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Review Essay

HUMAN SELF - TRANSCENDENCE: POSTHUMAN, POSTMODERN OR POSTSECULAR?

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Humanity's End: Why We Should Reject Radical Enhancement. By Nicholas Agar. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012. Cloth. 219 p. \$32.

Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy. By Christina M. Gschwandtner. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. Paper. 352 p. \$90.

God as Reason: Essays in Philosophical Theology. By Vittorio Hösle. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. Paper. 416 p. \$48.

PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN TRANSCENDENCE

Humankind is oriented to reach upward. It is human nature to stretch for the unattainable--paradoxically, even the impossible. Some locate the resources for this enterprise in God: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we are to judge angels?" (1 Cor 6:2a-3a). Some insist that humanity must secure the divine for itself. Alexander Pope waxes: "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan, The proper study of mankind is Man." Humans seek, not a world that transcends limits, but a self that transcends (or transcendentalizes) the world--sometimes that takes the form of embodying an absolute, absolutizing the body, and even the experience of grieving the death of absolutes in the face of death. And the answers and tools which technologists and philosophers conscript range from abstract to concrete, from universal to particular, from deity to diode, from finitude to "in-finiteness," from God to man. They seek to experience, and perhaps even attain, transcendence.

Three recent voices address the intersection of human nature and transcendence. In *God as Reason*, Vittorio Hösle argues for a radical (but arguably historical) equation of divinity and human rationality. Nicholas Agar's *Humanity's End* surveys multiple disciplinary proponents of radical human enhancement and cautions regarding such prospects. In *Postmodern Apologetics?* Christina Gschwandtner explores apologetical and religious themes in Martin Heidegger and his detractors in the lineage of Derridian deconstructionism. While seemingly diffuse, these three works uniquely each seek to answer the question from very different perspectives, "What does it mean for a finite human being to experience genuine transcendence?" This essay offers a brief overview of each book before identifying common themes that arise from each perspective as they seek to address the central question with the resources of their respective disciplines and areas of expertise.

POSTHUMANISM: TRANSCENDING BIOLOGICAL LIMITS

Nicholas Agar, professor of ethics, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, sketches a novel survey in *Humanity's End: Why We Should Reject Radical Enhancement* of how figureheads representing various disciplinary perspectives broach the topic of radical human enhancement. Radical enhancement is not human augmentation *per se*, which allows humans to function at their fullest, albeit nearly unimaginable, capacity, for instance, channeling 100 percent of their brain power. Rather, it is any form of enhancement that grants a human super-human capabilities, such that their very membership in the species class *Homo sapiens* is (perhaps rightfully) called into question, thus putting those who undergo such enhancement in the category "posthuman" (a term rejected by some proponents of radical enhancement). Agar's work is a criticism of radical enhancement, but nevertheless helpfully and succinctly presents voices from various disciplines in support of radical enhancement, and therefore functions well as a text to anchor curated insights from the conversation regarding posthumanism.

The book has nine chapters, containing an introduction to the concept of radical enhancement, the presentation of four thinkers, and Agar's intermixed responses to those thinkers. Chapter 1 asks the question, "What is radical enhancement?" (1). Agar's basic definition of radical enhancement is any procedure that "involves improving significant human attributes and abilities to levels that greatly exceed what is currently possible for human beings" (1). Agar outlines that: "This book's investigation of radical enhancement follows

the views of four of its leading advocates. They are Ray Kurzweil, whom I shall label 'the technologist,' Aubrey de Grey, 'the therapist,' Nick Bostrom, 'the philosopher,' and James Hughes 'the sociologist'" (5-6). Subsequently, Agar offers an introduction to the basic taxis of technologies that provide the possibility for radical enhancement, commonly abbreviated in the initials GNR by Kurzweil, a "pioneer in artificial intelligence," where "G" is for genetics. Indeed, "Geneticists have mapped the human genome and begun to connect strands of DNA with human characteristics 'N' is for nanotechnology, which involves the manipulation of matter at the atomic or molecular level 'R' is for robotics, the technology that will complete our escape from human biology" (6). While proponents of radical enhancement are excited at having a utopian future within their grasp, Agar insists that there are "possible futures that are somewhat darker than those favored by the advocates of radical enhancement" (11). Agar concludes his introductory chapter on a cautionary note: "I will argue that radical enhancement is indeed likely to take our humanity from us. The question we must then ask is what is lost along with our humanity" (15).

