

6. HUMAN BEING

WHERE WE ARE

As a distinct topic, "theological anthropology" is relatively new to the theologian's agenda. It is doctrine about "human nature" or what it is to be "person." Christian thinkers have always had things to say on that topic, of course, but for most of the history of Christian thought, they have said it in and with discussion of other topics. Thus they have always made claims about human beings as part of creation, about human beings' ability to know God, about the "fallenness" and "sin" of human beings, about the dynamics by which people are "redeemed" from that sin and made new beings, and about the ultimate destiny to which they are called. Each of these was a theological topic in itself. In the process of discussing these matters, theologians traded on conceptual schemes designed to describe what it is to be a human being, what it is to be the sort of being of whom all those things concerning creation, revelation, sin, and so on, were claimed.

Theological anthropology in the narrow or strict sense has tended to focus on either or both of two major guiding questions: (1) What is it about human beings that makes it possible for them in their finitude to know the infinite God? (2) What is it about human beings that makes fallenness possible in such a radical way as to require the kind of redemption to which Christianity witnesses? In the classic theological tradition these questions were addressed not directly in and of themselves but in the process of discussing other topics. Theological anthropology became a topic in its own right only in the modern period. And perhaps not by accident the basic conceptual scheme used to analyze humankind changed radically. As we shall see, what had been in the classic tradition an often implicit discussion of "human nature" became in the modern period an explicit discussion of "subjectivity." Our principal task in this chapter is to explore the significance of this shift.

THE DOCTRINE IN ITS CLASSIC FORMULATION

The classic formulation of theological anthropology was largely based on the story of the creation and fall of Adam in Genesis 1–3, interpreted through conceptual schemes borrowed from Greek philosophical traditions. The focus was on Adam, who was understood in a double way. On the one hand, he was taken to be the historically first individual human being. On the other hand, he was taken to be the scriptural ideal type or paradigm of “human nature” as such (after all, the Hebrew word from which “Adam” comes is the generic term for humankind). It is not logically necessary that the first human being should also be normative for what it is to be human. The assumption that he is creates a problem: Ideal types are highly general. Which features of the concrete individual man Adam, as depicted in the Genesis story, are part of the ideal type that is normative for human nature? And by what principle does one select them?

The view of human nature generated by this story had two major themes: (1) a picture of the place that human nature has in the unchanging structure of the cosmos God created and (2) a picture of humankind’s unique capacity for communion with God—what has traditionally been called the *imago dei* (image of God.)

The Structure of Human Nature

The story of the creation of Adam is part of the larger story of the creation of the world. Accordingly it is the classic formulation of the doctrine of creation that provides the context in which human nature is understood. The created realm is a *cosmos*, a single, structured, harmonious whole. More exactly, it is a hierarchy of kinds of beings, a hierarchy of “essences.” Following a pattern of thought at least as old as Plato, an essence is conceived on analogy with an abstract form or pattern. Just as the form a sculptor imposes on the clay is what makes it determinately a statue of a person or of a horse, instead of being a formless blob of clay, so an essence is the form that makes one actually to be the determinate kind of being one is. Human nature is one of those kinds of essences. It is the “humanness” of every individual human being, that which makes him or her genuinely human. Since it makes them all equally and fully human, it is identical *in* them all. But it is not identified *with* any one of them.

Within the overall hierarchy of the cosmos, it is located near the top because it is more like God's kind of being than are other creaturely natures.

Interpreting human nature in the context of creation has several important implications. For one thing, it expresses an extraordinary sense of fundamental security: a harmonious relationship to the rest of creation is part of the unchangeable structure of human nature. One is truly "at home" in this world. This is poles apart from the familiar modern way of understanding ourselves as isolated spirits arbitrarily thrown into a world lacking purpose or intrinsic value. In the classic view, to be sure, we do encounter terrible physical suffering and abysmal moral horror, which the human mind cannot explain. Nevertheless, because the world is a structured cosmos it is ultimately intelligible (at least to God!); because it is harmonious it is ultimately beautiful and good.

To understand oneself this way can be liberating as well as comforting. Pagans too believed that humankind was at home in a cosmos. But they often saw its structure as a prison cage governed by impersonal and implacable fate. By contrast, to understand oneself as an integral part of a cosmos freely created and governed by the biblical God was to understand the world as a home ruled by a divine love that worked for the fulfillment of humanity.

Moreover, on this view a relationship to God is essential to human nature. Creatures are finite precisely because they depend on the Creator for their continuing actuality. If they had no such relation, they simply would not be. Call it the creature's "ontological" relation to God, its relationship of dependence for being. In this regard, human nature is essentially related to God in exactly the same way as all other creatures. This has two religiously important consequences. Human nature, along with all creation, is radically secularized. The relation between creatures and God is a relation between two really different and radically different kinds of realities. It is in no way even partially a relation of "identity" between finite and infinite being. There is no respect in which "human nature" contains a part of God or is in any way intrinsically divine. Human nature is of immeasurable value, but it is not sacred in the sense of being worthy of worship. Second, finitude is not human nature's religious problem. Finitude is God's good creation, not a predicament from which human

beings need to be "saved." Whatever it is, salvation will be an affirmation of the essential finitude of human nature, not an escape from it.

As an integral part of the cosmos fundamentally related to God, human nature has four major dimensions.

1. *Body and Soul*

Human beings, as traditionally conceived, are constituted by two quite different kinds of reality related to each other in a hierarchical pattern. The Genesis story says God formed Adam "from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus the man became a living creature" (Gen. 2:7 NEB). Human nature is constituted by a complex relationship between "dust of the ground" and "breath of life." Classic formulations explicated these two notions respectively by using a traditional philosophical distinction between body and soul. "Dust of the ground" seemed to cohere with the traditional understanding of body as *material*, that is, a mode of reality that is distributed over space, can be experienced by the senses, and is subject to all manner of physical disintegration. "Breath of life" seemed to cohere with the traditional understanding of soul as *spiritual*, that is, a mode of reality that is not distributed over space, cannot be sensed, and cannot disintegrate. When the biblical images "dust" and "breath" are interpreted using the considerably more precise concepts "body" and "soul," the contrast between them is heightened. They are hierarchically related. In a living creature the soul animates the otherwise inanimate material body; thus the soul rules the body. Death is the separation of the soul, that is, the life principle, from the body. Nothing brings out more sharply the difference between them. In death the body, as material, undergoes disintegration; the soul, as spiritual, cannot undergo disintegration and so continues in existence (is "immortal").

