

# EBION AT THE BARRICADES: MORAL NARRATIVE AND POST-CHRISTIAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

---

MICHEL RENÉ BARNES

“The veiled goddess before which we on both sides bend our knees is the moral law in us in its invulnerable majesty. We certainly perceive its voice, and we understand very clearly its commandments.”

Immanuel Kant

“The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“You can offer to the righteous all the good that you have won,  
But down here among the unclean, all your good just comes undone,  
Your good just comes undone.”

Lyle Lovett

*Introduction: “You Cannot be Neutral and Be Christian”*

There are many possible meanings intended in this statement on the lawn sign outside a church near my home. It can be intended to refer to prisons at Guantanamo Bay or to the war in Afghanistan; it can be an exhortation to be “for” something or to be “against” something. I am sure that this imperative is not intended to contradict another, more frequently posted, statement: “Everyone is welcome.” Or perhaps there is a contradiction, but unobserved and unacknowledged because the two statements never occupy the lawn sign

---

Michel René Barnes  
Marquette University, Department of Theology, 100 Coughlin Hall, Milwaukee WI 53201, USA  
michel.barnes@marquette.edu

at the same time and memory is no longer a virtue that Christians cultivate. Some Catholic communities have, for example, gone effortlessly from saying “‘Catholic’ means ‘everyone’” to saying “Not him, not here.” In the context of my own experience, I am brought to this theological judgment: The first task of any scripturally-based soteriology is to ask the question, how will our knowledge of good and evil be overcome? How is this, the first temptation to sin, and the first consequence of the fall, overcome in Christ?

When I first began teaching at a religiously-affiliated college I occasionally would offer what I knew was a startling suggestion, the kind of comment an undergraduate teacher sometimes makes to prompt a discussion. I would suggest that given the failure of moral insight evidenced by the Church in the last two or so centuries (but especially in the twentieth century), perhaps the Church ought to call a moratorium on its moral claims, and back off, to think things through and rework the basics. Perhaps for a decade, perhaps for a century, Christianity ought to quiet its collective moral voice, in embarrassed if not shameful recognition of the many failures of that voice. After one says enough wrong things, the time comes to be quiet. My suggestion arose far from any intention of a thought experiment that would lead to a tacit endorsement of relativism.<sup>1</sup>

The acts by “corporate” Christianity that my students thought de-legitimized the moral authority of any church were of the sort reported and discussed on CNN and “portrayed” in films. The flaw that I thought most greatly de-legitimized modern Christian theology was the intellectual and moral respect it continued to show modern atheism long after the twentieth century had revealed—and continued to reveal—the violence beating in the heart of programmatic atheism. Was there anything in programmatic atheism’s creatures—National Socialism, Marxist Communism, and Scientificism—that had not revealed itself as tyrannical and vicious? And yet Christian theologians continued to treat atheism with intellectual respect, as if programmatic atheists were modern versions of free-thinkers in French *salons* (like, e.g., Voltaire). The fact that modern atheism had clearly revealed itself to have more in common with Jean-Paul Marat than with Voltaire was ignored: judgment was never passed.<sup>2</sup> The myth of self-definition of atheist thinkers was taken at face value: each such intellectual was treated as *sui-generis*—a philosophical freelancer, with no history that needed to be acknowledged and repented of.<sup>3</sup> While even the most independent of any free church Christianity, traditionally anti-Catholic and thus rejecting the history of Christianity prior to the 1860s, was nonetheless regarded as implicated in century old “crimes of Christianity” and denied any status of “freelancing,” atheism was a moral blank slate that could be, and had to be, taken seriously and respected: any atheist had no history that needed to be accounted for. In my eyes the credentialing of programmatic atheism was a deep moral and intellectual failure by modern theologians.<sup>4</sup>

It was “conservative” Christians who first objected to my hypothesis that the moral failure of the Church should lead it to be silent on moral questions. The Church had certain obligations to make judgments and to speak up about matters of sexuality, for example, and about the rights of the unborn in the face of their murder. However, as the discussion continued the outrage shifted its center: eventually it was the leftist Christians, “progressives,” that were most outraged with this suggested silencing of the Church’s moral voice. The Church had an obligation (then) to speak against the deployment of medium range nuclear-armed missiles in NATO; an obligation to speak against the continued existence of tyrannical regimes in Central America (and to denounce support for those regimes); and an obligation to support economic, racial and sexual social justice and to enact a “preferential option for the poor.” A morally silent Christianity, a Christianity that did not, could not, judge (which meant *accuse*), was a contradiction in terms. Class discussions could become quite energetic.<sup>5</sup>

