. Jesus left heaven, making himself at home in the world for a brief time, commissioning his followers to follow in his footsteps (Matt 28:18-20). Christians are called to make places while also living as sojourners in a foreign land. While Christians sojourn, they must invite the world into their places, reflecting God as they long for Heaven. This reflection occurs in everyday life, “through acts of imagination, ordering,

¹⁹ Wendell Berry, *The Art of Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002), 144.

planning, building and so on, all humans may participate in the hopeful renewal of our creation. ... God's presence can be found in arenas of local human placemaking, and that is this very *locality* that speaks to the abiding presence of God in *all* the world."²⁰

Christians participate in this redemption when they make places of solitude and rest, but also recognizing life's impermanence. They do this through working faithfully in whatever arena God sovereignly ordains for them, including the local church. The church is the best example of a place on earth for Christians, which God instituted for his glory and the good of his people. Through the body of fellow Christians, the Holy Spirit and Christ's work on behalf of his people can satisfy the longings arising from this rootlessness in the world. Bartholomew emphasizes this, stating that "Implacement ultimately means that by the Spirit we have the Father and the Son as our co-inhabitants. Such at-homeness is the key to being at home in our particular places in God's good but fallen world."²¹ This communion with God through the church gives Christians "the vision and resources for birthing Christ again and again in this world."²² This is the call of Christians in the world: to make a place while also sojourning through life as strangers, knowing the future of the church in Heaven awaits those who remain in Christ. One day God will renew all things.

CONCLUSION

Though home is often a place of brokenness, there is hope of redemption. Right now, many places are plagued by sorrow, sin, and displaced affections. This brokenness points people to their deepest need, a need for salvation. One day a perfect Christ will make a perfect place for his people. This is the hope to which Christians cling, in life and death, in homelessness and rootedness. Amid sickness, grief, and the groaning of creation, Christ will one day redeem the brokenness, gather the homeless, and create an eternally glorious place for his people. Until then, Christians live as wayfaring strangers. As they sojourn, it is important to remember that

20 Craft, "Making a Place on Earth," 118.

21 Bartholomew, *Where All Mortals Dwell*, 320.

22 *Ibid.*

At the heart of the Christian gospel is the message that we are all homeless, but that there is a home in which our yearning hearts can and will find rest. That home is creation redeemed and transfigured, a place of grace that is inhabited by an indwelling God of unfathomable love. The Christian gospel, in other words, is a grand story of redemptive homecoming that is at the same time grateful homemaking.²³

This promise of a restored and perfect home motivates Christians who are making places, longing for places, or wandering from places in this world to press in and press on to the end. Jesus encourages his disciples, saying “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). As Christians yearn for this redeemed place, they can remember that earthly homes are mere shadows meant to point them to the eternal reality of Heaven. Even communities like Starhill, Louisiana, with its deep roots and generous souls that cared for Ruthie Leming, cannot compare to what is to come. These shadows give Christians a glimpse into the greater, future reality of this gracious and long-awaited homecoming.

²³ Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, 320.

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A PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY: DIALOGUING WITH SCRUTON AND WOLTERSTORFF

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Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R.)* is a brutal, graphic, and disturbing portrayal of man's ability to use art to critique the actions of his peers, to inform a blinded public of their sins, and make complicit his audience in the crime it portrays. It is an eight foot tall slap in the face by the reductionism of the human form found in society. It is not beautiful. But it is art.

With a few broad strokes of the brush, Picasso captures the sacrilege of that transcendental nature of beauty that has plagued philosophers and artists alike for centuries. Beauty captures and allures; it calls to something within all mankind and yet remains elusive to definition. It is no wonder that Picasso can then break down the sacred nature of the human form into edges and angles, tribal masks and bare breasts. The portrayal of Barcelona's famed brothel is an effort to condemn a public for their own gleeful destruction of beauty in the social structure.

Any sense of judgment and taste in regards to what we call art and beauty has been so rendered down that rather than seeing Picasso's drastic piece of

social justice for what it is, his abstract cubism has been labeled as the new standard for beauty and sensuality. We have robbed ourselves of a standard by which the sacred nature of beauty both sustains and uplifts a society. In the search for inclusivity and ‘progress’ mankind has lost any sense of objectivity or morality in the arts. In their destruction of beauty, they have made themselves complicit in their own cultural decay.

This has been the flag that philosopher Roger Scruton has waved for several decades, despite opposition amongst his peers. Scruton’s views regarding art and beauty are not popular with the modern art crowd and their post-modern advocates.¹ Having written several books on aesthetics, Scruton has developed a largely metaphysical aspect to understanding standards of art and beauty.² For Scruton, the purpose of art is to save the sacred - the beautiful.³ In a remarkable correlation, fellow philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff uses similar language—speaking of aesthetic contemplation as similar to religious adoration.⁴ Both philosophers use this language of sacred and sacrilege in their discussions of art and beauty. Yet, where Scruton follows the metaphysical side of this much fought-over topic, Wolterstorff takes a more practical, foot-to-the-ground approach. Due to this, they are uniquely situated in developing a practical aesthetic that starts at the conceptual and ends in the actual. When placed in conversation, Scruton and Wolterstorff might just come to an answer both society at large, and especially the church, need to hear in regards to art and beauty in an age of desecration.

DEFINING BEAUTY

For Scruton, beauty is wrapped up in his view of the sacred. The sacred begins with the fundamental nature of man as an end, not merely a means. Scruton, then, is able to apply this concept of ends to beauty. The ability to place

1 Jonathan Glancey, “Roger Scruton Is On Shaky Ground Slating Architecture,” *The Guardian* (April 14, 2011): 1, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/apr/14/roger-scruton-architecture-zaha-hadid>.

2 *Art and Imagination, The Aesthetics of Architecture, The Aesthetic Understanding, The Aesthetics of Music, and Beauty* in addition to many other essays.

3 Roger Scruton and Mark Dooley, *Conversations with Roger Scruton* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2016), 197.

4 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 50.

meaning on things is what gives man his sacredness and makes him an end unto himself.⁵ The sacred gives us a glimpse into eternity, and provides man with the cure to his temporal misery. In a manner almost Platonic, Scruton describes the sacred as pulling man out of the world of things and into the transcendental realm.⁶ It is an attempt to find Eden again, even if only in a finite temporal way, and to “prefigure our eternal home.”⁷

Thus, it is this sacred nature of ends, not means, that Scruton puts forth in his understanding of beauty. According to the Greek philosopher, Plotinus, beauty is seen as an ultimate value, pursued for its own sake, and the way in which the “divine unity makes itself known to the soul.”⁸ Wolterstorff himself elaborates on Plotinus’ view, wherein beauty consists of the glimpses contained in things of the ultimate One. We delight in beauty, because our souls recognize these glimpses as windows into the ultimate One.⁹ Plotinus writes that this beauty as related to “...the soul, since it is by nature... related to the higher kind of reality in the realm of being, when it sees something akin to it or a trace of its kindred reality, it is delighted and thrilled...”¹⁰

Here, both Scruton and Wolterstorff seem to prefer to rest. While other philosophers like Aquinas took Plotinus’ theories and applied it to the nature of goodness and truth, Scruton finds problem with placing beauty on the same metaphysical plain as truth. Wolterstorff also calls into question Aquinas’ end result of equating beauty with uniformity of parts—which has remained dominant in the west—suggesting the inability of this theory to work with such things as literature or protest art. In his book, *Art Rethought*, Wolterstorff comes to this conclusion without spending much time on beauty for that very reason. He claims that beauty in relation to art is only a recent addition, limited to the eighteenth century. Connecting beauty to the arts places a false sense of judgement upon a piece if it is only a recent development. In addition, numerous masterpieces would have to be removed from their ranking of art if it didn’t strike one as beautiful or having “due proportion.”¹¹ Beauty, in turn, came to be thought of as pleasant to behold or easy to listen

5 Mark Dooley, *Roger Scruton: The Philosopher On Dover Beach* (London, UK: Continuum, 2009), 16.

6 Dooley, *Roger Scruton*, 27-29.

7 Roger Scruton, *Gentle Regrets* (London, UK: Continuum, 2005), 239.

8 Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

9 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 309-310.

10 Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 6, 2.

11 Aquinas, *S.Th. I, S,4, ad 1.*

to. That which causes one awe, however, was replaced with the sublime. So we have in the eighteenth century, a split in what could hold aesthetic merit, the beautiful and the sublime, all without truly recognizing the historical defining qualities of what beauty is.

Wolterstorff is unconcerned with taking the view of either Plotinus or Aquinas. He seeks instead to understand the aesthetic in regards to art, as replacing the belief of beauty being necessary to consider a piece of art excellent. Since beauty attached to art is a relatively recent concept, he declines it, and asks the reader to return to the method of disinterested interest; his desire is to find there what it is about art that makes us so captivated.¹²

Scruton is equally eager to find what it is in art that so captivates us. However, he thinks he has it. It is beauty, particularly the beauty of the sacred that draws us in. Wolterstorff's definition might be more inclusive of modern and abstract art, but Scruton is rigid in his judgments against art that does not fall into the categories of beautiful. He writes, "Is there any point in studying our artistic and cultural inheritance, when the judgment of beauty has no rational grounds?"¹³ Beauty is not just an other-worldly, nebulous concept in Scruton's mind. While connected to the sacred, beauty is also tied to our rational nature. It has real and universal value and is essential in shaping the cultures of mankind. Man's ability to comprehend and make sense of the transcendental object is what allows him to recognize the sacred in the world, and seek to obtain it. Here, Scruton channels Plotinus, saying sacred things are not of this world, they are set apart and made holy - much like Plotinus' glimpse of a higher reality.¹⁴ He connects the idea of sacrilege to beauty; when we meddle with holy affairs, we pollute by "dragging it down into the sphere of everyday events."¹⁵ In an almost perversion of the Platonic sense, we've brought what belongs in the realm of forms down to the realm of things.