In Chapter 2, Agar introduces the concept of species to the conversation about posthumanism. Agar defines humans as "members of the biological species *Homo sapiens*" (19). If *Homo sapiens* are truly enhanced to such a degree that exceeds conceivable unenhanced human capacity, then reproductive isolation is likely to occur, equal to the isolation that would exist if Neanderthals walked among humans today. In Agar's view: "Reproductive isolation may not be a logically necessary consequence of radical enhancement But it is a likely one." "At the very least," Agar concludes, the radically enhanced will "have taken a significant step away from our species" (33).

Chapter 3 contains Agar's engagement with Kurzweil, who insists that there is a law of increasing rates of technological advancement which makes the birth of artificial intelligence (AI), not a mere possible future, but "an event in our future that is dragging us toward itself much as a black hole sucks in matter and energy" (35). Impressively, as Agar points out, Kurzweil is "no mere observer of AI. He's the inventor of machines that perform a variety of human thought processes, including understanding speech and reading written language" (36). Kurzweil theorizes that we will be able to have the human brain exhaustively mapped and replicated "in synthetic neural equivalents" by the year 2029 (40).

The cybernetic application of this technology to humans is, first of all, to replace human biological components with synthetic biotechnology, beginning with the brain, thus introducing "neuroprostheses," a technology that would enhance cognitive capacity to the point of reading encyclopedias and learning languages in a matter of seconds (41). Kurzweil introduces important terminology to the conversation to distinguish between biological humans who reject radical enhancement and those who accept it. He calls rejecters "mostly original substrate humans, or MOSHs. This mode of nomenclature would presumably make those of us who depend on biology to get all of our mental and physical activities done TOSHs, or totally original substrate humans. Kurzweil compares the MOSH or TOSH bias for biology with the nostalgia some express for vinyl records in the era of plentiful and cheap digital recordings" (41-42). Agar rejects, not the notion that the technology is possible, but that it is possible to attain the status of radically enhanced humans. As Agar comments: "Kurzweil should give up on the idea that the transformations he hopes for from the GNR technologies will preserve our humanity; this may not be such a big issue so long as they preserve us" (56).

In Chapter 4, Agar makes the distinction between weak AI, which is a computer that "may be able to simulate thought" that retains "an unbridgeable gap between the genuine thinking done by humans and the simulated thinking performed by computers," and strong AI, the view that it is possible to invent a computer one day "that is capable of genuine thought" (58). Agar insists that there may be more to our humanity than our ability to think. Thus, replacing our brains with biotechnological neuroprostheses "may not remove our capacity to protect, promote, and honor [our moral] commitments. But it may remove our desire to do so" (79). Thus, even if strong AI is not possible, and a strong enough version of weak AI is invented, a radically enhanced human with a mechanical brain, even if really "incapable of conscious thought," would "probably assert such a capacity" (77). Of course it would. It would be part of the programmed human simulation to do so, and there would ultimately be no way of verifying whether a radically enhanced human is doing anything much more human than a pocket watch--if a TOSH really made it around to the other side, or if they are merely a mechanically sustained corpse.

Agar engages Aubrey de Grey's strategies for engineering millennia-long life-spans in Chapters 5-6. De Grey is a noted proponent of "Strategies for

Engineered Negligible Senescence" (SENS), techniques and scientific advancements that would be necessary for attaining everlasting bodily life. Agar advances philosophical criticisms of de Grey's enterprise. First, that life would become unbearably boring far faster than one would anticipate, and would likely have a high suicide rate among the radically enhanced. Second, that to extend a human's life indefinitely carries the illusion of curing death, but ultimately only cures a small percentage of the causes of death--old age-related deaths. Even if de Grey's anti-aging therapies are 100 percent successful, participants' chances of death are still 100 percent. What hangs on accepting or denying de Grey's therapies, therefore, is not whether one encounters the death experience, but what happens in life between birth and death.

In Chapters 7-8, Agar presents and interacts with Nick Bostrom (a philosopher) and James Hughes (a sociologist), who issue an ethical proposal that radical human enhancement can result in programmable virtues, and that any foreseeable malicious enhanced consciousnesses would be tailored and policed by a superior and enhanced morality. The result of artificial intelligence would not be malice, but love. Bostrom therefore argues that radical enhancement does not run contrary to human nature, but is its natural fulfillment and end, both technologically and existentially. As Agar relates: "According to Bostrom, radical enhancement may be something that we all desire, without being aware that we do. It's something that is implied by our human values" (140). Hughes likewise insists that, if enhanced, "we might then all be able to consistently reason with the clarity of philosophers and the selfless compassion of Ghandi or Martin Luther King" (159).