What struck me during these discussions was not simply the shift in those Christians who felt the most attached to a morally pro-active Church, the shift from right to left, but that many of those (of whatever political persuasion) were outraged by my proposal because it left them with a Christianity lacking any recognizable content. If Christianity was not a moral system embracing some actions and denouncing others, it was nothing. Whether the denunciation was of gays or nukes was not as striking as the fact that many Christians did not simply value the religious capacity to make moral judgments, they *identified* this capacity with what “religion” meant. The denouement of this revelation came in another undergraduate class at another university, in which I assigned the Russian classic of spirituality, *The Way of a Pilgrim*. A number of the students felt that the pilgrim could not be Christian at all because he wanted to live in solitude. When I responded that perhaps one might have a relationship with God that was not necessarily routed through people, that is, a personal relationship with God directly and not only through one’s “neighbor,” these students recognized such a possibly as “psychotic.” Everyone on both sides of the political aisle seemed to assume that Christian attention belonged on the “practical” and on the narrative of Christ’s *ministry*, and to view the idea that “contemplation of the divine was the goal and root of theology” as virtually anti-Christian.<sup>6</sup> This assumption and this view together constitute a fundamental judgment of modern Christianity (*qua modern*).<sup>7</sup>

My students’ reactions can, in one sense, be easily explained: they were taught to have this understanding of Christianity—by the Church itself through its catechetical instruments. If the Church were herself ever vague on the priority of the ethical in Christian (specifically, Catholic) identity, then theologians, professors, teachers and instructors filled that vagueness with their own content. Now we have perhaps two full generations of Catholics who have been taught that Christianity is a kind of morality, or a kind of moral “openness” (to a secular closure).<sup>8</sup>

The present article develops primarily out of a concern for the way modern Christian understandings of evil express and support this fundamental judgment, namely, that the cause of evil can be truly identified.<sup>9</sup> The narrative of why we ought to judge casts *moral judgment* as the expression of each individual's knowledge of good and evil, a knowledge revealed in conscience, spirit, reason or sincerity. This narrative is thus the source of the problem of Christian moral judgment.<sup>10</sup> My secondary concern (which comes first in my exposition) is for the way modern Christian understandings of the *meaning* of pre-modern Christianity are taken as prolegomena to and justification for the fundamental judgment that Christian attention belongs on the "practical" and on the narrative of Christ's ministry, and rejects the idea that contemplation of the divine is the goal and root of theology.<sup>11</sup>

My task in this article is to explore the question of the "place" of moral questions—questions of good and evil—in Christian faith, "faith" here being considered particularly as the content or narrative of belief. The thesis I will argue is that Christianity offers no substantial account or explanation of the origin(s) and nature of evil, that in a fundamental way Christianity is not concerned with offering such accounts, and that when the task of supplying accounts of the origin(s) and nature of evil is made central to the content or narrative of Christian faith that faith is made false: it is misunderstood.<sup>12</sup> To use historical language to restate my thesis, I will argue that "catholic" or "orthodox" Christianity is distinguished precisely by a refusal to treat the questions of the origin and nature of evil as fundamental to the faith. I will argue that the way moderns read pre-modern texts excludes most of what could be regarded as "tradition"—especially that of doctrine. This exclusion has resulted in a misrepresentation of Christian faith, by eliminating the full narrative which expresses the content of the faith and which provides the basis by which select components of—or *moments in*—Christian faith are correctly understood. The misrepresentation of Christian faith identifies moral judgment based upon an account of the nature and origin of evil as decisive for and fundamental to the faith. The modern hermeneutical conclusion that the only continuing content of pre-modern texts into the modern world is their moral content colludes with the modern abandonment of doctrine as a fundamental and enduring element in Christian faith.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, for the purposes of this article what I am calling the "full narrative" is identified with the *regula fidei*, the creed, and with doctrinal assertions.<sup>14</sup>

Christianity does indeed make judgments about practice, exhorting some and damning others; the primitive "two ways" catechisms of the *Didache* and the *Epistle of Barnabas* are obvious witnesses to this fact. But the justification for such exhortations and condemnations remains in terms of the relationship between each of these two ways (or types of practice) and God. To do good is to walk towards (or with) God; to do evil is to walk away from (or without) God. What makes some actions good or evil is comprehensible only by referring the object to God: to be with God is virtue, to be without God is evil.