Scruton clearly ties the importance of beauty to beyond that of art. Scruton's connection of beauty to the sacred appeals to the timelessness and transcendent nature we often find in pieces of art that recall to us those little glimpses of ultimate reality. It stands in contrast to Wolterstorff's attempts to create a defining line for understanding art. While Scruton might be

12 Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 310.

13 Scruton, *Beauty*, xii.

14 *Ibid.*, 43-44.

15 *Ibid.*, 43-44.

known for being rather drastic in his appraisal of specific art forms, Wolterstorff's refusal to include beauty as part of the equation does more loss to his argument than Scruton's inclusion. For Scruton, beauty plays a role in developing taste, which is foundational in creating a proper critique of art. If we are to maintain standards for art—and this includes architecture, music, etc.—then understanding how the presence of beauty shapes our desires for order, harmony, and even dissonance impacts us as a society.

In defining beauty, both Scruton and Wolterstorff take pains to define what it is not. Beauty is not simply excellence in form. Wolterstorff compares it to a scale in reference to Aquinas' standards of proportion, harmony, and pleasantness. If we keep to this traditional standard for beauty, we would consider the works of Raphael, Telemann, and Keats as more beautiful than those of Picasso, late Beethoven, and Donne.¹⁶ However, what exactly is being measured here is unclear. If we equate beauty with aesthetic excellence that makes Telemann's works more beautiful than late Beethoven, and therefore aesthetically more excellent. But not many would hold to this. Some pieces might be more aesthetically excellent—perhaps in skill or execution—yet unable to be called beautiful. Wolterstorff thus does not place beauty as necessary for aesthetic excellence.

Scruton, while content to play with Plotinus, often draws from traditional standards for beauty when discussing how beauty manifests itself in society. Admitting to the slipperiness of aesthetic descriptors, Scruton does seem to align with a measure of harmony, order, or what he calls *fittingness*.¹⁷ Despite the interplay with the scales of Aquinas, Scruton's understanding of fittingness is linked more closely with the ideals of Plotinus. Scruton sees this fittingness as a way "to achieve order in their surroundings and to be at home in their common world."¹⁸ He applies it to his concept of minimal beauty, beauty in the everyday and ordinary. Without this minimal beauty, objects of immense beauty would not contain their "immenseness" due to lack of comparison. Here, Scruton subtly appeals to an "everything in moderation" mindset. Too much beauty can be too much of a good thing. Fittingness is important in an understanding of beauty because it creates harmony and inspires a kind of

16 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 162.

17 Scruton, *Beauty*, 80.

18 *Ibid.*, 81.

rightness to the senses. Scruton admits that there are many other words we use to describe the aesthetic of a thing. We see one thing as elegant, and another charming. One might be intricate, pretty, or attractive. But “to speak of beauty is to enter another and more exalted realm—a realm sufficiently apart from our everyday concerns as to be mentioned only with a certain hesitation.”¹⁹

Scruton couches his understanding of beauty in the implied understanding of sacredness. His wording suggests boundaries and standards; a need for judgment and taste. In fact, much time is spent on cultivating taste and understanding in regards to art and ultimately beauty:

...Taste is not simply a set of arbitrary preferences. It is a complex exercise of sympathy, in which we respond to human life, enhanced and idealized in artistic form. Good taste is not reducible to rules; but we can define it instead through concept of virtue: it is the sum of those preferences that would emerge in a well ordered soul...²⁰

Taste has its roots in moral character. Similar to Augustine’s well-ordered loves, the well-ordered morality of man responds rightly to virtue. And so too, beauty portrays to us not the things we want, but the things we ought to want. It is why Scruton places such emphasis on manners, clothing choices, and well-designed gardens. The minimal beauty we wrap around ourselves is bound up in a standard of taste, rightness, and fittingness. The ideals of community and home depend on it. When bad taste is cultivated, it drives us from our neighbors and makes a dwelling into a squalor. Because Scruton places his emphasis on the sacred nature of beauty’s ability to transcend this “world of forms,” beauty’s real value lies in what it reminds us of. Familiarity, home, rightness, all these little glimpses of the “ultimate reality” that are fast and away disappearing from the arts and culture in general. This leads us to what is perhaps the sharpest distinction between the two philosophers in their views of aesthetics: what qualifies as art.

DEFINING AESTHETIC EXCELLENCE

In order to speak on aesthetic excellence, we must first speak on what qualifies as art in the minds of Scruton and Wolterstorff. Wolterstorff defines art as

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1997), 379.

a skill, craft, or competence at making.²¹ He proceeds to make a distinction with fine art as those produced within a society with the express purpose of using it for disinterested contemplation. Scruton credits Enlightenment thinkers for his definition of art as “a thing whose value lies in it and not in its purpose.”²² However, Scruton does push back against these kinds of philosophically technical terms of “for its own sake,” “intrinsic value,” and ‘end in itself.’ These don’t indicate a clear distinction between having a purely aesthetic interest in a piece or a more utilitarian purpose.

A standard needs to be established for what is considered art in present day society. Art seems to lend itself to contemplation, or a “set-apartness” from other kinds of production. Both Scruton and Wolterstorff agree that art - on the level of museums and galleries—is typically made for contemplation or observation. It is to be enjoyed through the senses. Craftsmanship, on the other hand, tends to imply a level below art—art with a strictly more utilitarian purpose.

Scruton calls these useful arts, and gives such examples as architecture, basket weaving, and carpentry. Each of these categories can produce contemplative art, but are mainly commissioned for a particular practical use. Useful art lends itself well to Scruton’s previous point of minimal beauty. Cultures across the world practice minimal beauty in their craftsmanship of tools, ornaments, and household items. Surrounding themselves with a practical beauty of sorts appears second nature. Even today we open entire exhibits dedicated to the way ancient cultures practiced their everyday lives. The Vatican Archives are full of pottery, tapestries, religious figurines, and weaponry. While they might set these apart as visual curiosities, these pieces are not placed on the same level as Raphael’s School of Athens a few rooms down.

A level of distinction must be made. Wolterstorff defines craftsmanship as how well the work uses the material, subject to the given standards of a community.²³ Traditional standards of craftsmanship are what guided the creation and development of new art throughout history. Respect of these standards helps maintain a higher level of quality of craftsmanship that allows

21 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 37.

22 Scruton, *Beauty*, 15.

23 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 92.

a piece to be considered art. In *Art in Action*, Wolterstorff applies this kind of standard to abstract expressionist paintings and the quasi performance art John Cage calls music.²⁴ In this kind of modern “art,” any semblance of craftsmanship is entirely irrelevant. Scruton, too, expresses his frustration over “soaps being as good as Shakespeare and Radiohead the equal of Brahms.”²⁵ Neither Scruton nor Wolterstorff speak with any fondness of the modern art movement.²⁶ Scruton in particular calls Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* a joke and Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* “downright stupid” and corny.²⁷ Wolterstorff mentions an installation by Robert Morris of a piece that is simply a notarized document stating that the previous piece in the exhibit contained no aesthetic quality or content.²⁸

In response to this, Wolterstorff unites craftsmanship again to the need for a standard in art: “Just as fundamental as our responsibility to promote the cause of art intended for aesthetic contemplation is our responsibility to promote aesthetic excellence in works of art generally, no matter what their intended use.”²⁹ Whether the artist intends a more functional use of his creation—such as baskets, rugs, furniture—or items meant more for contemplation—public art installations, paintings, symphonies—the key is excellence in the execution. The mass creation of art by a people gives rise to a need for standards, a level of excellence to attain. Scruton finds this standard tied to our understanding of community. In creating standards, we make a call for a collective right judgment, an appeal for consensus.³⁰ This is why we have standards in society for fashion, design, and architecture. Even in the avant-garde and the extreme, there are boundaries in place for practicality or colors for the season. It allows us a sense of creativity while remaining in the bounds of polite taste and appropriateness. One could say *fittingness*.

Scruton makes note of the actions of a parent or teacher in encouraging children to foster similar taste in art as themselves.³¹ We wring our hands and frown when literature, music, and art that we consider ugly, obscene, or

24 *Ibid.*, 93.

25 Scruton, *Beauty*, 83.

26 Although Wolterstorff seems to rescind his judgment 20+ years later in *Art Rethought*.

27 Scruton, *Beauty*, 83.

28 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 92-93.

29 *Ibid.*, 170.