Agar remains unconvinced. He imagines radically enhanced ethicists taking different ethical approaches, including consequentialism and a form of utilitarianism. No matter what the case, humans will be at the mercy of whatever moral system posthuman ethicists propose, since: "We will have no power to make moral demands of posthumans and posthuman social contract theorists may conclude, correctly, that humans have no moral value at all" (162). We have never had an equal trans-species ethic, and to sustain one between humans and posthumans, while theoretically imaginable, may be decided to be unnecessary and therefore human moral value would be logically dispensable by a more powerful species. Introducing a posthuman species to our human society is a dangerous leap of faith, with possible genocidal outcomes.

In Chapter 9, Agar concludes that: "Humanity isn't just what we get left with once we've said no to Kurzweil, de Grey, Bostrom, and Hughes. It's something worth celebrating" (179). Ultimately, the problem with radical enhancement, and what makes it different from the traditional species-to-species transition within evolutionary history, is the crass overlap of two radically diverging populations, each with radically antithetical and antipathetic sub-populations, and an enormous power differential between human and posthuman populations. The ethical circumstances that the possibility of radical enhancement and the existence of a posthuman population put us in are, Agar argues, unable to be ethically navigated. It is an ethically impossible situation for humans to expand their ethic across species. In theory, it is possible to sustain peace and ethical goodness in a trans-species society. But the practical realities of such possibilities carry too much threat to be justifiable, in Agar's estimation.

Agar's book is a valuable survey of the most important interlocutors in the conversation about posthumanism. From a bioethicist's perspective, Agar seems to hold his own against the best of Bostrom and Hughes. While the technologies seem advanced beyond the competencies of many scientists and philosophers, at the forefront of the debate is the variable of human dignity. Is human dignity best honored by retaining its present form, or by altering and advancing it as soon as the technology to accomplish such alterations and advancements is available to us? How do our answers to those questions change if Kurzweil is correct, and AI is an inevitability? The way forward may involve several steps. For those who agree with Kurzweil's predictions, ethicists might begin writing trans-species ethics books. Although, Agar would surely respond that a posthuman would value these human texts as much as a toddler's attempt to replicate a Monet. Whatever the case, the conversation should continue in order to come to grips with the ethical question. As soon as moral absolutes begin to be blurred, we infringe upon the freedoms of others in ways that potentially threaten basic human liberties. Agar's book, then, should be taken seriously as a text that holds in tension the undeniable fact that radical enhancement is not merely science fiction. Rather, it is a scientific possibility that faces us in our present day--and nevertheless continues to argue from the basic presupposition that humanity as we have it at present retains unique and unrepeatably significant that is not worth trading for a quantitatively enhanced but existentially diminished dark world. If it is possible to make such an estimation, then one may well be persuaded by Agar's arguments.

POSTMODERNISM: TRANSCENDING CULTURAL LIMITS

In *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy*, Christina M. Gschwandtner, recently installed associate professor of philosophy at Fordham University, and a published Jean-Luc Marion scholar, offers a masterful survey of religious themes in contemporary phenomenology, beginning with Heidegger, and ending with contemporary expositors and appropriators of a Derridian detraction. The book is divided into three Parts--I: Preparations (chs. 1-3), which summarizes the writings and thought-relationships between thinkers that are ultimately elemental for contemporary phenomenology, without whom "none of the contemporary 'religious' phenomenologies would be possible or coherent" (xix); II: Expositions (chs. 4-10), that engages the more explicitly "apologetic thinkers"--readers and thinkers devoted to thinking in terms set forth by earlier phenomenologists; and III: Appropriations (chs. 11-13), that considers "the reception of these thinkers more specifically in the North American context," surveying the religious phenomenologies of such self-confessing Christian Derridians as Merold Westphal, John Caputo, and Richard Kearney (xxi).