Traditional philosophical doctrine has noted that, in contrast to all other forms of life, human life is distinguished by the capacity to know truth (through the use of "reason") and by the capacity to regulate its own behavior so as to be morally responsible for it. It therefore concluded that the human soul is the principle not just of mere "livingness" but also of rational and free life. Furthermore, a distinction was often drawn between two kinds of rational capacities: the ability to collect and analyze evidence, build inferential argu-

ments, and solve problems (call it "discursive thinking"), on the one hand, and the ability to apprehend unchanging and universally valid principles of truth, goodness, and beauty (call it "understanding") on the other.

In adopting the concept "soul," theologians also took over these notions. Human nature is essentially free and rational. This makes it enough "like" the rational and free God that it belongs near the top of the hierarchy of created being. More than that, to some degree it inescapably knows God. There are importantly different classic formulations of just how this happens. Augustine held that in understanding, the mind has an immediate intuition of God in and along with its immediate apprehension of the unchanging criteria of truth, beauty, and goodness that one constantly uses in making judgments about what is relatively more true, beautiful, or good than something else. This intuition of God admits of many degrees and may often be no more than a sense of responsibility before higher norms. However dim, it is the "light" within which we do all our "thinking." It is uncreated, the very presence of God to the mind. In contrast, Aquinas seems to have held that the "light" in which we do all our thinking is created; it is itself part of our creaturely mental capacities. He denied that we have any immediate intuition of God, but he held that in discursive thinking, in which we come to grasp the causes of things, we implicitly come also to grasp the reality of God. And he proposed arguments through which this implicit knowledge of God's reality can be brought to explicit acknowledgment. Either way, it is part of classic doctrine to affirm in human nature an essential cognitive relation to God in addition to the ontological relation.

A great danger in the body/soul conceptual scheme is that it may foster a dualism in regard to value: the body may be worth less than the soul. Traditional formulations rejected such suggestions. Origen, for example, moved into dualism when he speculated that Adam was originally created as a disembodied soul who was subsequently, on account of his disobedience, punished by a "fall" into a body. In this view, bodies are a punishment and are part of what we need to be saved from. This view was rejected. It is wrong to say Adam *is* a soul (who happens to be stuck with a body). No, Adam is an embodied soul. Embodiedness is essential to being a human soul. But what kind of body? Scripture complicates the discussion, because the apostle Paul distinguishes between the "animal body" of the first (and

fallen) Adam and the "spiritual body" of the second (and resurrected) Adam, which is to say, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:44–45). Augustine's mature position, which is representative of classic formulations, was that the creation story teaches that God created Adam with an animal body like the ones we have. A material body is not a punishment; it is good, and having it is good, as part of God's good purposes in creation. Only at the general resurrection will we have spiritual bodies.

Classic formulations never gain clarity about what a spiritual body is. But the distinction is important because of the nuance it introduces concerning the goodness of material bodies. Having a body is essential to human nature. Having a *material* body is not essential; at the general resurrection we shall still have human nature complete even if we come to have another kind of "body." But—and this is theologically crucial—*having had* a material body at some time is essential to human nature. Being part of a material cosmos is not an evil, and it is not a punishment. It is neither part of the discipline of our redemption nor what we need to be redeemed from. Precisely because it is a nuance, however, and a rather subtle one at that, it undoubtedly failed to stem a strong drift in Christianity toward negative attitudes concerning the human body. In particular, this way of describing the relationship places the body in the position of a seducer. It is always possible that the proper hierarchical relationship between soul and body will be reversed if the appetites of the body, in their own way perfectly good, prove so attractive to the soul that they displace the soul's own "higher" appetite for truth in moments when the soul must choose between the two. If the soul is "seduced" by the body this way, then the body is still governed by the soul and, more basically, the soul is governed not by its own rational capacities but by the body's interests. No doubt there were many other powerful causes for this suspicion of the body, quite outside classic doctrine. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the body/soul conceptual schema employed in classic formulations permitted and probably suggested such attitudes.

2. *Social Being*

Human nature has a social dimension. According to the story, Adam, the paradigm of human nature, was created a social being.

He is not complete as himself unless he has a human partner: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will provide a partner for him.' So God formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of heaven. . . . But for the man himself no partner had yet been found. And so the Lord God put the man into a trance, and while he slept, he took one of his ribs and closed the flesh over the place. The Lord God then built up the rib, which he had taken out of the man, into a woman" (Gen. 2:18–22 NEB). This has led classic formulations of the doctrine to place a high stress on the social character of human nature. Humankind is characteristically conceived as the one family of Adam, so tightly knit that somehow it is a single reality "in Adam."

At the same time, the decision to take an individual man as paradigm for human nature, the hierarchical patterns of thought in which the doctrine is elucidated, and the dualistic way "body" and "soul" are related have conspired to make this feature of classic theological anthropology enormously destructive for women. The story says that a male figure was created first as the paradigm for human nature and that a female figure was created second, and was created *for* the male. Does this mean that maleness is, by God's intent, paradigmatic of human nature and that femaleness is somehow inferior and subservient to it? By and large the classic tradition has understood it that way, teaching women to perceive themselves as inferior to men and rightfully subject to them.