30 Scruton, *Beauty*, 113.

31 Scruton, *Beauty*, 114.

offensive is prized by the next generation. There is a striking need for order and objectivity despite universal subjectivity from culture to culture. Scruton makes a distinction between taste—which is more regional and personal—and objective universals. While qualifying that any hard and fast rules are detrimental to the creativity and freedom of art, he maintains his belief that there are universals rooted in our very nature that feed our interest in things that display symmetry, proportion, harmony, and order. At the same time, these universals encourage novelty and excitement. Regarding aesthetic judgment, Scruton divides objectivity and universality. “In the judgment of beauty the search for objectivity is for valid and heightened forms of human experience—forms in which human life can flower according to its inner need and achieve the kind of fruition that we witness in the Sistine Chapel ceiling, in *Parsifal*, or *Hamlet*.”³²

Aesthetic judgment, unlike a parent or teacher, does not demand that you like *Hamlet*; rather, it aims to encourage understanding of human life within *Hamlet*, of the values and forms it endorses. It particularly is not claiming that the aesthetic life pictured in *Hamlet* is universally available. The life of man is subjective, and to a certain sense, so is art. The way we judge color is entirely subjective, yet it is an objective judgment to say that red is red and blue is blue.

It is important to note that Scruton is not saying that judgments of taste—which are universally subjective—guarantee beauty. The creativity vital to art lies in taking the standards and norms and fulfilling them unexpectedly. Scruton gives the example of Michelangelo’s work in the Laurentian Library. Due to structural reasons necessitating Michelangelo place the columns within the walls, he was given a unique opportunity to bend the accepted standards of style while still maintaining an excellence of order and symmetry that is stunning. The architectural details so often found outside the building were brought inside, thus creating a bold statement of strength, solidity and timelessness. He maintains the objective judgment while defying those very rules.

The work of Michelangelo is a clear example of the idea that while beauty contains elements of order and harmony, neither are necessary for a piece to be considered excellent. If only order and harmony were necessary, then

32 Ibid, 120.

originality would no longer be a hallmark of success, and undoubtedly much of art would be a quick succession of Thomas Kinkadee paintings.

In continuing an understanding of aesthetic excellence, Wolterstorff speaks of what he calls *mastering craftsmanship*.³³ Not only does an artist seek such external rigors as harmony, order, and symmetry or some interplay of the kind—in reaching for the goal of aesthetic excellence, an artist must also pursue internal rigors. When an artist chooses his medium, he comes to know the materials he is working with. He learns what he can and cannot do with his materials, what can be done easily and what can only be done with great difficulty. He experiments, creates, and attempts to find new ways of working with his medium that others have not attempted before. Yet, even in his own creativity, there are rules which govern his chosen materials and limit what can be done with them. Take for example, a carpenter. A carpenter knows which types of wood work best for what he hopes to create. Some types of wood are softer than others, hemlock and various white cedars, and thus better suited for certain kinds of delicate detail work. Harder woods, like hickory or rosewood, are better suited for furniture meant to withstand great pressure.³⁴ As a craftsman, a carpenter makes choices regarding his materials so that he may get the best work out of them. Overtime, through practice and knowledge, this leads to skill, which when properly nurtured can turn into expertise. It is in this way that an artist develops craftsmanship.³⁵ Wolterstorff's description reads similarly to Scruton, saying, "Craftsmanship consists in how well one's work meets certain standards in one's use of the material, these being the standards of a certain community."³⁶ An artist's ability to accomplish certain levels of skill is dependent upon the levels of excellence in a given society that have been handed down for centuries. Wolterstorff gives the example of a carpenter making drawers. No matter what kind of style the artist wishes to identify himself with, if he is going to make a chest of drawers, he will need to learn to make drawers. Thus, a community can adopt a level of excellence for good drawer making. Artistic skill is necessary for aesthetic excellence.

33 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 91.

34 The tough and often difficult to work with wood was used as a moniker for President Andrew Jackson, "Old Hickory," which he received due to his presence on the battlefield.

35 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 92.

36 *Ibid.*, 92.

To use a different analogy, we do not let potters continue to fashion bowls out of Playdough and consider them to be excellent potters. For a potter to achieve a level of aesthetic excellence in his work, he needs to learn how to throw the clay, spin the wheel, and operate a kiln. Yet these are only the basics of pottery work. If one were to throw away levels of excellence in regards to aesthetics, then any level of craftsmanship becomes irrelevant.³⁷

The goal of an artist is his *masterpiece*. Traditionally, after serving as an apprentice or journeyman, an artist would work on producing his finest piece in the hopes that it would be worthy enough to be considered a mastery—both of his skill, and the material. It would then be judged before the guild of his trade, and if considered a true piece of excellence, it would be retained by the guild and he would be awarded his *mastery*.³⁸ However, mastery of one's craft does not immediately assume creativity and genius on the part of the artist. This is why aesthetic excellence cannot depend solely on craftsmanship. Something more is required. The kind of creativity Michelangelo delivered in pushing the boundaries of what he had to work with is perhaps a bit what we are looking for.

Wolterstorff speaks of the *tour-de-force*, the “achievement of something which stretches the abilities of the materials to the uttermost.”³⁹ The eastern wall of the Gloucester Cathedral is incredibly vast, terribly thin, and filled with glass. It is a daring feat that for its time seems impossible. Yet it stands, inspiring awe and perhaps a bit of fear in the admirer. The artists stretched the possibilities of their materials to its absolute limits. The exploration of creativity and ingenuity are the internal goals of an artist. Even in the boundary-pushing Gloucester Cathedral there is order and symmetry that defy the odds of the execution. Walls should not be that thin, hold that much glass, and still remain standing. But the artist behind Gloucester decided to try, and did so in a way that has both excellence in mastery and excellence in innovation. It is a masterpiece in every sense of the word.

For the Gloucester artist to be able to stretch his materials to such lengths, he had to have an understanding, or as Wolterstorff claims, a love, for his materials. “The potter loves clay, not so much indeed for what it is as for what

37 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 92-93.

38 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Guild,” accessed November 26, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/guild-trade-association>.

39 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 93.

it can become; he or she longs to nurture it into pots.”⁴⁰ Just as any teacher seeks to push and mold his student to become more than what the student imagines himself capable, an artist understands and knows his materials to such a degree that he can push and stretch them to their extremes while still maintaining the integrity for the piece. The artist loves his materials. He desires them to grow in potential, not to shatter in failure.

Here, though, Wolterstorff reminds the reader it is possible for an artist to not love his materials. Bemoaning the modern art movement, he recalls Duchamp’s abhorrence of his materials. Duchamp’s *Fountain* has no craftsmanship imputed in it. If anything, it shows an abundant *lack* of care. When craftsmanship is stripped from the creative process, Wolterstorff worries that there will be little left to satisfy us.⁴¹ Scruton agrees, detailing modern art as “deliberately antagonizing gestures of defiance toward the traditions that make art loveable.”⁴² Scruton considers much of public art today to be loveless, which is not surprising when considering Duchamp’s own disregard toward his materials. By deliberately predicating the “unlovely and unlovable,” Duchamp, among many others, has made it popular to dispose of any sort of judgment or standard for beauty, let alone excellence.⁴³ In this kind of culture, aesthetic judgment is seen as an affliction.

Aesthetic judgment should be a guide to greater appreciation, even joy, in the object. If an object must be in our field of perception, it is considered a better, more preferred object if it is aesthetically excellent as well.⁴⁴ A house made of cinderblocks may shelter someone but the house is not as good as it could be. It is not an excellent house. “Something is missing, something of the joy that rightfully belongs in human life, something of the satisfaction that aesthetically good housing would produce in those who dwell there.”⁴⁵ What is required in the construction of a house is not absent from the aesthetic judgment of it, much the way Michelangelo worked with the location of the pillars, but the beauty of the house is intimately connected with the artistic intention in the house’s design.⁴⁶ A house’s function is considered

40 Ibid., 95.

41 Ibid., 96.

42 Roger Scruton, “Art, Beauty, and Judgment,” *The American Spectator*, July/August 2007.

43 Scruton, “Art, Beauty, and Judgment,” 2.

44 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 170.

45 Ibid., 170.

46 Scruton, *Beauty*, 66.

within the aesthetic judgment of it, yet the architectural function is bound up in the aesthetic goal.

[The] column is there to add dignity, to support the architrave, to raise the building high above its own entrance and so to give it a distinguished place in the street... In other words, when we take beauty seriously, function ceases to be an independent variable, and becomes absorbed into the aesthetic goal.⁴⁷

Function is included in a consideration of beauty, but is not the standard of beauty in its entirety. Beauty must be approached as the end goal, one that qualifies and limits any other intentions for a piece.⁴⁸ For Scruton, this is the ultimate end. While this might seem to exclude many pieces of great art that do not outright conform to a semblance of conventional harmony or order, Scruton's aim does not appear to be a broad sweep of condemnation. Rather, this understanding is rooted in a greater view of the metaphysical necessity of beauty in the role of human flourishing.

THE NECESSITY OF BEAUTY

In seeking to give greater clarity to a standard of aesthetic judgment, Scruton connects excellence with a moral standard. Aesthetic judgment concerns what one ought and ought not to like, which carries with it an implicit moral weight.⁴⁹ Borrowing from David Hume, Scruton connects the judgment of art with the character of the one who judges it. The character of a critic points to the virtues vital to moral life and not just discrimination as regards aesthetic critique. Beauty is just as firmly rooted in virtue as goodness, and thus both in human fulfillment. They are reflective not of the things we want, but of what we ought to want, because they are essential to us.⁵⁰ Scruton appeals to the experience of the sacred as the universal puzzle anthropologists have tried to understand for centuries.⁵¹ His tone is religious in nature:

47 Scruton, *Beauty*, 18.

48 *Ibid.*, 18.