The book begins with an introduction to the epic philosophical history that carried theological predication from pre-modern "Perfect Being" theology, largely swallowed whole by historic Christian theology, to the twentieth-century "Death of God" scene, all hinging on a regal Thomistic concept once called "Natural Theology," now casually clumped together as "religious phenomena." According to French phenomenologists, the poison that took almost all of human history to eradicate from philosophy's lifeblood is the misconception that human reason "was basically on a par with God and could discover most things about the divine and the universe it had fashioned" (7). Gschwandtner invites John Caputo's farewell to such naiveté: "Good riddance" (*Philosophy and Theology* 2006: 48-49). She thus sets up the entire book in terms of a postmodern rejection of the modernist and medieval enterprise of accessing the transcendent with reason, with the resulting question: "What does it mean to have an experience of the divine?" (16).

Chapter 1 addresses Heidegger's "contention that theology is an 'ontic' science," as well as "his claim that the term [being] has no place in a 'theology'" (xix). Gschwandtner examines Heidegger's 1927 essay, "Phenomenology and Theology," his early lectures on the *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (1920-21), and his famous lecture on "The Onto-theo-logical

Constitution of Metaphysics," later published as *Identity and Difference* (1957). In examining Heidegger's notion of "onto-theo-logy," Gschwandtner ultimately defines the term as the principle that "the various modes of being that metaphysics acknowledges are generally grounded in a 'highest being' or a divine being" (20). Yet the relationship between human existence (*Dasein*) and "the 'All-Highest' One" must be strictly separated (29), and Gschwandtner avers that Heidegger "certainly is not involved in any sort of defense of Christian faith" (38). And yet, the most relevant metaphysical concept for later religious and apologetic phenomenologists dealt with in Parts II-III does not really appear to be onto-theo-logic, but *Dasein* and its resulting emphasis on metaphysics as a mode of authenticity and phenomenological discovery.

In Chapter 2, Gschwandtner examines "in what sense (if any) Lévinas speaks about God or guides us toward (religious) transcendence" (40). Emmanuel Lévinas issues the critique that while Heidegger is correct in seeking authenticity as a mode of metaphysics, this still mistakenly presupposes an inordinate level of objectivity, and insists on a more "face-to-face" and therefore quite distinctly "other" (42). Thus, if God is to be truly "other" for Lévinas, He must be much more "other" than Being that Heidegger insists--to be infinite, God must be "something or someone entirely without relation to Being or manifestation" (57). Only then can man encounter God as an authentic subject, and therefore to be possible "for this less autonomous and powerful self to become vulnerable and receptive in the face of something or someone divine" (58).

Chapter 3 contains Gschwandtner's examination of religious themes in Jacques Derrida, who is "certainly more critical of religion than apologetic on its behalf" (80). And "while Derrida himself can be considered a 'religious' thinker only in a highly ambivalent fashion" (82), Derrida's work is "imbued with a quasi-religious desire for the 'to come,' with a quasi-Messianic dimension, which calls for justice, and a quasi-eschatological affirmation and hope" (68). Derrida both affirms and denies the value of religion. On the one hand, "God is made manifest through the desire for the secret" (73). And yet, engaging the apophatic foundations of classical, inherited Christian theism, "Derrida also argues that negative theology is not finally able to defer infinitely, that even its language of praise, which seeks to escape description of the divine, does still make decisions: for God rather than the demonic, for the good rather than for evil or emptiness" (63).

Part II includes a chapter on French phenomenologists who articulate a philosophy of religious experience: Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, Jean-Louis Chrétin, Jean-Yves Lacoste, and Emmanuel Falque. As the book's back cover announces: In Part II, "the author argues that their respective philosophies can be read as an apologetics of sorts--namely, as arguments for the coherence of thought about God and the viability of religious experience." Most notable in Part II, and most relevant for the figures dealt with in Part III, are Ricoeur and Marion. Ricoeur's primary contribution to the conversation is his three-fold taxonomy of religious discourse: "The discourse of faith (especially the one found in the Bible as the original expression of various Jewish and Christian communities) is the most immediate and the closest to the primary expressions of living faith. Dogma and creeds, as a second level of discourse, are built on this primary level. Theological doctrine, finally, is a third-level discourse and is most removed from the life of faith. As in his more general philosophical work, Ricoeur is then most interested in the texts that are closest to life, in this case the biblical texts" (88). In terms of the book's argument, Gschwandtner hence "suggests that even the more heavily phenomenological thinkers remain indebted to Ricoeur's religious hermeneutics, especially in the way in which he defines the 'truth' of religious experience" (xx).