There have been important variations on this theme. Gregory of Nyssa held that Adam was created with a "glorious" (which is to say, "spiritual") body that was androgynous. Ideally, sexual differentiation is not essential to human nature. However, foreseeing that Adam would sin and have to die, God introduced sexual differentiation in a second creative act to prevent the race from dying out once Adam sinned. This has the effect of stressing the parity of male and female sexuality, but parity in that both are deficient modes of human nature. Sexual differentiation is simply a necessary compromise of original creation to fend off an even greater evil.

Augustine developed two lines of thought that have dominated the classic tradition, though they stand in some tension with each other. The subordination of women to men is a hierarchy of status and role in the material cosmos, but not a hierarchy in regard to being or

intrinsic worth. Men and women are souls that have animal bodies. As souls they are equally fully human. It is only as *embodied* souls that they are hierarchically related, and that is a hierarchy of roles, not of being. Women, because their bodies are female, are to fill roles associated with child-rearing and are dependent on men. Men, because their bodies are male, are to fill roles associated with protecting women and children by laboring to provide food and shelter. But when we come to have spiritual bodies at the general resurrection, that differentiation will disappear. This is to say that the hierarchical pattern may be ordained by God for the time being, but it is not strictly speaking essential to human nature as such. We can still be fully human in its absence.

This softening of the view, pale as it is, is undercut by a second theme. Augustine shares the view that the body, while good, must be viewed with suspicion because it is a potential seducer of the soul. For him, this is especially true with regard to sexual pleasure. The fact that the Genesis story depicts Eve as tempting Adam to disobey gave Augustine biblical warrant for interpreting his own male struggles with sexual temptation as paradigmatic of that seduction. Seductiveness is asymmetrical. As embodied souls, women are seductive to men in a way in which men, as embodied souls, are not seductive to women. Consequently women are more to be feared morally than men. It is not that to be female is intrinsically evil but that it is morally more dangerous. Aquinas hardened this position into the view that women are not only hierarchically subordinate to men in status and in role but also, precisely as embodied, deficient expressions of human nature. He held this view not for any theological reason but on the authority of some of Aristotle's views about the respective roles of men and women in procreation.

At this point both moral and theological considerations raise radical doubts about the adequacy of the classic formulation of the doctrine of human nature. One has to ask whether it is moral to hold a view that has caused so much human anguish. Theologically one has to ask whether by this point the classic view has not come into such conflict with other basic Christian convictions as to suggest that there is something fundamentally wrong in the very way the doctrine has been formulated.

3. *Teleology*

Human nature has a teleological dimension. That is, while it is itself an unchangeable structure, it is essentially ordered to the completion of two purposes that are not yet fully accomplished.

Within the structure of the cosmos, Adam was created with a role to play in relation to the rest of creation: "Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, and every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28 NEB). Accordingly, it is part of the structure of human nature that we have a calling, a role to play in and for creation. The role has been variously understood in the tradition, sometimes as "caring for" and "tending" a partner, far more often (and with disastrous ecological results) as "mastering" and "dominating" an opponent. Either way, human nature is understood in terms of a purpose to be realized.

Second, the Genesis story makes it clear that Adam was created to fill a role in relation to God. He was created to live in unending communion with God. It was to be an immediate and intimate relating to God, but in obedience to rather than in parity or mutuality with God. And the unendingness of the communion depended on the obedience: "You may eat from every tree in the garden, but not from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for on the day that you eat from it, you will certainly die" (Gen. 2:17 NEB). It is part of the structure of human nature that it is oriented toward this relationship of obedience to God. Several things depend on it: The unendingness of the communion depends on obedience. Adam is told that if he disobeys, he will die. And classic formulations add that preserving the correct relation of body to soul and properly caring for the rest of creation also depend on obedience.

4. *Temporality*

Finally, human nature is essentially involved in time. This point needs to be made carefully. Human nature itself is nontemporal. No event in time could cause it to change its structure (that is, cease consisting of a free and rational soul that has been embodied, or cease being social, or cease being ordered to caring for creation and

communing with God). Time cannot get *into* it to change it. On the other hand, it is part of the structure of human nature to be *in* time. This follows from its being part of its structure that the soul has been *at some time* materially embodied. It also follows from the soul's freedom. Freedom means the possibility of change in action. Change and time are correlative: Time is the measure of change; no change, no time. If freedom is essential to human nature, then the temporality of human action is too.

So human nature is the nontemporal *basis* of temporal acts. The classic tradition has typically expressed this with the philosophical distinction between "being" (what a thing is) and its "operations" (its acts). In the order of reality, being precedes operations. That is, operations depend on a being for their reality (no action, say running, could be going on without the presence of a being who does them) in a way in which a being does not depend on its operations for its reality (in monumental sloth, a human being might be present without performing any actions and nonetheless be "real"). Thus human nature is a kind of being and is the nontemporal basis of (human) acts; human acts are temporal operations whose ontologically prior basis is human nature. So human nature is essentially involved in time, but time does not get into human nature.

The last two dimensions of human nature taken together provide the possibility for radical failure or "fall" in human beings. Human beings cannot fail to exhibit an orientation toward caring for creation and communing with God, and when they act they cannot fail to act in time. These are aspects of the unchangeable structure of human nature. But precisely because they are free, human beings can fail actually to perform the concrete acts of caring and of obedient communion to which human nature orients them. Moreover, failure to act in obedient ways that constitute actual communion with God leads to a deformity outwardly in one's actual relationship with creation and to a deformity inwardly in the way soul and body are interrelated. Failure to commune with God in obedience is not just one more mistake; it brings with it a radical deformity of oneself.