49 *Ibid.*, 84.

50 *Ibid.*, 123.

51 *Ibid.*, 43.

Sacred things are not of this world: they are set apart from ordinary reality and cannot be touched or uttered without rites of initiation or the privilege of religious office. To meddle with them without some purifying preparation is to run the risk of sacrilege. It is to desecrate and pollute what is holy, by dragging it down into the sphere of everyday events.⁵²

This is where Wolterstorff's confession of the Christian faith collides with Scruton's side-stepping around it. Wolterstorff claims that the Platonist is committed to avoiding the aesthetic delight in this world of objects. The Platonist, properly understood, separated the sacred from the realm of things, and therefore cannot truly delight in a world that is only mere copies of the sacred forms.⁵³ For the Christian, his aesthetic delight fuels a joy over this present life that is right and godly. The presence of beauty in the world is a gift from God to his children, and as Mumford said, "To starve the eye, the ear, the skin, the nose is just as much to court death as to withhold food from the stomach."⁵⁴ Much like Scruton referred to this ultimate reality as Eden, beauty is meant to be the sacred call to a time long past, a time of perfection. To Christians, beauty should be another reminder of the ultimate reality. For Scruton, the ultimate reality ends there, but for believers, the ultimate reality is found in Christ.

Scruton's use of the sacred nature of beauty as connected to the world beyond is correct, but he runs close to connecting art as a religious experience in itself. In speaking of beauty, Scruton uses the word "desecration," which calls to mind a spoiling of something set apart.⁵⁵ For Scruton, despoiling art is nothing less than an act of sacrilege.⁵⁶ It offends polite society, and something intrinsic within us. Kant and Plato also saw this feeling of the sacred in beauty as similar to the religious mindset of hoping to arise to the transcendental.⁵⁷ There is a depth and rightness to Scruton's concept of the sacred, especially in regards to art and a higher ultimate reality. However, Scruton runs the dangerous risk of falling into an "art as religion" mindset, unconsciously referencing Schopenhauer.⁵⁸

52 Ibid., 43.

53 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 82.

54 Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1961), 344.

55 Scruton, *Beauty*, 145.

56 Dooley, *Roger Scruton*, 111.

57 Ibid., 146.

58 *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, sum12 ed., s.v. "Schopenhauer's Aesthetics," accessed November 24, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schopenhauer-aesthetics/>.

Many other philosophers have also followed this line of thinking. In *Art Rethought*, Wolterstorff gives two examples of the movement within art in the early twentieth century for art to work as a replacement for God.⁵⁹ Wilhelm Wackenroder in particular describes art galleries as temples, the great artists as the highest among mortals, and aesthetic pleasure as more like prayer than simple contemplation.⁶⁰ Philipp Moritz calls aesthetic pleasure akin to self-sacrifice, an almost nirvana-like attainment of higher transcendence.⁶¹ While Moritz and Wackenroder regard works of art as god-like surrogates, and worthy of veneration, Wolterstorff mentions the work of Clive Bell, who, perhaps reminiscent of Scruton, does not consider works of art god-like, but as objects of revelation through which the divine might be known.⁶² While he doesn't worship at the altar, Bell is clear in how he views art. "[In] my giddier moments I have been tempted to believe that art might prove the world's salvation." Like Scruton, Bell sees art as a byway to that ultimate reality that transcends this world of things.⁶³ Bell is blatantly Platonic even if his language is ripe with religious symbolism. He might claim to only think so in his giddier moments, but many others have proclaimed it while sober. In so doing, they fashion altars and idols for themselves out of art. For them, "art harbors the potential of saving us from what we need saving from; therein lies its religious significance."⁶⁴ Wolterstorff goes a step further: art has begun to compete with religion in the business of salvation.⁶⁵

With the rise of postmodernism and secularism, religion has been stripped from art, and likewise art has been stripped from the church. Where once art used to be predominantly religious, the twentieth century became known for the desecration of religion in art, to use Scruton's term. Andres Serrano's *Immersion (Piss Christ)* is a famous example. A crucifix submerged in a jar of the artist's own urine, it is offensive and crude. Yet the piece is considered one of the foremost pieces of modern art. Thousands flock to see such pieces, selling for outrageous sums, and the veneration given by critics and fellow

59 Additionally, in *Art in Action*, Wolterstorff expands greatly on the use of art as "surrogate gods" that is worth the read, though I did not have the room to here.

60 Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 35.

61 *Ibid.*, 34-35.

62 Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 45.

63 *Ibid.*, 47.

64 *Ibid.*, 49.

65 *Ibid.*, 49.

artists is mind boggling. In their own way, postmodernism has set up an altar in the art gallery and bid all to come and worship. Instead of inspiring awe and otherworldly recollections, modern art purposefully shocks and disturbs. It has only continued to do so into the twenty first century.

In Scruton's *Beauty*, he describes a 2004 production of the opera, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. The original was written by Mozart, with the themes of chastity and faithful love evident everywhere in the music. The 2004 adaptation, however, is horrific in its contrast.

Even during the most tender music, the stage was littered with couples copulating, and every excuse for violence, with or without a sexual climax, was taken. At one point a prostitute is gratuitously tortured, and her nipples bloodily and realistically severed before she is killed. The words and the music speak of love and compassion, but their message is drowned out by the loudly orchestrated scenes of murder and narcissistic sex that litters the stage.⁶⁶

Unlike Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, no one condemns this scene. There is only disgusting, gleeful perversion. It is desecration; it is sacrilege. For Scruton, modern culture is hell-bent on a flight from beauty, delighting in spoiling any semblance of the sacred.⁶⁷ In their bid to throw out religion, they have left a void that science cannot fill. But with the cultural tendency toward art as a metaphysical experience, postmoderns solve this for themselves by superimposing a religious order on their own creation.⁶⁸ Their desperate flight from religion has left them blind to the irony of their own actions. Set free from their supposed chains, postmoderns wave the banner of liberation, declaring their ability to define art as they see fit. Some, like Barnett Newman, are "completely denying that art has any concern with the problem of beauty and where to find it."⁶⁹ To liberate art from the need for beauty is to liberate from artistic traditions. Suddenly, the act of art was more important than the result. When the boundaries for what is called art are done away with, it opens the floodgates for anything to be considered art without exception.⁷⁰

66 Scruton, *Beauty*, 144.

67 *Ibid.*, 145.

68 It bears striking resemblance to Isaiah 44:9-20.

69 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 54.

70 *Ibid.*, 55.

What exactly is seen in modern art today hints at what Scruton describes here:

Imagine now a world in which people showed interest only in Brillo boxes, in signed urinals, in crucifixes pickled in urine, or in objects similarly lifted from the debris of ordinary life and put on display with some kind of satirical intention—in other words, the increasingly standard fare of official modern art shows in Europe and America. What would such a world have in common with that of Duccio, Giotto, Velazquez, or even Cezanne? ... it would be a degenerate world, a world in which human aspirations no longer find their artistic expression, in which we no longer make for ourselves images of the ideal and the transcendent, but in which we study human debris in place of the human soul. It would be a world in which one whole aspect of the human spirit—the aesthetic—would have become stunted and grotesque. For we aspire through art, and when aspiration ceases, so too does art.⁷¹

These people Scruton describes are systematically rebelling against the very tradition that allowed them to create their anti-art in the first place. Scruton calls this a repudiation.⁷² They ask neither for acceptance nor assimilation. Rather, they desire a complete surrender of one's self to the vision these so-called artists are proclaiming.⁷³ It is, admittedly, horrifying. A calculated "de-aestheticization," they purposefully avoid bringing any semblance of aesthetic satisfaction into their pieces.⁷⁴ Like *Die Entführung*, there contains within them a desire to spoil beauty.⁷⁵ Despite all this, it is remarkable that a philosopher like Herbert Marcuse, whose thoughts on aesthetics are dissected in much greater detail in *Art In Action*, should find such a salvific approach to art. Vehemently against religion, his own language in describing the arts is exactly that. Dedicated to art as a path to liberation, art represents to him a pure transcendence of the realities of man's social existence. His cries for liberation give us nothing less than a surrogate for the Christian gospel.⁷⁶ Art, for Marcuse, is the perfect transcendent thing that rises above man's

71 Scruton, "Art, Beauty, and Judgment," 2.

72 Scruton, *Beauty*, 141.

73 *Ibid.*, 142.

74 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 62.