Jean-Luc Marion makes a very different contribution. Marion is "most well-known for his argument (in *God Without Being*) that God is not subject to 'being' and that the traditional ontological language is inadequate for God (does not 'attain' to God)" (109). Appropriating Derrida against Heidegger's more ontic ruminations, Marion suggests that "God must be thought 'beyond being' and beyond ontological difference. God is not merely a being among others, not even the highest or most supreme being. Being is an idol for God, an attempt to define God, but one that ultimately proves limiting, idolatrous, and blasphemous" (111). In seeking to revere a just God over the violence of Greek metaphysics, Marion advocates a God who is "maybe paradoxical but not simply irrational" (123).

Part III features contemporary appropriators of Derrida, Marion, and, to a lesser degree, other figures dealt with in the book. Chapter 11 deals with Merold Westphal, the first appropriator, best understood as giving us "a postmodern version of faith" (xxii), which he seeks to accomplish by demonstrating "the possibility of depicting God or a notion of transcendence that would not succumb to onto-theology" (224). Westphal's theological

rationale for this move is that union with God is “always on God’s terms, not on ours” (237; *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence* 2004: 178).

Chapter 12 presents John Caputo, who grounds a phenomenology of religious experience in Derrida’s commitment to “concrete questions of justice” (247). Gschwandtner insists that: “Religion is hope and desire for the impossible. God is the ‘name’ of the impossible even that drives me to the doing of justice” (258). As Gschwandtner explains: “This is not a faith in any particular God, but it is the name of God, a very important distinction for Caputo . . . It is the name of a promise, the structure of an incoming event for which we hope but which we cannot control and which has no determinative content” (264).

Finally, Chapter 13 introduces Richard Kearney, whose thought is “best understood as a kind of postmodern charity” (xxii). Kearney proposes a version of theism called “anatheism,” which is “an invitation to revisit what might be termed a primary scene of religion: the encounter with a radical Stranger who we choose, or don’t choose, to call God” (281; *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* 2009: 7). Kearney’s anatheism, therefore, carries more discernible content than Westphal’s or Caputo’s systems, but remains equally committed to grounding any concept of theological metaphysics in an ethic with demanding concern for the *other* (clearly rooted in Lévinas). Kearney evinces this clearly, when he makes the onto-theological claim: “This is not an omnipotent God. We can no longer believe in such a God after all the atrocities of the past century” (286). Classical theists may wail in disgust, while phenomenologists drown out the wail in celebratory praise of Kearney’s proposal. In the contemporary discussion, with Heidegger and his critics at the table, Gschwandtner rightly includes Kearney as her final chapter—he may be the most balanced synthesis of the voices in the conversation thus far.

Gschwandtner concludes that: “Postmodern apologetics, if there is such a thing (*s’il y en a*, as Derrida would say), is a defense of experiences of radical excess as originating in some fashion in or at least as closely associated with the divine, a defense of passion at the very limit of human experience as a religious phenomenon” (293). The book is a *tour de force* in twentieth and twenty-first century French phenomenology. The only critique one might entertain, however, is that the “apologetics” theme may not best account for the literature surveyed in the book. Indeed, at times, it seems that Gschwandtner is reading against the grain of the texts, and even admits as

much in certain places. Perhaps what we see, for example, in Heidegger's thought, is an imperfectly consistent philosophical theology, or even a theory of religious experience that self-consciously places theology and philosophy in tension. But what we do not seem to have is a clear "apologetic" theme in the works of all these authors, even merely in Parts II-III. A more appropriate title for the book might be "Religious Themes in French Phenomenology."

Nonetheless, Gschwandtner should be commended for tracing and organizing the religious discourse that takes place among often indiscernible authors, and doing so with a balance of nuance and clarity that makes difficult authors easy to read. The study would not be a fitting primary text for a class in apologetics, while it could serve as an invaluable resource in research. It may, however, be best utilized as a guided handbook on religious themes in modern French phenomenology, or perhaps as a text for a graduate course in philosophy or modern theology.

POSTSECTULARISM: TRANSCENDING EXISTENTIAL LIMITS

In *God as Reason*, Vittorio Hösle, Paul G. Kimball Professor of Arts and Letters, University of Notre Dame, offers the academy a *tour de force* of philosophical theology in the form of heuristic essays, published between 1990 and 2011. With an inductive style, Hösle seeks to demonstrate his thesis that "modernity is Christianity's legitimate child" (xi). And while this may be Hösle's guiding thesis, his primary task in each chapter is to "find an interpretation of Christianity that is compatible with [a] commitment to reason," since reason is "the uncircumventable horizon within which alone any theory, and thus also any theory about God, can claim validity" (vii-viii). As becomes clear throughout the book (especially Chapters 3, 8, and 12), that rationality is defined according to the modernist thinker *par excellence*: the rationalist system of G. W. F. Hegel.