Image of God, Freedom, and Fall

This radical deformity is what early church theologians called "fall-*eness*." But how can human beings suffer a truly radical deformity

and still retain their human nature intact? Augustine suggested the two-part answer that largely shaped medieval and Reformation views on this matter. The first part is to stress that what is deformed is the image of God, not human nature. Adam was created "after" or "according to" the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Only the Logos, the Word of God, is the *imago dei*. Failure to live according to the ends for which we were created can damage the *imago*. That is because human nature is understood as a static structure, whereas the *imago* is understood in largely dynamic terms. It consists in my actively taking up right relationship both to myself and to God. More precisely, it consists in taking up a cognitive relationship in which I simultaneously and inseparably know myself rightly and know God rightly. In this relationship people know themselves as creatures and implicitly know God by virtue of the light provided by God's immediate presence to them. To know God and oneself in this way is actually to bear the *imago dei*. The image is always at least potentially present, so in one way it is a permanent capacity of human nature; yet it is not something simply given. In this case, knowing properly depends on loving truly. I can know myself, and know God in knowing myself, only if I care enough to attend properly to God and myself. So to bear the image of God is freely to relate to oneself as a being *in* God. To cease to do that is to cease imaging God properly. Then the image is damaged.

In what way is this a *radical* deformity? The second part of Augustine's answer is to insist that when the *imago dei* is damaged, human will falls into bondage to sin. While remaining human, one becomes unable to avoid sinning. This is a truly *radical* deformity. It confronted Augustine with a paradox, since freedom of the will is essential to unchanged human nature. He resolves the paradox by distinguishing between two quite different senses of "will." Free will as free choice among alternatives (call it *arbitrium*) is essential to human nature and is never lost. But all choices are made for the sake of some value. Basically we all will to be happy. Augustine contends that our decision about what makes for happiness is a special kind of act of will (call it *voluntas*). To pick something as the basis of our happiness is to love it. As created, Adam exercised will as *voluntas* in freely loving God. He was related to himself in the way that images God. That provided the basis on which he exercised will as *arbit-*

rium. Every choice among alternatives was made in service of God. Then Adam chose (*voluntas*) a creature (himself!) instead of God as the basis of his happiness. Thereby he constituted himself in a new way. He retained the capacity for free choice among alternatives, but the chooser was now defined by a new way of relating to himself. He was constituted as a non-God-lover, a self-lover. He chose freely, but every free choice was chosen in service to himself as the basis of his happiness. And that is a situation one is not free to change. When one ceases to image God, one's immediate intuition of God is so weakened that one cannot be conscious enough of God to start loving God anew. The dynamics of the *imago dei* are such that if the image is distorted, the person is radically deformed and in bondage.

CHALLENGES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

The Turn to the Subject

One hallmark of the modern period in Western cultural history has been the rise of a distinctive set of root convictions about personhood. They developed slowly and from different sources, but by the start of the nineteenth century they had become a widely shared and unquestioned set of beliefs. To be a person is to be a center or "subject" of consciousness who is at once a knower of "objects," a knower of the moral law, and a possible enactor of moral duties. Both as knower and as doer, a subject is autonomous, historical, and self-constituting.

Take the subject as knower. It has a kind of autonomy in that it is not dictated to by a world of already determinate "objects" that is over against it and simply given to it. Immanuel Kant was believed to have shown in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the "objectivity" of the objects we know is not a given. Rather it is largely constituted by the knowing consciousness. All that is given is sense experience. Consciousness organizes that experience into objects. It does so on terms it itself provides, and not on terms dictated by how reality is "outside" consciousness. It is consciousness that organizes experience into an intelligible field of individual objects. So there is a way in which the subject as consciousness is "behind" or "outside" the world as a field of knowable objects. It is not an item in the world. Like God, it

orders and transcends a world. Moreover, since what can be known is restricted to what can be ordered out of sense experience, neither the knowing subject (or "transcendental ego") itself nor any other trans-empirical substance can be a possible object of knowledge. As the study of history and of non-Western cultures progressed during the nineteenth century, it came to be widely held that the categories in which consciousness organizes sense experience may themselves change from culture to culture and from one historical period to another. So far as that is true, the subject as knower is historicized. Not only does consciousness know objects in history, but the movement of history can change consciousness.

Take the subject as morally responsible doer. Its autonomy is deeper than mere freedom of choice. It was generally accepted that in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant had made his point that a subject is truly moral only in following a law (*nomos* in Greek) that is grounded not in something other than itself and not even in the will of God (which would be "hetero/nomy"), but rather in itself as subject (which he called "auto/nomy"). As the nineteenth century passed, it became clear that there was room for considerable difference of opinion about which aspect of the subject is the basis of moral norms and about their actual content. But the principle of moral autonomy has become an unquestioned assumption of modern consciousness.

The principle of autonomy brings with it another principle. Moral subjects are self-constituting. There is an ambiguity in the phrase "moral subject." It may mean that the subject's behavior is actually moral. Of course, that is never a given. But moral subject may mean "a subject whose behavior is rightly open to moral assessment." In that sense, animals are not moral subjects; they can behave neither morally nor immorally. The principle of moral autonomy brings with it the view that being a moral subject in this second sense is also never a given. What is given is an array of physical and emotional hungers that, in their pressure for immediate gratification, tend to motivate behavior. It has also been common to say that, in contrast to these "desires," subjects have a qualitatively different kind of yearning for fulfillment as subjects. It has been variously characterized as a yearning for happiness (following classical philosophy) or for "authenticity." A subject will satisfy the yearning for fulfillment only when it constitutes itself as a moral subject. It constitutes itself a subject when

it actively takes charge of itself so that its behavior is guided not by desires but by the moral law grounded in the very structure of its subjectivity (however that law may be spelled out in detail).

More precisely, the subject is constituted by the *history* of its relating to itself in this way. Here again the basic historicity of the subject of consciousness becomes apparent. The fact that moral subjectivity is never a given means that it is open to threats. Once achieved, it may be lost. The "act" of self-constitution may need to be repeated. As the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have unfolded, there have been different opinions about the sources of the threat. For much of the nineteenth century it seemed that the threat stemmed from the fact that the subject is embodied. The Enlightenment and the rise of modern science had left a mechanistic picture of the body as a set of cogs in the machinery of the physical world. The autonomous, self-constituting character of the subject makes it at once wholly other than this mechanical system and yet involved in it and threatened by it. Later in the century, Darwin's powerful hypothesis that evolution of the species, including *homo sapiens*, is driven by a battle whose only law is the survival of the fittest posed the threat differently. In this instance the moral subject was threatened by the fact that, as embodied, it is part of a basically amoral biological system.