75 Scruton, *Beauty*, 144.

76 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 154.

existence, but this message seems to strike him with a note of despair.⁷⁷ Art may promise redemption and the rise of human happiness, but art alone is incapable of redeeming that promise.⁷⁸ Art has no power beyond the intention of the artist. Scruton gently reminds that wherever beauty is to be had, there lies quietly a small voice behind the roar of desecration. “For beauty makes a claim on us: it is a call to renounce our narcissism and look with reverence on the world.”⁷⁹ There is a hope in this mindset that is relieving to the despair ridden soul. Marcuse’s despair in particular lies in the fact that he does not think the world was made for the sake of man. Art has limits, made only more painfully aware at how lacking a savior it is.⁸⁰ Scruton believes that beauty guides mankind along the path that tells him he is at home in this world, that the earth is already fit for the lives of human beings. Yet, man only becomes at home in this world by acknowledging his fallen state. This is why the experience of beauty is vital in pointing mankind beyond this world “to a kingdom of ends in which our immortal longings and our desire for perfection are finally answered.”⁸¹ In this way, Scruton relates the still small voice of beauty to the transcendental longing in man and the art he creates. Rather than following this to its metaphysical implications, Scruton stops short. In fact, he moves on to a character study of nature landscapes. It is left to Wolterstorff to follow Scruton’s implication to its natural conclusion.

At the end of the chapter, following the despairing words of Marcuse, Wolterstorff admits to the inability of art to provide the kind of comfort for which Marcuse is looking. Without lambasting religion, Wolterstorff affirms man’s home on earth, like Scruton, but confirms the frustration Marcuse is expressing. “It is the Christian tradition that the world and history are for mankind. For at the foundation of the world and history is God; and God is for man. In that lies our hope.”⁸² Perhaps unknowingly, Scruton reveals himself at this point. He admits the religious points to his argument and gives credence to Christian tradition, but at the end of the day Scruton’s hope for the recovery of beauty and thus the recovery of man lies in man.

77 Ibid., 155.

78 Ibid., 155.

79 Scruton, *Beauty*, 145.

80 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 155.

81 Scruton, *Beauty*, 145.

82 Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 155.

Without the confessional requirement of fallen man and almighty God, Scruton is doomed to find his answers in his fellow man, or at least in a resigned hopeful attitude toward his fellow man. Wolterstorff is honest in his Christian understanding of the world, yet seems to suffer from a faulty understanding of a reformed view of man. Convinced of the fallen nature of mankind, and man's dependence upon God to ever hope to be good, he proceeds to approach art as a field open to reformation. In moving forward, the arts progress. "[The] City of God, full of song and image, remains to be built."⁸³ This views the modern art movement as simply another step in the steady upward climb of society. Reform the community, and one helps contribute to building the Kingdom of God on earth.

It is telling that Wolterstorff embraces a much more fluid understanding of art in his newest book, *Art Rethought*. While tradition places emphasis on the finer art genres of music, painting, prose, sculpture, poetry, and architecture, Wolterstorff goes beyond a mere inclusion of television or movies to completely redirect our attention from the fine arts altogether.⁸⁴ He proposes a new way of understanding art as through the lens of a social practice. By relativizing the methods in which those engaging with a work of art experience it, Wolterstorff opens the doors of what can be considered art by leaving the interpretation open to the audience, the artist, and the presenters. There is a reason a child's finger painting, though much loved, is not placed alongside the *Mona Lisa*.⁸⁵ When the limitations are broadened, the requirements boil down to the sheer ability of a medium to be engaged aesthetically, whether by the artist or the audience.⁸⁶ If one can think critically about a piece being art, it is art; no standards or level of excellence required. Doing so allows the artist to display anything he desires as long as anyone, even if it is just the artist, can engage it aesthetically. In the case of the presenter or art curator, the mere act of displaying a piece in an institutional setting of an art show or gallery justifies it as art and allows it to gain credibility among viewers. What proves the pieces deserving of such attention is simply the act of being

83 Ibid., 198.

84 Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Review of *Art Rethought*," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, May 7, 2016, 1, accessed November 14, 2016, <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/66812-art-rethought-the-social-practices-of-art/>.

85 Korsmeyer, "Review of *Art Rethought*."

86 Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 217.

displayed. Aesthetic quality, let alone beauty, is of no consideration.⁸⁷

Wolterstorff's main reason in writing *Art Rethought* is to toss out the old understanding of art through contemplation of a transcendental end, what he calls the "Grand Narrative", and no longer restrict the judgment of art to the aesthetic.⁸⁸ The arts are progressing, and as "the arts are coming into their own ... seldom do the practitioners appeal to beauty as a consideration."⁸⁹ In the twenty plus years between *Art in Action* and *Art Rethought*, Wolterstorff's once scathing view of Duchamp's *Fountain* is now described as an evocative intellectual experience.⁹⁰ What was once treated with disgust is now thought provoking. By relativizing the standards for art, Wolterstorff relativized the moral underpinnings of objective judgment and taste.

Wolterstorff opened the door to memorial art, work songs, and protest art, but as one review says, why stop there? Nothing is saying that pornography, propaganda, hate art, even video games cannot be considered art as well.⁹¹ Already there are art exhibits specializing in the public display of the explicit.⁹² This detail makes Scruton's rigid view of art more appealing: "The pornographic image is like a magic wand that turns subjects into objects, people into things—and thereby disenchanting them, destroying the source of their beauty... It is not a tribute to human beauty but a desecration of it."⁹³ Wolterstorff's new and improved "non-standards" open up a dangerous playing field, yet he is considered progressive and considerate of where art is going. Scruton might seem opinionated in his antiquated standards toward modern art, but he draws definitive moral lines that are sorely needed. Wolterstorff's new understanding of art may allow for the absence of beauty being considered, but Scruton makes it clear how necessary the role of beauty is in art, and especially life:

Art, nature, and the human form all invite us to place [beauty] in the centre of our lives. If we do so, then it offers a place of refreshment of which we will

87 *Ibid.*, 276-277.

88 *Ibid.*, 277.

89 *Ibid.*, 321.

90 *Ibid.*, 278.

91 Dominic McIver Lopes, "Review of *Art Rethought* by Nicholas Wolterstorff," *Philosophy In Review*, May 2016, 1, accessed November 12, 2016, <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/pir/article/view/16053/6900>.

92 New York's 'Museum of Sex.'

93 Scruton, *Beauty*, 136-138.

never tire. But to imagine that we can do this, and still be free to see beauty as nothing more than a subjective preference or a source of transient pleasure is to misunderstand the depth to which reason and value penetrate our lives. It is to fail to see that, for a free being, there is right feeling, right experience and right enjoyment just as much as right action. The judgment of beauty orders the emotions and desires of those who make it. It may express their pleasure and their taste: but it is pleasure in what they value and taste for their true ideals.⁹⁴

RESCUING BEAUTY

Scruton and Wolterstorff's philosophies of beauty find much to agree on in their writings. Yet it is in their respective differences that they are strongest. In Scruton's metaphysical treatment of beauty, he restores a sense of the sacred to the everyday and to art. His understanding of beauty and art restores inherent value in the world of things. He gives a rational and moral defense for the existence of beauty and art in the life of man. Through the lens of beauty, man is able to see glimpses of the ultimate reality that lies beyond. Art is one of the major windows to that world, but Scruton's treatment of beauty allows man to find beauty in art galleries, in office building, and quaint living rooms without sacrificing standards of judgment and taste. Perhaps one could say that beauty is not a set thing, but a window into a metaphysical world that moves and breathes alongside man's physical reality. There is potential for beauty in all things, and man bears the responsibility to see it actualized.

For the Christian, a narrow position needs to be understood. Scruton's understanding of potential beauty and proper conservatism should ring true for a people commanded to steward the world their Creator has given them. However, proper stewardship does not carry the assumption that the Kingdom of God is to be actualized by man on earth. This is where Wolterstorff's view of man in light of the historical progression of art is flawed. As a professed Christian, Wolterstorff should have an understanding that the Kingdom of God is not ushered in by man, but by God. Mankind has

94 Scruton, *Beauty*, 163-164.

the ability to create and foster virtue on this earth, but he is incapable of redeeming the whole of society through his own works. This is why his new theory of art as social practice could be seen as dangerous. Art as social practices strips art as being transcendental. It becomes grounded in reality and no longer meant as a relay sign between the physical and the metaphysical. Additionally, art as social practice allows art to be a social construct that varies from place to place. In relativizing itself, art loses any standard for judgment. As previously mentioned, this allows the doors to open for many other things to necessarily be considered art as well. By that definition, one loses any need to label things as art at all.

Another point of contention is the loss of craftsmanship this encourages. As pop art and abstract art rise in popularity, the commonality of prints and multiple copies skyrockets. Instead of well written songs that stay as classics through the decades, the modern age is filled with one-play-wonders that are easily forgettable. Yet this is the kind of art that sells, that makes records, that publicizes to the point of inanity, and that criminally drowns out the voice of many more talented and less funded artists. When standards are not highly maintained, the next level of importance is the ability to sell. Modern art has become a marketing issue, sponsoring or showcasing only what will draw the masses and crank in the dollar signs. If Wolterstorff sees this as a sign of artistic progression, then it is rather depressing for the unknown artist who has actually mastered his craft to levels of genius.

In such a world, rather than seeing the arts as an upward progression of man's ability, as in the case of Wolterstorff, the ornery stubbornness of Scruton's particular view of the arts could be seen by some as a breath of much needed fresh air. Art does not need to move forward into an utter breakdown of any level of excellence, but a restoration to the principles that determined art for the past century. Wolterstorff is quick to toss out beauty in relation to the arts as only a recent construct born out of the eighteenth century.⁹⁵ Scruton, on the other hand, lists a long line of philosophers throughout ancient and medieval history that contradict Wolterstorff's claim.⁹⁶ If Wolterstorff only wants to specify the arts as regarding those created for contemplation, Scruton makes mention of Chinese tapestry, Japanese woodcuts, and the

⁹⁵ Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 310-311.