This reality can be understood only as a result of understanding how it is that humans understand God; for the Christian this means recognizing the decisive revelatory moment of the Incarnation, and how that moment relates to our condition (*geworfenheit* or “life in the diastemic mode”). The technical term for this human understanding of God is “wisdom”

The problem, then, comes down to this: If indeed it is true that Christianity has no proper explanation for evil, then to make such a proper explanation to evil central to Christian self-consciousness and self-definition requires two moves: misrepresenting the content and character of Christianity; and subordinating the content of Christianity to some other narrative which does have a “proper explanation for evil” such that Christianity receives this proper explanation to fill its own lack. My first task, then, is to locate the place of moral concerns within modern theology and to show how the content of Christian belief has been subordinated to—identified with—identifying and solving the problem of evil in the world. Such a task is diagnostic in nature, for it seeks to explain the “symptoms” evidenced in my stories (above) of a popular understanding of Christianity and faith. After the statement of a diagnosis I will turn to more remedial tasks, which include recounting the way(s) “full narrative” Christianity describes evil. The last section of this article turns to Augustine for his understanding of the way doctrine grounds (and must precede) Christian reflection on the problem of evil. The reader must keep in mind that the modern theology I am concerned with here is principally modern Roman Catholic theology in its academic setting. To make such a statement does not mean I will have nothing to say about Protestant theology, for it is a feature of modern Catholic theology that formally it shapes its methods upon Protestant theology, and that materially it borrows heavily from Protestant theology.

### *A Post-Modern Catholic Looks at Outdated Liberalism*

The best way to define the fundamental rhetorical purpose of modern Catholic Systematic theology is “The attempt to articulate Christianity in terms and concepts which non-believing intellectual elites can find reasonable.” Or, more practically, “To talk to the establishment of non-believing intelligentsia in terms which they can credit, understand and find respectable.” Speculative theology has rejected Scripture as an intellectual idiom due to both purposes: against the first purpose, Scripture is seen both as particularist (“triumphalist”) and simple or anachronistic, and thus offensive and off-bounds for modern theology; against the second purpose, the “conception of . . . Scripture as intended to draw Christians towards contemplation” of God is held suspect by modern theology<sup>15</sup>

In the twentieth century a counter-argument was made by what we might call the trajectory of Henri de Lubac, namely that, as Thomas says, Scripture was theology and vice versa: no theology could speak or reflect without

using Biblical idioms. Rahner could hardly accept that argument, but his students developed a strategy that defanged the de Lubac trajectory: speculative theology was indeed to be articulated in scriptural idiom, but it was a Scripture that was demythologized, in which the text was suggestive but not literally true. Properly demythologized, the Scriptural idioms could be preserved and contemporary theology articulated in many familiar terms whose meaning had been transposed into a more modern—i.e., “reasonable”—field. Bultmann, for example, gave systematians an understanding which allowed for the use of Scripture to articulate modern theology. By this understanding, the Christian story—the Gospel(s) especially—is a drama of Spirit seeking greater consciousness and revealing itself as what it is. The Gospel is about—and *only* truly about—Spirit. The “low” or “ascending” christologies of the Synoptics are apt stories of the struggle of Geist’s self-realization, while the “high” or “descending” christology of John is the story of Geist’s initiative in the process of self-realization. The “resurrection” is a moment in Spirit’s self-understanding, and has nothing to do with the body except insofar as the body leaves a trace memory upon spirit. Resurrection occurs not because one is saved but because one is spirit. The call to recognize change within spirit as the realm in which the Christian faith acts is well expressed in logion 50–51 of the Gospel of Thomas: “His disciples said to him: ‘When will the repose of the dead occur? And when will the new cosmos come?’ He said to them: ‘This thing which you expect has come, but you do not recognize it.’” This metaphysic leads us to a proper understanding of the tension between the “already—but not yet” eschatologies of the Gospels: transformation has already occurred in Spirit but not all spirits recognize the realized transformation that occurs outside empirical history. Some Christians, like the mystified disciples in logion 50–51, still look to a historical, empirical eschatology. However, the things the disciples hope for (to stay with the logion a moment longer) have indeed already happened in the realm of spirit; they are anthropological realities. The foolish, unfortunately, still seek to find them among the bodies, that is, as a historical event. Those who cling to history are the dead burying the dead.