Hösle's essays are collected into two sections: Part I: "Philosophical Theology," a topical exploration of major themes at the intersection of religion, philosophy, and theology; Part II: "A Rationalist's Tradition: Interpretations of Classical Texts," where Hösle interacts with texts which best serve his agenda of demonstrating a genetic relationship between Christianity and modernity (not necessarily the most historically significant or well-known texts, which is a refreshing change of pace for this genre). As an introduction to Part I, Hösle spends much of Chapter 1 detailing the

challenges to his rationalistic approach to Christianity, essentially arguing that Hegelian philosophy, while not identical with Christianity's "true set of basic categories," nevertheless "would be the core of any rational concept of God" (10). He thus introduces the Christian doctrines of the Trinity, the Bible, and even Christology, to the principles of reason and morality, conceived as universals. In Chapters 2-3, Höslle continues a topical demonstration of his rationalist thesis with the themes of teleology and theodicy, respectively. Thus, in Chapter 2, he argues that an evolutionary teleology "increases our faith in the intelligibility . . . of nature," since teleology undergirds the rational principles of the world (49). In Chapter 3, Höslle juxtaposes the technologies which Gottfried Leibniz, Hegel, and Hans Jonas use to solve the problem of evil, ultimately concluding that "if one has to choose between omnipotence and perfect goodness, then the second attribute is preferable. If one wants to find the way back to God after Auschwitz, then this has to be a God who does not desire these crimes" (73-74).

The mind-body problem takes up Chapters 4-5. In Chapter 4, Höslle deals with the problems facing determinism, and concludes that "a determinism of the Leibnizian type copes remarkably well with some of the questions other determinisms are unable to answer" (100). Chapter 5 is a dialogical exploration of the relationship between mind and body, in which Höslle explores in the form of a conversation whether such a thing as a psychophysical law could exist, or whether it is rational to speak of such a law as real. Concluding Part I, Chapter 6 sets up a taxonomy for distinguishing and relating the disciplines of religion, theology, and philosophy. Höslle defines religion as the "sense of commitment to a power that is recognized as the criterion of the conduct of one's own life," theology as "every discussion about the subject of religion, that is, about God and the gods," and philosophy as "the science of the principles of being and knowing that is entirely based on reason" (138-44).

Part II takes a historical approach to relating major relevant philosophical issues that stand at the fault line of Christianity's legitimacy. In Chapter 7, Höslle maintains that: "Only a philosophically enlightened exegesis can avoid the Scylla of fundamentalism and the Charybdis of historic relativism" (185). In Chapter 8, he attempts to practice this philosophically enlightened exegesis by exploring "to what extent the Hegelian philosophy of spirit" is "a legitimate heir of the New Testament concept of *pneuma*" (200-1). In Chapters 9-11, Höslle examines the relationship between philosophy and

theology in selected medieval authors like Anselm (*Cur Deus homo*), Peter Abelard, and especially Nicholas of Cusa, whom Höhle believes to be “the most brilliant exemplification of my thesis that modernity is Christianity’s legitimate child” (xi).

Höhle then takes Søren Kierkegaard to task, asking if Kierkegaard’s philosophy is “problematic” in terms of Höhle’s own Hegelian-Christian agenda in the book (272). He ultimately concludes that “one still finds a unity in that which for Hegel and Kierkegaard is distinct: Hegel represents objectivity, Kierkegaard subjectivity” (299). The book concludes with Chapter 13, a review of Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (2007). In this final chapter, Höhle insists that “every account of the secularization process presupposes certain views within the philosophy of religion that do not disappear simply by leaving them out of the discussion” (309).