⁹⁶ Scruton mentions Plato, Aristotle, Bharata, Confucius, Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas in *Beauty*, 54.

poems of Confucians and Basho as evidence that this method of viewing art is not relegated to the eighteenth century and beyond.⁹⁷ Scruton will admit to the use of the word aesthetic being a recent invention, but the human universal which it represents is not. His frustration with modern art brushing this off is telling:

If you want to dismiss the concept of aesthetic interest as a piece of bourgeois ideology, then the onus is on you to describe the non-bourgeois alternative, in which the aesthetic attitude would be somehow redundant, and in which people would no longer need to find solace in the contemplation of beauty. That onus has never been discharged. Nor could it be.⁹⁸

If one takes Scruton's view of beauty as a transcendental value, it is not surprising that he responds in such a way. Regardless of how modern art is labeled as the next stage in human creativity, it has not stopped the crowds from silently walking through the bewildering modern exhibits to stand and gaze in the galleries of Van Gogh, Botticelli, Vermeer, and Raphael. The works of Michelangelo are no less relevant simply because Damien Hirst sells millions. The lasting quality of the work of these classic artists relates to Scruton's view on architecture. "Beautiful buildings change their uses; merely functional buildings get torn down."⁹⁹ Modern buildings are not built to last through multiple re-uses. Yet classical architecture is in high demand by a generation that is thriving on renovation and restoration. Entire city squares are being restored to maintain their original charm and function anew as shops, cafes, and apartments. These buildings were built to last in a transcendent way. Traditional craftsmanship in the details and design continue to place value on a building despite its need for updates in regards to stability or utilities. When modern buildings prize the usage of steel and glass to make it timeless, they have rendered the aesthetic nature that makes it timeless down to physical stability.

One could view this as an issue of stewardship. Linked to Scruton's well-loved conservatism, stewardship is simply the careful and responsible

97 Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 310-311.

98 *Ibid.*, 310-311.

99 Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18.

managing of something within one's care.¹⁰⁰ When it comes to art, stewardship is the fostering of artists, the encouragement of skill growth, development in the quality and availability of materials, and the patronage of true talent. Patronage does not have to look like the sponsorship of old. Instead, the right use of public relations, encouragement, and possible monetary support goes a long way in an age where true talent is often overlooked in the desire for artists who already have a following. Putting money where real skill is will go a long way in the support and credibility of those who do deserve the recognition. The top tier of popular art has been monopolized for far too long.

In the same line, access to education and the ability to increase their skill set is vital for artists. Much like the guilds of years past, artists should be encouraged to develop their medium and talents in ways that are new and innovative and demonstrate their capability and mastery of the medium. An artist may be able to sing just fine, but the greater appreciation should go to the one who sings, plays their own instruments, and writes their own songs, all with excellence. The first may have a one-hit-wonder, but the second is the true artist and deserves the accolades and praise for the time and effort he has placed in his work. Perhaps music awards should judge their nominees more like applicants to Juilliard or City University of New York, and not by radio plays. As an observer, this means rewarding artists who do put the hard work into creating masterpieces and not fostering the sense of irreverence and sloppiness that dominates modern art installations today. Art should never be an afterthought. For the artist, stewardship means learning to foster their own talent, taking steps to grow in their skill set, and never settling for "just good enough." As the patron, stewardship means buying the tickets to the galleries, exhibits, operas, and concert halls of artists who understand the care and reverence that comes in following such a glorious tradition. It means buying the pieces, buying even prints, and raising children to understand and appreciate quality and skill in art, not just originality and innovation. It means being educated as an observer as well, seeking to grow in understanding and appreciation of art.

¹⁰⁰*Miriam Webster*, s.v. "Stewardship," accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stewardship>.

The Wolterstorff of twenty years ago would agree.¹⁰¹ As a Christian, his understanding of stewardship is tied to his faith, even in relation to art. Man's understanding of himself as artist lies in light of his understanding of God as artist. This is a common understanding of artists in the historical tradition, who saw art as a kind of communion with their Creator.¹⁰² But this response is not a free pass to create moralizing mid-level art, a result often found in the church today. Rather, if Christians are to abide by their own scriptures in response to stewardship, stewardship of this world includes stewardship of the arts. The faithful servant who stewarded what he was given was the one rewarded in the end.¹⁰³ If anything, Christians have a higher responsibility to see art stewarded well and to encourage the pursuit of excellence in art. Even as artists, Christians should be the foremost in seeking excellence at their craft; a beacon of mastery, not mediocrity.¹⁰⁴

While the goal of the Christian is not to bring the Kingdom of God down to earth by way of reformation—no matter how much one might want to reform modern art—the Christian can see art as Scruton does. Beautiful art brings consolation in sorrow, and affirmation in joy. It makes human life worthwhile.¹⁰⁵ When modern art becomes obsessed with the ugliness and alienation that surrounds them, that is just the time to make beautiful art that offers glimpses of the beauty that transcends. Plato said that beauty is the sign of another, higher order. For Scruton, and for many, “one way of glimpsing that heavenly sphere here below, is by experiencing beauty.”¹⁰⁶ Regardless of one's religious stance, beautiful works of art have the power to transport one beyond the chaos and pain that inhabits life. For the artists of old, beauty was their outlet, their way of escape. Beauty has been, and will continue to be the anchor in the present that sustains, and the call to beyond that gives us hope of a better way.

CONCLUSION

101 Perhaps the Wolterstorff of today would as well, but I cannot really know from the source with which I am working. While *Art In Action* is full of the relation of the Christian to art both as artist and observer, *Art Rethought* does not concentrate there and has not shed light on this matter.

102 Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, 51.

103 Matthew 25:14-30.

104 Colossians 3:23-24; 1 Corinthians 10:31.

105 “Why Beauty Matters” (video), 2009, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/128428182>.

106 “Why Beauty Matters,” 2009.

When so much of modern art is determined to showcase the same horrors and atrocities reported in the papers, beauty should be a reminder of the hope that lies beyond. This is why the methods of both Scruton and Wolt-erstorff are so important. If there is any hope of restoring beauty, excellence and mastery to art, it lies neither in man nor in the reformation of man, but in those brief glimpses of the higher realm. Beauty is what ties man to the transcendental, to the sacred. It reminds man that there is more than wars, more than bombs, more than riots in the streets. Beauty is in the starry night, the face of a child, the kiss of a lover. Beauty is in a field of irises, in water lilies, and sunflowers. Beauty is not only the execution, the skill, or the message. Beauty is in the hope that imbues each piece that this life is worth living, even though it is not the end. It is simply one more road to truth.

Pablo Picasso was capable of shocking feats of artistry, usually in reference to social injustice or war. Yet, he knew the power of the softer touch when it was required. His painting, *Olga* is simple and beautiful in its stillness. There is no hint of Picasso's later frantic and displaced nature, chaos and confusion. It simply sets aside as a calm breath in the middle of the anguished world he chose to portray. Picasso gives back the hope for humanity that he so often chose not to portray by simply painting his wife with reverence and love. It is beautiful.

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REDEFINING HUMANITY: EVALUATING THE METAPHYSICAL CONCERNS OF TRANSHUMANIST IDEALS

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Consider for a moment, as Plato once did, a man in a cave, chained to the dusty ground with nothing but the stone wall before him. The inside of the cave is dark, aside from the fire burning in the background with flames creating just enough light to make out the faces of four men chained on either side of him. They are his only company, apart from the ominous figures lurking by that burning fire. Eerie as those figures may seem, they provide his only insight into the outside world, casting shadows of various objects onto the wall before him. Yet, they never satiate his longings to *know*—to understand in tremendous depth the world around him and the purpose and meaning he holds in this life. He yearns to grasp the fullest potentiality of humanity and achieve it. With frustration, he begins to speak his concerns to those on either side of him.

Having listened intently to his apprehensions, the man closest to him, on his right, introduces himself as Thomas Aquinas. Holding tightly to the

traditional views of later medieval philosophy and Christianity, he reassures the man in his quest to understand being, humanity, and the world around him. However, Aquinas caveats his reassurance by explaining all that can be known is known through empirical observation, apart from reasoned scientific research and alchemy. Aquinas informs him that objects within one's realm of experience seem to, without exception, follow laws of nature, thus observation alone can reap great benefits. He also speaks in great detail of theology, seeking to convince him that such empirical discovery ought to be a preamble to faith, not merely a compend on philosophy. While the man is comforted in his validation of the longings overwhelming him, he still is not satisfied with Aquinas' approach.¹

The man on the other side of Aquinas, however, catches his attention during a break in the shadow-show happening on the wall in front of him. His name is Francis Bacon. With increased vigor, and just enough skepticism to make the man wary, Bacon assures him that the human being and the natural world are both legitimate objects, not just of observation, but of scientific methodology and study. He seeks to persuade the man of his concept of a well-rounded individual as highly developed spiritually, culturally, morally, and scientifically. The man nods in agreement, but as Bacon continues to theorize about such scientific research, the man sees the danger of allowing those theories to impart a level of control over nature to substantially improve the lives of all humanity within it.²

At that moment, the man on his left wakes from his dogmatic slumber, interjecting his ideals in both agreement and advancement of Bacon (knowing now that he is outnumbered in his opinions, Aquinas slumps down and falls silent). This new man takes no time to introduce himself, assuming the others are already aware of his successes, yet they later find that his name is Immanuel Kant. Not even pausing for breath, Kant is hasty to make his opinions of enlightenment known, stating that

Enlightenment is man's leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another.