The theology of Geist metaphysic identifies the real as what happens in the realm of spirit (Spirit). Christianity cannot rest its claim upon any historical, “positivist,” claims because—it is argued—everything from the virgin birth to the empty tomb lacks the possibility of empirical verification and, moreover, runs counter to our normal material expectations; thus we are left only with the possibility of logical verification. (“Logic” in a Hegelian sense of the word.) The argument runs like this: (1) “Empirical verification is a science with real rules and true judgments”; (2) “Most religious events are not verifiable under those rules and in those judgments”; and (3) “This is not a bad thing, because we really want to talk about something Super-real, i.e., outside the realm of empirical history.” The first two points can be used to stop any tendency among those who might want to take empirical history as

fundamental (the new “fundamentalists”), for history is, as has already been noted, particularist and therefore triumphalist, and that is bad. The Super-real is neither: it is perfectly general and universal: it is transcendental. Looking forward to what I will say about the modern Catholic Systematic tendency to reduce problems of epistemology to their social basis, it might seem as though an emphasis on Geist is antithetic to such materialism and that the two cannot co-exist in the same school of thought. In fact, however, the coexistence of a Geist “metaphysics” and epistemological materialism is a profound feature of one influential form of philosophy in the twentieth century, left-wing Hegelianism. It is left-wing Hegelianism that has been, in the twentieth century, both the dominant form of Hegelianism and the most intellectually credible form of Marxism.<sup>16</sup>

One peculiar feature of modern theological statements about the limits imposed upon theologumena by the “rules of science” cannot be passed over and needs to be noted. The truth claims made for the rules and judgments of science allow the above argument(s) to be presented as though it were a statement made within the realm of scholarly or academic discourse. But scholarly discourse is characterized by authentication, and by that I do not mean experimentation but credentialing. In an academic institution, a serious question about biochemistry is asked of a biochemist—not because one expects that the biochemist has performed some experimental verification but because the biochemist has apprenticed to the body of knowledge called biochemistry: she or he has a Ph.D. in biochemistry. For exactly the same reason any statement by a biochemist on the historical fact of Shakespeare’s Catholicism or the difference between Ionic and Attic aorist declensions would not be regarded as scholarly. Theologians with a Ph.D. in theology can speak in a scholarly way about the field of theology, but any statement about the integrity of scientific method or about how much of what happens in the empirical world is verifiable by scientific means must necessarily be nothing more than amateur enthusiasm, even if those statements happen to travel within scholarly discourses on theology. The validity of this criticism is implicitly acknowledged in one important way: modern theology based upon Geist metaphysic proceeds from the presupposition that there is no credentialed discourse that has the specific authority to speak about spirit because spirit is experienced within the act of living and not through the means of any specialized method or technique. In contemporary theology, *being alive* is the authenticating criterion that allows a theologian to speak about Geist. Just as Kant’s limitations on what religion can know are bracketed off, so are any claims by academic science: spirit is the pre-condition of consciousness, and reflecting upon our spirits we are in truth seeing through to Spirit.

A final observation can be offered on Geist metaphysics and modern theology: the debt to Geist metaphysics is not always clear in modern theologies because systematians interweave different narratives with no sense of the contradictions between these narratives and their different historical gene-

alogies. Philosophies are treated as though their constitutive concepts are modular and parts can be mixed and matched freely at the initiative of the theologian. Moreover, the discipline as a whole has opted for a form of discourse that does not own up to its allegiances and feels no need or obligation to do so. Even where one might expect a clear choice to be made—Kant or Hegel?—the boundaries between the alternatives are dissolved in the vehicle of appropriation, for both Hegel and Kant are mediated to moderns via themes of German idealism. There are systematicians who demand metaphysics (e.g., Karl Rahner), and systematicians who declare themselves free of it (e.g., Jürgen Moltmann), but the difference between the two kinds lies primarily in the fact that the second group has given up acknowledging what it is doing.