To many other thinkers late in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth, the threats to the moral subject seemed to stem more from its cultural dimensions than its physical dimensions. The process of self-constitution, for all its radical autonomy, always takes place in a social context. But social contexts always involve a material culture. One did not need to be a Marxist to acknowledge the force of Karl Marx's contention that the economic structure of cultures can profoundly distort the consciousnesses of subjects living in them. Nor did one need to be committed to existentialism to recognize the cogency of Martin Heidegger's analysis of ways in which the routines and language of everyday conventional technological culture can deform subjectivity into "inauthenticity." In any case, whether they are rooted in the body, culture, or elsewhere, it is the threats that focus the autonomy, historicity, and self-constitutingness of a moral subject: One is a moral subject only as a *history* of a struggle autonomously to constitute oneself a morally responsible subject in the face of threats to one's status as moral subject.

This set of root convictions about personhood deprived any theolo-

gian who shared them of the major assumptions on which the classic theological view of human nature had been based. Given the modern view of the subject as knower, it is impossible either to claim a cosmic structure of being in which human nature has its proper place or to claim that each individual human being is a rational substance. Consciousness can only know what is in sense experience, and that does not include either a cosmos "out there" to be known or a rational substance "in here" to do the knowing. The secure cosmic home in terms of which the classic view understood human beings is gone. Furthermore, given the modern view of the subject as moral subject, it is impossible to view the unique acts of individual human beings as secondary to some underlying being, identically the same in all subjects. The very idea of human nature became unintelligible. What constitutes one a subject is precisely what is most unique to each one: the history of one's own struggle autonomously to constitute oneself as a subject. And precisely because that history is seen as a struggle, human life is seen no longer as "at home" in a beautiful and intelligible cosmos but instead as cast into a world at best indifferent to human values and at worst antithetical to them.

A great many Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have refused to share modernity's assumptions about personhood, preferring to conserve the classic theological views of human nature. They view the root assumptions of modernity about personhood as dubious philosophical theses which they reject. Some theologians, however, consider efforts to disavow these assumptions a kind of self-deception. They view them as inescapable aspects of the identities of modern Christians simply because they live in *this* culture. It seems to them intellectually more honest explicitly to affirm these new convictions about personhood and to try to use them in addressing the same agenda of questions about persons that earlier theologians faced. Recall that the agenda had two points: What is it about finite persons that makes it possible for them to know the infinite God? And what is it about persons that makes it possible for them, while remaining persons, to undergo so profound a "fall" that it requires the sort of "redemption" to which the church witnesses? The convictions about personhood that modern consciousness brings present these theologians with this challenge: How can one affirm the autonomy, historicity, and self-constitutingness of persons as subjects and still affirm not only that they know

and are redeemed by God, but that in this they are radically *dependent* on God?

Strategies for Theological Reconstruction

Six major strategies have emerged in nineteenth- and twentieth-century theology to meet this challenge. Most of them continue to be influential. Before sketching them singly, it is worth noting two features they share. None of them is alleged to be based on the story of Adam. As an explanatory account of the coming into existence of homo sapiens and of the fall, the story is rejected. As a paradigm of what personhood ought to be, it is replaced by the story of Jesus who, it is now common to stress, is at once the truly actualized person and the image of God. If the story of Adam figures at all in this theology, it is as a paradigm of the movement from innocence through temptation to sin. And here, instead of personhood being understood in terms of the biblical story, the story is interpreted in terms of analyses of consciousness developed independently of the story. Second, they share the theme that theologically the central thing to say about subjects is that they do stand in a relation to God of radical dependency. In classic theology there had been a clear conceptual distinction between two modes of relatedness to God: the human being as "knower of God" (the invariant), and as "sinner redeemed by God"—both of which may admit of different modes and degrees at different times in a person's life. In "modern" theologies, by contrast, there is a marked tendency to collapse these into one relationship.

1. *Structure of Consciousness*

The first strategy for reconciling a relation of radical dependence on God with the subject's history of autonomous self-constitution relies on an analysis of the *structure* of subjectivity as embodied consciousness. It is within the framework of that structure that self-constitution takes place. Consciousness has several levels or grades. By virtue of its embodiedness it is flooded at one level by sense experiences and by hungers and desires demanding immediate gratification. At another level, consciousness as "theoretical reason" can order sense experience into a world of objects whose interrelations it can then analyze and explain; and as "practical reason" it can grasp the moral law and assess which actions count as doing one's moral

duty even if it requires subordinating or suppressing desire. But what Christians mean by the God-relation can be neither a cognitive relation with an object of theoretical reason nor a relation of moral commitment by practical reason to a good maxim. There is, this strategy urges, a third level of consciousness distinct from sense consciousness and consciousness of a world of other objects and persons. It is an immediate consciousness of God. It is a relationship to God in *consciousness*. Friedrich Schleiermacher characterized it as a "feeling of absolute dependence." Paul Tillich calls it "ultimate concern." Karl Rahner calls it a "preapprehension of being" or of "mystery." However it is put, it honors the turn to the subject by being a claim about consciousness, not about substances. It is a relation of *immediate* consciousness. It is a "consciousness-of," but it is not mediated by concepts and so has no determinate "object" (since objects are conceptually formulated). Tillich makes this point by insisting that this is a consciousness that transcends the subject-object structure of knowledge, and Rahner characterizes it as a "pre-thematic" apprehension. Thus the God-relation is a structural feature of every consciousness.