1 Collin Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas, and Movements*, vol. 1, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 134-135.

2 Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (April 2005): 2, accessed September 18, 2016, <http://jetpress.org/volume14/freitas.html>.

Such immaturity is self-caused if its cause is not lack of intelligence, but by lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own intelligence!³

The man is enthralled, yet taken aback, by his zealous exclamation, and even though he finds himself wrestling with Kant's words, he is even more determined in his search for knowledge and understanding of human potential.

The man farthest from him, Charles Darwin, clears his throat as if to gain attention prior to making some grand announcement. As much as the man's chains allow, he turns and listens. Darwin explains his theory of humanity being comprised of matter similar to that which is in peripheral substances and obeys the same laws of nature and of physics. For him, this allows for the capacity to learn to manipulate human nature in many of the same ways that one can manipulate external objects. Darwin continues with his lengthy monologue, and as he does, the man finds himself drifting back into his own mind, caught in questions of whether or not humanity is the endpoint of evolution or only an early phase of it.

The conversation begins to die down, and still lost in his thoughts, the man stares aimlessly at the flickering shadows moving across the wall. Shouts begin to break through the silence, tenacious and unrelenting. The clamor seems to be coming from outside the cave, as if someone were standing at the entryway he was unable to see. In a frenzied hopefulness, the man fights to break his chains, eventually managing to scramble out of them, racing to find the location and source of all the commotion.

Escaping behind the fire, the brightness of the outdoors blinds the man and he quickly crashes into someone just outside the cave. His name is Nick Bostrom, a man, he quickly learns, of advanced education and incredible intellectual vigor. The man is mesmerized, not just at meeting someone such as Bostrom, but at the sheer beauty and expanse of the outdoors that he has been robbed of experiencing for so long. The step he took out of the cave is only the first of many, Bostrom explains to him, and he quickly comes to realize that the possibility of humanity as only one of the earliest stages

3 Immanuel Kant, *The German Library: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1986).

of evolution is perhaps not too far off. The man listens with eager ears to Bostrom's evolutionary ideas of transhumanist thought, so carefully built on the theories of those to whom he had previously spoken. He is intrigued, not only by such a novel concept, but by the possibility of the fullest degree of human potential actualized in this virtually limitless individual, the post-human. The man only needs a moment to see why Bostrom's ideals could so easily amass a substantial following.

Not only had the man traded filthy chains for soft grass and exchanged the fire and shadow-show for color and sunlight, but Bostrom offered him a response to all his longings that seemingly no intellectual would ever refuse. Nonetheless, the man's conscience plagued him as he took time to consider all he had been told. Thus, unrestrained acceptance was more difficult for the man than Bostrom anticipated.

WHAT IS TRANSHUMANISM?

Much of humanity has been trapped in this cave, while transhumanist values have developed behind the fire at a rapid rate. Some are still chained there. Those that are have yet to see that what began as the ideals of one Oxford professor has expanded to a movement with an substantial following. Rooted in centuries of secular thought, transhumanism directly uses medicine, robotics, and technology to surpass the biological limits mankind is forced to face.⁴ In its broadest claims, transhumanism purports to be an intentional process designed to eradicate disease, eliminate suffering, improve human intellectual and physical capacities, and expand one's health-span, allowing man, if he so desired, to achieve immortality.⁵ More importantly for transhumanists, these developments refine one's emotional experiences and give him an increased sense of well-being. Bostrom aims to achieve autonomous, undiluted happiness and unmatched self-control. "We are in the business of living, and the show must go on. Special moments are out-of-equilibrium experiences in

4 The scope of this paper has necessitated the oversimplification of the discussion of transhumanist ideals. For a more detailed explanation of these views, consider reading Nick Bostrom's *The Transhumanist FAQ: A General Introduction* version 2.1 published by the World Transhumanist Association.

5 Nick Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values," in *Ethical Issues for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Frederick Adams, (Philosophical Documentation Center Press, 2003), 2.

which our puddles are stirred up and splashed about; yet, when normalcy returns, we are usually relieved. We [as humans] are built for mundane functionality, not for lasting bliss.”⁶ His ideologies are an attempt at creating harmony from the chaos and ecstasy from the commonplace, yet they are inefficacious, because Bostrom’s longing lie outside a realistic scope of human finitude.

However, in order to fully comprehend transhumanist ideals and the effects of them, one must first understand the transhumanist community’s foundational view of humanity. The human race suffers from severe limitations. Transhumanists generally hold that such limits imposed by a human’s biological nature are no less than those imposed on an animal by its own. These include physical, emotional, and cognitive capacities, yielding the net result that one’s potential for character development is substantially restricted to the confines of a finite human life. Aging, and ultimately death, wreak havoc on such a pursuit. Bostrom urges one to consider the cultural greats—individuals such as composer Ludwig van Beethoven and writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Perhaps their character would not have changed despite the longevity of their lives. However, it is possible the addition of centuries would have encouraged their increased growth as both men and artists.⁷ According to Bostrom, such development assumes at least the possibility of goodness beyond the sphere of humanity, but in its finite state, mankind is robbed of that opportunity.

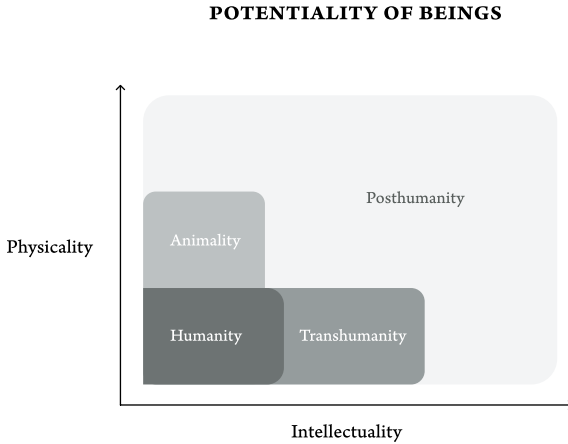
Humanity, in the eyes of the transhumanist is a stepping stone, “a work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways.”⁸ This fluid definition of humanity assumes, as did the man in the cave, that the current state of humanity is only one of the earliest phases of evolution. Transhumanism, then, stands as the next phase of the evolutionary process. Bostrom traces this line of evolution through the following diagram.⁹

6 Nick Bostrom, “Letter from Utopia,” *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 19, no. 1 (September 2008): 67-72, accessed September 18, 2016, <http://jetpress.org/v19/bostrom.htm>.

7 Bostrom, “Transhumanist Values,” 3.

8 *Ibid.*, 1.

9 *Ibid.*, 2.



Creatures once limited to their animality overcame some limitations as they progressed into the realm of humanity. Through science and technological advancements, one then evolves into a transhuman, an individual functioning in a transitionary phase between the life of a human and a posthuman. The posthuman possesses greater abilities than that of mere human beings, with consistent ability to overcome his biological limitations and maintain a certain level of autonomy. Bostrom illustrates this absence of dependency, observing that

It may then be possible to upload a human mind to a computer, by replicating *in silico* the detailed computational processes that would normally take place in a particular human brain. Being an upload would have many potential advantages, such as the ability to make back-up copies of oneself (favorably impacting on one's life expectancy) and the ability to transmit oneself as information at the speed of light.¹⁰

One transforms individually, but the impetus for the evolution of humanity as a whole expresses the need for such transformation.

¹⁰ Ibid., 4.

The thread of enhancement weaves through this entire transformational undertaking. A difficult-to-define term, it bears the general idea of increasing one's capacity through the improvement of performance, appearance, or other areas of capability whether biomedically, technologically, or otherwise. Currently, medications and surgical procedures limit technological enhancement. However, with the development of increasingly exotic technologies, the push for continued research proves ever more urgent. Fields such as nanotechnology, implantable technology, and cell regeneration are all being pioneered, any one or combination of which could lead to powerful degrees of human augmentation and expansion.¹¹ The sheer speed of these developments render Bostrom's ideas both problematic and alarmingly near on the horizon.

REDEFINING HUMANITY

Perhaps the greatest of the dangers woven into transhumanist values can be found in its fluid definition of humanity, as it allows for transhumanism simply to be the next step in evolution. Logically, such fluidity implies that humanity has evolved from animal to man through genetic development, and then, through technological enhancement, humanity evolves from man to machine. Humanity within these confines reduces to a mere compilation of easily-manipulated matter. The control of such augmentation lies with each individual which assumes an uncomfortable level of trust society must place on him to make thoughtful and prudent decisions; it assumes that individuals have the freedom to choose not only their outlook on life but also what enhancements are necessary to reach that end. This definition of humanity leaves one wondering how far an individual can be changed before becoming someone or something else—perhaps even a machine.¹²

Not only does this mutability deconstruct the definition of humanity, but it alters the vision of human flourishing as well. Properly understanding what is encompassed in one's humanity, from a largely evangelical perspective, requires acknowledging that mankind has been created in the

11 Ronald Cole-Turner, "Introduction: The Transhumanist Challenge," in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner, (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 1.