God as Reason is an elegant demonstration of Höhle’s masterful grasp of historical philosophy and theology. In terms of format, it would be helpful for the essay sections to have content-explicit headings in order to help the reader understand the flow of the chapter’s argument (instead of merely iterated by roman numerals), as well as concluding summary paragraphs for each chapter (of which there were none, with the possible exception of Chapter 13). The book would serve very well as a text for an advanced doctoral seminar, since it both presupposes sophisticated philosophical knowledge, and provides essays which function as discussable interdisciplinary perspectives on major issues and texts in the history of secular and Christian thought. The question a reader might walk away with, however, remains: “In what sense is Höhle’s work historically Christian?” Höhle would likely answer that his study represents a Christian integrative approach to the degree that it is a rational integration, because “the core of God is Reason” (10). Paradoxically, to integrate reason and God by submitting God to reason is to propose a model of God that does not merely map new coordinates for different theological and philosophical traditions, but constructs a model that is structurally incompatible with the most basic claims of certain historic strands of Christianity--both in its Catholic (Thomistic) and Protestant (Lutheran or Calvinist) forms.

And yet, to borrow the Anglican penchant for valuing a *via media*, it would be fair to say that Höhle’s proposal should be understood “not as a compromise for the sake of peace, but as a comprehension for the sake of

truth." Hösle's project can serve as a novel thesis for piecing together the warring thought traditions of Christianity and modernism, but it should be recognized as a distinctively secular project, religious though its contents are. Fitting to the book's unique thesis about the relationship between the religious and the secular, it is appropriate that it ends with an analysis of Charles Taylor, in which Hösle insists in a characteristically Christian way that: "To God belongs modern secularism as well" (312).

TRANSCENDING THE SELF

All three books open a window into each one's perceived intersection of humanity and transcendence. For the posthumanists whom Agar engages, one achieves transcendence to the degree that one transcends their natural limits. In terms of Gschwandtner's postmodern figures, on the Heideggerian side of the spectrum, one experiences the truest form of transcendence to the degree that one is authentic, thus coming to clearest terms with *Dasein*; on the Derridian side of the spectrum, one experiences the transcendent to the degree that one gives his or her self over to the contentless, the mysterious, and the impossible. From Hösle's postsecular perspective, one may access transcendence to the degree that one is rational, which is simultaneously the degree to which one experiences the divine.

In brief, posthumanism seeks to transcend the given biological self through the robotic self; while postmodernism seeks to transcend the myth of transcendence through giving one's finite self over to one's own limits in spite of culturally conditioned and violent appeals to the divine. Postsecularism seeks to transcend the ignorant self through the mental self's access to the divine. Each reaches past what is given to what is created. Thus, for all, imagination is the intersection of humanity and transcendence—whether a technological, phenomenological, or logical imagination.

The common underlying theme between posthumanism and postmodernism is that genuine human transcendence is accessed and conceived from a bottom-up perspective—it is rendered in terms of subjective human experience. Both *Dasein* and *différance* are formally and structurally parallel to GNR. Each of these enterprises indexes all ontic realities, claims, experiences, and texts according to the subjective taxis of individually perceived phenomena. The difference is in which direction each enterprise faces in order to access transcendence.

While both are subjective, posthumanism seeks an outward-oriented subjective transcendence (to escape the primordial), and postmodernism seeks an inward-oriented subjective transcendence (to become attuned to the primordial, even in Lévinas's insistence on an ethic of the "other"). Gschwandtner comments that: "The human way of being in the world, which consists of an 'attunement' to and openness to the world, shows that this meaning of truth is primordial" (31). Agar himself admits a common theme between religious traditions and the posthuman enterprise, in that: "Radical enhancement is not a new idea. Religion and myth are rich in accounts of humans seeking and undergoing radical enhancement" (2). The difference is merely where one locates the resources for transcendence. For Agar, then: "The idea that humans could be radically enhanced is not new; but the notion that it's something that we could arrange ourselves certainly is" (3). Gschwandtner's figures would shake their heads in disapproval, not from Agar's ethical perspective, but out of an incredulity toward the metaphysical presuppositions of such aspirations, which denote "the modern attempt at erasure of human finitude and the enclosure of the divine into the human system of knowledge" (225).

The common theme between postmodernism and post-secularism is a concern, or at least a respect, for the religious. What is different is that postmodernism has a disdain for the rational, while postsecularism (or at least Hösle's version) worships it (literally). Gschwandtner summarizes the postmodern approach to transcendence, commenting that, for Ricoeur: "Christianity provides a particularly challenging and insightful account of the self and in the limit-experiences of death and mourning can even point to something essential to human existence. Through the tension of its polyphonic discourse, it points to the divine and provides access to a meaningful (albeit not ultimately 'rational' or fully coherent) reality" (104). There is a clear tension here with Hösle's insistence that "freedom is a property of the human mind" (ix).