And it does not violate autonomy. It is at once a dependency relation on God and the necessary condition of the subject's autonomy. On the one hand this strategy argues that the subject is unintelligible apart from God-consciousness. As knower and as moral subject, it is dependent on the God-relation to be precisely what it is. On the other hand it is clear that a subject's true actualization is not a given. The subject must actualize itself. In that act of self-constitution is its deepest autonomy. The God-relation, far from violating that autonomy, is rather its necessary condition, for self-constitution consists in either allowing or prohibiting immediate God-consciousness to dominate consciousness as a whole. Without the consciousness of God there would be nothing to allow or prohibit.

2. *The Subject in Nature*

The second strategy relies on an analysis of the situatedness of subjects in nature. Consciousness intrinsically "intends" or is consciousness-of natural and social phenomena that are other than itself and that provide it a kind of context. The subject always constitutes itself in a situation that has natural and social dimensions. On this strategy, the God-relation is emphatically not an intrinsic part of the structure of each consciousness. The theological reason for this de-

nial is important: The God-relation in redemption to which Christianity witnesses is an unpredictable gift of grace and not a universal feature of consciousness that can be taken for granted as something simply given. The God-relation consists rather in faith, a gift that some have and others do not. Faith is a particular mode of subjectivity whose distinctive features are determined by that which it intends and to which it is a response. As such, the God-relation is only one possible way among many in which a subject may be related to its situation as it constitutes itself.

The focus here is on the moral subject. This strategy accepts Immanuel Kant's contention that the subject as knower is restricted to sense experience. So the God-relation cannot be a cognitive relation. It also rejects the thesis of the first strategy that distinct from knowing and doing is a deeper level of consciousness which, as "feeling" or "intuition," is consciousness of God, for that contradicts the theological claim that the God-relation is grace and not a structural feature of consciousness. As put by Albrecht Ritschl, whose formulation was immensely influential in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, the moral subject is situated in a contradiction. It is both "a part of the natural world and a spiritual personality claiming to rule nature." Its involvement in nature is a threat to its status as a moral subject that knows values and knows an obligation to make them actual. We constitute ourselves as moral subjects by taking responsibility for our behavior. This may be done in many ways. The theological claim is that there is only one way of constituting oneself that will sustain one's difference from "nature." That is to act in the faith that deeper than amoral nature is a reality that sustains the actualization of values in history. More exactly, faith is the trust that the historical life of Jesus discloses the nature of this reality as a love that forgives our failures to act in this trust and motivates us to love one another more deeply. This faith is the God-relation. It does not violate the autonomy of the subject who has it; rather, it sustains that subject precisely in its autonomy against the amoral mechanisms of nature.

3. *The Subject in Time*

The third strategy focuses on the subject's situatedness in time rather than in nature. Every subject has a relationship to itself. Following Martin Heidegger, Rudolf Bultmann (whose use of this strategy has

been very influential in mid-twentieth-century theology) characterizes this self-relation as a "self-understanding." It is the concrete "how" of the subject's life, the unique way in which in actual practice it takes or treats itself. All of the subject's transactions with its natural and social setting and with the contents of its own psychological states are done in terms of its self-understanding. The question of how it will understand itself is always open and must be decided anew in every moment. The hallmark of authentic self-understanding is freedom. In it a subject is free to respond to each new situation that history brings in terms of its novel possibilities and demands. But there is always the possibility that a subject will understand itself "inauthentically." That happens when it understands itself on terms set by a given situation. It loses itself in nature or in society's current status quo and therewith loses its freedom to respond to the new situations that the passage of time brings. A subject thus falls into bondage to a cultural situation that immediately becomes part of the past. It is tied to the past and closed to the future. The theological claim is that all subjects do in fact understand themselves inauthentically. This is fallenness: a bondage to ideals and norms in terms of which one has chosen to understand oneself, living according to the works of some "law." Here culture and society pose the threat to true self-actualization. However, the objective fact of the proclamation of the gospel of God's loving acceptance of humankind in Jesus Christ provides the concrete possibility of recovering authentic self-understanding. It is grace. If one decides to understand oneself as one affirmed and forgiven by God, one is set free from defining oneself in terms of any status quo. This self-understanding is faith. It is given its particular form by that to which it is a response, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Since the word "God" means "the power that can restore us to authenticity," this is the God-relation. It does not violate but rather creates the subject's autonomy.

4. Dynamics of Self-Making

A fourth strategy for reconciling our dependence on God with our autonomy in self-constitution rests on an analysis of the dynamics of situated self-making. Rooted in G. W. F. Hegel's thought, it was very influential on mid-nineteenth-century theology. Its influence on twentieth-century theology has come through inverted and reversed versions.

Ironically, this strategy embraces the turn to the subject as a way to recover a cosmic context in which to understand the subject. The central thesis is that knowing consists of a dialectical process having three moments. Out of sense-experience one constructs a concept, a truth (thesis); then, experience being what it is, another truth is called forth that seems to contradict it (antithesis); but genuine understanding comes only when the two are united and transcended in a more embracing truth (synthesis) which will itself come into conflict with a contradictory truth (antithesis again), and so on. Absolute knowledge would come when all individual truths are embraced in one grand synthesis.

This dialectic is for Hegelians the principle of knowledge. If the broadly Kantian thesis is correct that the knowing subject "constitutes" the objectivity and order of the reality it knows, then this dialectical principle of knowledge is also the principle of reality. Each individual subject (spirit, *Geist*) is constituted by a dialectical process of self-making which is situated in nature and history. On the one hand this means that each subject is limited by the fact that there are others with whom it must interact. It is not unlimited; it is finite. On the other hand it means that each *Geist* is constituted by a dialectic between two aspects of itself. It is an autonomous center of consciousness, a "subjective spirit" that manifests itself as a center of both natural energy and moral agency, in this way becoming "objective spirit." These two aspects of finite spirit—the subjective and the objective—are dialectically related. Finite spirit is constituted by the process of objective self-manifestation. Yet every objectification of itself, that is, every one of the political, social, and moral roles and structures it creates for itself, is inadequate to express its autonomy. So history is the story of subjective spirit's progressive overcoming of successive modes of objective spirit and their forms of bondage in the direction of greater freedom. Conversely, history is the story of objective spirit, persons as social and moral agents, giving subjective spirit concrete placement in some culture and historical tradition that defines its very identity. Finitude includes radical cultural and historical relativity.