12 Cole-Turner, "Introduction: The Transhumanist Challenge," 1.

imago dei by a relational and triune godhead. God created humanity to live and function on this earth within a biological, non-mechanical body, as observed by scholar Celia Deane-Drummond:

Instead of an exclusive emphasis on the mental powers of willing, choosing, and understanding, human futures need to include more bodily metaphors of gestating, relating, and nurturing. Sexual difference is then included along with other differences, such as that between humanity and other animals, so that it is a difference in degree rather than an absolute one.¹³

Working toward becoming a posthuman, particularly in its most extreme form of uploads does not necessitate the development of some sort of superhuman; rather humanity becomes a collection of mechanical parts and binary code. In one fell swoop, transhumanists make a direct attempt at abandoning humanity, ignoring God's deliberate design, and thus forsaking the unique aspects and opportunities for it to flourish as it was originally intended.

In addition to the necessity of a biological, non-mechanical body, to be a human living on this earth requires the possession of a soul. Humanity has depth, an essence housed in such a possession. The soul is the cornerstone of personhood, the key to moving beyond only existing as a creature in the world. In a sense, Kant's theory of the transcendental apperception applies. One could not be considered a person apart from the presence of a soul, for he would be a simple collection of body parts; nor could one be considered a living human with only a soul not focused to the particular view point of embodiment.¹⁴

Due to the influence of dualist philosophers such as Plato and Descartes, the idea of the soul as synonymous to the mind has become commonplace. However, some philosophers like Aquinas fought against the assumed similarities to embrace the idea of the soul as a substantial form—that which informs the matter composing living beings. The soul endows a being with

13 Celia Deane-Drummond, "Taking Leave of the Animal? The Theological and Ethical Implications of Transhuman Projects," in *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner, (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 123.

14 Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Works of God*, vol. 2, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 97.

the capacities crucial to and consistent with its life and existence.¹⁵ However, intellectual and volitional capacities of the soul are not dependent on bodily organs. The brain is not the “seat of the soul,” for the soul cannot be reduced to neural activity. “While neural happenings occur simultaneously whenever one thinks or wills, the act of thinking or willing is not identical to such neural happenings, and the latter is ontologically dependent on the former.”¹⁶ Aquinas’ hylomorphic ideals reject both those of dualism and materialism by holding to the composite unity of the immaterial soul as it informs a material body. This soul-body relationship understands that an organized, living body can only exist insofar as the soul is informing it.¹⁷

Thus, the conclusion recognized mankind as embodied, ensouled, and relational. Deane-Drummond explains this relational identity of humanity well, stating that

An emphasis on treating all creatures as “Thou” instead of “It,” to use Martin Buber’s terminology, changes the ethos of human aspiration from one that is driven by technological achievement to one that is filtered through human goods, worked out in collaboration and in consultation with others. A shift toward relationship is a reminder that life that is received as a gift includes the giftedness of others in relation to human beings. Although not exclusively a Christian concept, the notion of gift and the welcome of the other *as other* counteracts the more huberistic tendency for control over uncertain features that is woven into transhumanism.¹⁸

Removing relational capacity distorts the image of the Trinity intrinsic to mankind. Individuals live to possess and experience that which has been set on their hearts. The relationship of the three persons of the Godhead values willing service, deeper friendship, appreciation, respect, and love.¹⁹ This model has been set on the hearts of humanity; this is the model mankind ought to imitate. Depriving people of relational capacity severely damages their capability

15 Jason T. Eberl, *The Routledge Guidebook to Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 87.

16 Eberl, *The Routledge Guidebook to Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae*, 87.

17 Ibid., 85-89.

18 Deane-Drummond, “Taking Leave of the Animal?” 123.

19 Paul David Tripp, “God’s Wisdom, Your Relationships,” *Desiring God*, June 1, 2011, accessed November 24, 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/gods-wisdom-your-relationships>.

to do so. A shared human condition produces solidarity. Yet, in a posthuman world of autonomy, humanity loses its communal roots of creaturely being.²⁰ To enhance man in the way transhumanists desire strips him of all three—non-mechanical body, soul, and relationship—fundamentally robbing him of a life that is fruitful and as it ought to be. Overall, this removal could be considered more of an intentional retrograde, seeking powerful and limitless beings that are controllable, rather than a true advancement of any kind.

METAPHYSICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF A TRANSHUMANIST DEFINITION OF HUMANITY

To function on a fundamentally transhumanist definition of humanity breeds significant danger and produces two substantial metaphysical concerns. The first is an issue of the essence and function of a person. Because the transhumanists' fluid definition allows for humanity to evolve from man to machine, the essence of an individual progressively diminishes. Through this transition from creature to material, man becomes entirely functional. The essence of an individual, housed in his possession of a soul, maintains his humanity, but loses substance in the transformation. Only functionality can be maintained virtually; the essence of mankind cannot.

Transhumanists have reached so far for the control of an individual and the future he aspires toward that they cease to believe in the possibility of humans as “complex creatures who resist reduction to functional mental units.”²¹ Many theologians appeal solely to mystery, and hesitate to discuss in specific detail the likeness of God and humanity, while transhumanists fly to the other extreme, removing any sense of mystery all together. The transhumanist community shows far less concern for knowing the future scenarios of humanity than for understanding future human projections as strictly wedded to technological invention and enhancement. Their attentions lie less with human flourishing than cyber-cultural values and perfectionist concerns.

Transhumanists have also placed the burden of decision on the individual who bears the responsibility of determining the makings of a good life. Aside

20 Deane-Drummond, “Taking Leave of the Animal?” 124.

21 *Ibid.*, 124.

from the endless debates about what characteristics philosophers deem necessary for a “life well lived,” the autonomous individual is their only option.²² Yet, the danger lies in its subjectivity. The lines become blurred between man as human and man as machine, and distinguishing between biological necessity and personal preference of enhancements becomes a near impossibility. Ethical guidelines cannot be effectively established within the scope of their research.²³ The transhumanists see enhancing one’s life as increasing the goodness within it, but if goodness ought not fall victim to a sliding scale with no standard, leaving those decisions to the conscience of the individual (even the enhanced individual) may be a greater risk than the transhumanist would care to admit.

TRANSHUMANISM AND THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Undoubtedly, aspects of the posthuman pursuit can be commended. Every individual searches for goodness and truth. Transhumanists, intellectual individuals who have bravely ventured into uncharted territory on this search, have wrapped their lives around the developing theories. They strive for good, but look in the wrong place, so they attempt to create that which they cannot find.

The Bible offers individuals the ultimate goal of transhumanism. Bostrom describes this aim well, writing that “Human life, at its best, is fantastic. I’m asking you to create something even greater. Life that is truly humane.”²⁴ Transhumanism can only offer a humane life by removing one’s humanity, while classical Christianity offers people humane life rooted deeply within their humanity and within Christ’s.²⁵ God the Father promises believers resurrected bodies upon Christ’s return, and not only does he faithfully fulfill those promises, but a fully restored life necessitates the resurrection of the individual. Christian philosophers and theologians do not dispute the idea of the resurrection of an identifiably human body.

22 Cole-Turner, “Introduction: The Transhumanist Challenge,” 2.

23 Certainly Christian theology and philosophy provide guidance for proper limits and it is necessary for those ethical guidelines need to be clearly spelled out. However, doing so reaches far outside the scope of this paper.

24 Bostrom, “Letter from Utopia.”

25 c.f. 2 Corinthians 4:14-16.

Thus the hope entertained by the church is not for the mitigation or evasion of death, but for its undoing. The church does not hope for the survival of some part of the human person, not even an “essential” or “central” part, or for a redefinition of death as liberation from the material world. When the Lord raises his people from the dead, he does not rescue them from a neutral if unfortunate circumstance or reach an adjustment with another power; he conquers an enemy.²⁶

The lives of the redeemed will be congruent with and moved by divine life, resurrected and of irreducible personal identity.²⁷

CONCLUSION

All of these thoughts and concerns filled his head as the man sat for hours outside the cave considering what he and Bostrom discussed. Physically, he had only taken a few short steps outside the cave, but mentally, he felt he traveled miles without respite. The intellectual journey he experienced satiated his longings to understand deeply for a moment, but he could not understand Bostrom’s enthusiasm for a movement that seemed to hold so little hope. The man stood and began to pace back and forth outside the entrance of the cave as he continued to contemplate everything he learned in past few hours.

After several passes, the man stopped suddenly at the mouth of the cave—something had changed. He still could not see the men to whom he had spoken that morning as they remained chained on the other side of the fire, but he was not concerned for long as the fire itself held his attention. It had transformed. No longer did the flames cast grave misrepresentations of life onto the cave walls. The fire was no longer a symbol of all he had been robbed of truly experiencing. He gazed intently at it, desiring to determine the differences in it. What he saw was different to be sure, and not unfavorably so, but still recognizably human in form and function as if it were truly a resurrected body. The sight was unlike anything he had ever seen and stirred his affections as nothing else ever had. He knew in that moment a far more satisfactory solution than transhumanism existed. A

²⁶ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 329.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 354.

smile spread broadly across his face as the man began to walk away from the cave, assured that in that moment, his longing to truly *know* had finally been satisfied.

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