There is, as well, another difference in location. While commonly distinct from Agar in that both Gschwandtner and Hösle's approaches are explicitly religious, Gschwandtner and Hösle differ in that the postmodern finds true religion in subjectivity (either as coming to terms with authenticity or impossibility), while Hösle does so in terms of objective rationality. The approaches are antithetical in the sense that Hösle seeks transcendence in escaping subjectivity through objectivity with the mind, while Gschwandtner's

figures seek transcendence by attempting to demythologize objectivity through subjectivity with the pre-rational, and sometimes primordial, will. This is exemplified in Marion's philosophy, which provides "an alternative rationality that gives coherence to the phenomena of Christian faith, especially the experience of self-sacrificing love" (123). Admittedly, Höhle does not disdain the subjective. But he prioritizes the objective--the universal--to explain the subjective--the particular. Commenting on Kierkegaard, Höhle intimates that "it is the universal itself that recognizes that truth must be reconciled with subjectivity" (300).

The perplexing common theme between posthumanism and post-secularism is the outward-orientation of transcendence. Radical human enhancement may be understood as the technological version of natural theology--an attempt to experience the infinite and transcendent, conceived merely as a correlative of our own phenomenology. Both take a deep interest in the question of human suffering, and in a sense seek to solve it with the various technologies available to them--technology and earthly modification for Agar's opponents, and philosophical deduction for Höhle.

CONCLUSION

The attainment of genuine human transcendence is one that every human faces, at birth and at death. The central question that Agar, Gschwandtner, and Höhle wrestle with is one that humans will attempt to provide answers to for the foreseeable future, just as the most ancient human enhancements, Scriptures, and philosophical texts have attempted to do for as far back as one may envision. An ancient (but nevertheless relatively recent) text is 1 Corinthians 15: 42-56, which, in a sense, represents and combines the concerns of all three authors. From the Apostle Paul's perspective, the bodily, the subjective, and the existential all experience transcendence through union with the Life-Giving Spirit (*pneuma zoopoion*), Who is a functional unity of the ascended person of Jesus Christ and the Spirit (Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 3:6; Rom 8:10-11). Although such language sounds mystical, and perhaps in need of demythologization, for Paul, the spiritual transformation of the person is anything but mystical--it is concrete, and embodied. Spirituality, for Paul, is the "technology" which transforms the "perishable" into the "imperishable" (1 Cor 15:42). Spirituality is not a "part" of a human being--instead, it is the aspect of the Christian that has been definitively raised with Christ. Paul sometimes refers to this aspectual sphere of human personhood as "our inner

self," which is "being renewed day by day," as opposed to "our outer self," which is "wasting away" (2 Cor 4:16), and with which Agar, Gschwandtner, and Höfle wrestle.

The central transcendental experience for Paul, therefore, is the human bodily transition from a natural body (*soma psuchikon*) to a spiritual body (*soma pneumatikon*). Paul affirms that: "What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor 4:2b-4a). Paul thus clearly locates the source of human transcendental experience in the eschatological activity of the God of Judaism, revealed in Christ and effected in the work of the Spirit. The concerns of Agar's opponents, Gschwandtner's figures, and Höfle's ruminations are all represented here in Paul's concern. The Spirit of Christ provides a transformative bridge from humanity to transcendence that human natural capacity cannot attain on its own. A central element of Pauline theology that accounts for the human encounter with the divine is grace, and hence sin. Man's finitude is not his only barrier to transcendence--it is the corruptive and forensic consequences of sin that prevent a genuinely positive encounter with the divine that results in a transition from "perishable" to "imperishable," from "weakness" to "strength." In contrast to Aquinas, the *sensus divinitatis* is not a capacity, but a relational knowledge of the divine (Rom 1:18-20).

Each of these engaging texts--Agar, Gschwandtner, and Höfle, seeking insights via posthuman, postmodern, and postsecular perspectives--makes a valuable contribution to the human quest for transcendence. Pulling these rather disciplinarily disparate texts together, one may cast a net wide and far in search for something permanent and beyond a single discipline. For what reason and to what end the enterprise is conducted is left to each technologist, theologian, and philosopher, that each human is to the degree that one seeks to transcend the self. All three texts encourage and even celebrate the human aspiration upward, inward, toward the divine--toward genuine human transcendence--with an eye toward the ancient, presupposed cord that ties the human quest for transcendence together: the Life-Giving Spirit (1 Cor 15:45).

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