The fact that spirit knows all this about itself, however, means that in some other respect it transcends its situatedness and is nonsituated or infinite. It is *absolute* spirit. As such its reality is constituted by

the same dialectical principle. Absolute spirit is a process of *nonsituated* self-making. The world and its history are not really other than absolute spirit. Rather, history as a whole is the second moment in the three-moment dialectic in which absolute spirit (thesis), by manifesting or objectifying itself (antithesis, world history) comes to ultimate self-reconciliation in self-knowledge (synthesis). But that is to say that finite spirits have their reality in a larger cosmic context. Being so situated is their God-relation. Furthermore, that context is one in which God comes to ultimate actualization precisely through the process in which finite spirits come to their own actualization. So the God-relation is the condition, and not a violation, of their autonomy.

5. Dynamics of Self-choosing

A fifth strategy rests on the dynamics of the subject's situated self-choosing. Søren Kierkegaard provides the classic formulation of this strategy, and it has been very influential in mid-twentieth-century theology, especially in Reinhold Niebuhr's *Nature and Destiny of Man*. The subject is constituted by three relations: (1) It is a relation between "finitude" and "infinity." Niebuhr takes this to mean that it is a relation between a determinateness imposed by the subject's actual setting in nature and history (it has this body type, these physical and mental endowments, this particular cultural heritage, and not others) on one hand, and a freedom unendingly ("infinitely") to transcend this givenness and entertain possible alterations and alternatives to it on the other. (2) It is a relation that relates itself to itself. It may relate to itself as the bipolar reality it is ("finite" and "infinite," "nature" and "freedom") by so living as either to deny one of its poles or to affirm them both. "Falleness" is to conduct one's life as though one were not free (sin as sensuality) or as though one were not nature (sin as pride). (3) A subject is a relation that relates to itself truly only as it stands related to God. It is only in consciousness of and trust in God's gracious power that one is *able* so to relate to oneself that in one's living one affirms both one's finitude (nature) and one's infinitude (freedom), and keeps them in their rightful balance. At least a dim consciousness of the presence of this divine power is present in every subject (general revelation). Vivid and focused consciousness of it through particular historical events (e.g., the crucifixion of Jesus) is

saving special revelation, for it engenders the trust that pulls one out of fallen denial of one aspect or the other of oneself.

In this strategy the threat to the subject is rooted not in something, whether nature or history, other than and outside the subject, but rather within the very dynamics of the subject itself. That it is constituted by deciding how to relate to itself means it is always possible that it will decide wrongly and misconstitute itself. This strategy has generally been seen as the polar opposite of the fourth strategy, designed to affirm the irreducible individuality of the finite subject. Yet it is a kind of reverse image of it as well. The crucial difference between them is that the moments in the dialectic of self-constitution are related to one another by free decisions and not by an inevitable process. Each subject must make its own decisions by which the dynamics of its self-constituting move along on their dialectical way. Self-constituting is a self-choosing, not a self-making. The possibility of a God-relation is a part of the dynamics of every subject. Its actualization is the basis of the subject's fully actualized autonomy, not a violation of it. But its actualization itself depends on the subject's free decision and is not a function of a cosmic process in which the subject is but a moment.

6. *God as Subject*

A sixth strategy has been controversial because it rests on a rejection of the agenda of questions that classic and modern theology have shared. In his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth proposes to reconcile the subject's autonomy and dependence on God by grounding both in God's free decision. In his view, Christian theology, precisely because it is finally about God, cannot discuss human beings by addressing these questions: What is it about finite subjects that makes possible knowledge of God? And what is it about them that makes radical fallenness possible? Rather the question should be: What is it about God that makes these things possible?

For Barth, a seriously theological point of view will see God as subject (or, in Barth's terminology, "person") in the proper sense of the term. It will see us as persons only in a qualified and extended sense of the term. Barth is faithful to the turn to the subject, insisting that God as person has being only "in God's acts" and not in an essence or substance lying behind God's acts. The "acts" in which

God has being constitute a dialectic of self-relatedness having three moments. God's reality as person is triune. The theological claim is that God "decides" to enter into relationship with persons other than God. The best image for that relationship is covenant. Implicit in this is God's further decision to be known to covenant partners: revelation. It takes place in a very concrete way: incarnation. In Jesus, God comes into the closest covenant fellowship with a finite subject. This is the end to which the creation of a world of finite subjects is ordered. All creaturely subjects are involved in this covenant relationship with God by virtue of being related to Jesus. It is simply a matter of objective fact that Jesus is part of human history to which we are all related. All subjects are "elected" for this relationship. It is this relationship to God, which is created by God's decision, that constitutes us as persons.

So the God-relation is universal, but it does not consist of a mode of consciousness and cannot be discovered by an analysis of the structure of consciousness (against the first strategy). Because it nonetheless involves all subjects, the God-relation is not just one possible relation among many (against strategies two and three). Because it is the fulfillment of that to which creation was ordered in the first place, the covenantal relation that constitutes us as subjects is a relation that places us in a cosmic setting. But the God-relation is not a moment in a cosmic process. It is free grace, the final redemption of God's primordial purpose (against strategy four). And in this view, subjects are constituted by a free decision by God and not by themselves (against strategy five). In a way this is strategy four turned on its head. Instead of the history of interactions among finite "spirits" being the process through which absolute spirit is known and actualized, God's decision to enter into covenant fellowship with a finite "other" (i.e., "to reveal God") is the basis of history. Whereas strategy five connects the necessary moments of the dialectic through which each subject constitutes itself by its *own* free decisions rather than by an inevitable process, Barth's strategy connects the moments in the cosmic dialectic through which God realizes God's primordial decision for covenant fellowship, including the constituting of finite subjects, by *God's* own free decision. This focuses the major theological objection to this strategy. While it allows for full stress that the God-relation is grace and that the ones begraced are irreducibly finite

subjects dependent on grace, what happens to their autonomy? In many places it is clear that Barth intends to affirm our autonomy. But it is not clear that this strategy will permit one to affirm it consistently.

ISSUES AND PROPOSALS

There have been at least three persistent issues bedeviling Christian theological anthropology since the turn to the subject.

1. Can its stress on the *autonomy* of the subject in its self-constituting be reconciled with the ways in which modern consciousness in other moods seeks to *explain* human behavior? The explanations come in at least three broad types. One kind of explanation is cast in terms of psychological analyses of consciousness, both from experimental psychology and from various kinds of psychoanalytic theories. Another kind of explanation is based on the study of the behavior of more or less "social" animals. Still another type of explanation is grounded in neurological research, especially study of the brain. The conceptual framework theologians have relied on seems simply inadequate to engage these forms of explanation of behavior. "Emotions," "animal behavior," and "brain processes" presumably all belong in the theologians' category of nature. Even when nature is not treated as something other than the subject and as a threat to it and is instead incorporated into the subject as one pole in the dialectic by which it is constituted, it is still treated as somehow inferior to and a threat to the glory of the subject's other pole (freedom, spirit, or self-transcendence). "Nature" is altogether too abstract a category to use in trying to come to terms with these explanations that seem to deny the subject's autonomy. To use it in describing the subject is to distort the description of the subject by abstracting it from its very physical or material concreteness.

2. Can the stress on the autonomy of the subject's *self-constitution* in modern theology do justice to the material bases of human life? Stress on self-constitution, as we have seen, places high value on the cultivation of highly refined sensibilities, intense levels of self-awareness, and unique individuality. In practice this is possible for people whose economic, social, and political power relative to the rest of society gives them a remarkable degree of leisure. They are next to

impossible for people to attain whose poverty, powerlessness, or ignorance makes life itself precarious. The rise of liberation theologies expressing the theological perspective of oppressed blacks, women, and Third World people insistently raises this question: Is not the concept "subject" in modern theology fatally flawed for the purposes of Christian theology precisely because it reflects a Western, male, bourgeois status that has the requisite surplus of time beyond what is needed to sustain life, but only as the fruit of other people's oppression? Once again the charge is that the concept of subject that theologians have used is abstract. But in this case it is "abstract" in the Marxist sense: abstracted from the *material* economic, social, and political power structures that in actual life are ingredient in a subject's concreteness.

3. Have theologians evaded the hard question about reconciling finite human autonomy with radical dependency on God? They have attempted to reconcile the two by thinking of persons as patients and recipients of influences from nature, society, or God. Or they have taken persons as centers of inwardness that engage in self-making or self-choosing by "acts" that are entirely interior and utterly private. In either case, persons are considered as actors in a public world only secondarily, and in ways somehow derivative from what consciousness receives or inwardness "does." The one apparent exception we found to this comes from the fourth strategy, which stressed that person as "objective spirit" has a dialectical parity with person as "subjective spirit." And there it is unclear whether the finitude of finite spirits is ultimate, or whether it is but a moment in a process culminating in an undialectical unity of all spirits in absolute spirit. In regard to the other strategies, we have seen that it is possible to show ways in which consciousness' autonomy is compatible with dependency on God. But surely the hard questions come when one considers persons not as patients but as finite agents—active concrete powers in a shared and public world—and when one tries to reconcile the autonomy of finite agency with dependency on God. Again, exquisite analyses of subjectivity turn out to be misleading because they are abstract, that is to say, abstracted from the concrete reality of persons as finite energy systems, causal agents (perhaps self-causing?) in a public world.

At least two sorts of theological development seem to be called for.

In classic theology claims about the material dimensions of human life were made in a doctrine of creation that declared the actual physical contexts and dimensions of human life, whatever they may in fact be, to be fundamentally good and supportive of human freedom. This was true even when theologians played down or dropped any effort to explain the origin of the physical universe by their doctrines of creation. The claims about the material dimensions of personal existence could be made in terms of an ontological relationship between all reality and God. This unchanging and unchangeable relationship, we saw, was logically distinct from the relations constituted by knowledge of God and by fall and redemption, which could be understood as varying in degree or ceasing altogether. However, as we have also seen, in modern theology these two kinds of relationships between persons as creatures and God have consistently been collapsed into one kind of relationship, consisting in a mode of consciousness or in a conscious decision, and admitting of degree. It may be that theological anthropology will be unable to do justice to the material dimensions of human life until it has recovered a full-blown doctrine of creation as a mode of relation to God other than relationships in consciousness.

In addition, theological anthropology may be able to deal with persons in their genuine concreteness only by a second "turn," from the person as patient or subject of consciousness to the person as agent. There are at least two quite different kinds of movements that may promise a new turn to the agent. On one side, in liberation theology and political theology the Marxist tradition has begun to influence Christian analyses of the human predicament and God's engagement in it. These movements have not yet perhaps fully articulated the conceptual schemes on which they rely. But it is already evident how much they depend on an analysis of personhood in which the concept "praxis" is central, a concept that focuses on persons as agents before they are subjects of consciousness, taken precisely in their concrete material contexts. Second, there is a revival in Anglo-American philosophical theology of a modest sort of metaphysics that tries to sketch a conceptual scheme central to which is an analysis of "action" and of persons as "agents." This too is a varied phenomenon, no single school of thought at all, and certainly not yet the fount of a highly articulated set of proposals. But, like the first move-

ment, it promises to be fertile for new constructive proposals of better ways in which to elucidate the Christian witness to the liberating and humanizing effect of personal dependence on God.

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