*The Ethical Foundations of Post-Christian Roman Catholic Theology*<sup>17</sup>

In modern theology there is an understanding that some cultural event or moment has occurred which divides western history into two unequal eras or epochs: these two eras or epochs may be called the pre-modern and the modern. This understanding belongs to more than just modern theology, and in modern theology itself this understanding is derived from a host of influences. The momentous event that divides history is, for modern theology, best articulated and explained in the language of modern philosophy (especially some hermeneutical theory) while at the same time the movement from one era to another is thought to be reflected best in “science.” For such moderns, this epoch-making event is adequately captioned by the title “the Enlightenment.” The result of this epoch-making event is that all pre-modern “texts” (including events, symbols, expressions of self-consciousness and self-definitions: so, “artifacts”) no longer hold any intrinsic or self-evident significance for “readers” on the other side of that epoch-making moment, i.e., moderns. Pre-modern texts are now blank slates. (The “monuments” have been sand-blasted.) Whatever significance pre-modern texts may continue to occasion for modern consciousness results from the projection of modern meaning back onto these texts: the significance of pre-modern artifacts occurs exclusively insofar as they function as screens onto which modern meaning is projected. A modern judgment to preserve a pre-modern text-artifact is always utilitarian to the extent that preservation depends directly upon the text-artifact’s suitability as a screen for modern meaning (and modern meaning-making). It is worth noting here, even if in passing, that a seemingly obvious question which does *not* get asked is “How do we distinguish this hypothetically *progressive* meaning-loss and the accompanying text-artifact destruction from *repression*, which, after all, manifests itself in precisely the same processes of epoch-centered meaning-loss and text-artifact destruction?”<sup>18</sup>

For such modern theologians who are Roman Catholic, even if only professionally or as a job description, the greatness of any given modern theologian is to be found in the programmatic skill with which that theologian handles pre-modern text-artifacts (e.g., Scripture, liturgy, the creed of 381), projecting modern significance onto pre-modern screens without—as it were—“breaking” those artifacts. From this perspective the master modern Catholic theologian is often thought to be Karl Rahner. However, the need to handle pre-modern text-artifacts among modern Catholic theologians is itself transitional for modern theology, and as the project of “enacting the modern” (i.e., declaring the limits of the continuity of meaning) progresses, Catholic theologians have lost the imperative to handle-without-breaking (or in Catholic Systematic jargon, “preserve”) the text-artifacts.<sup>19</sup> As this imperative fades away, modern Catholic theologians are seen to become more like modern (i.e., liberal or “progressive”) Protestant theologians in the casuistry they employ to justify the loss of traditional Christian text-artifacts. However, it is important to say clearly that there are really two “moderns” or modernities in contemporary theology. The “First Modernity” of theology regards the cultural events of the last four hundred years as decisive for defining authentic content and method in theology and religion. The “Second Modernity” of theology regards the cultural events of the twentieth century as decisive for the same definitions.<sup>20</sup> The first of these eras or patterns of thought is largely identical with the cultural forms (here, particularly, forms of thought) associated with the Enlightenment. If the first moment of this era is not quite agreed upon (does it “begin” with, e.g., Bacon or Descartes?), the dissolution of this modernity may safely be said to have begun in the twentieth century, most clearly after the Second World War. It is in fact the pulling away of the second of these “modernities” from the first which makes the identity and limits of the “First Modern” clear, for while there is a fundamental commonality between the two “moderns,” there is also a distinction between them—a distinction which sometimes grows into a tension between the two.<sup>21</sup> “First Modern” Catholic theologians pride themselves on their ability to handle pre-modern text-artifacts; “Second Modern” Catholic theologians are clear that the status of such text-artifacts as screens for meaning-projection is entirely accidental.<sup>22</sup>

For example, First Modern theology typically justifies Christian pluralism of doctrine and method by adopting a modern thesis like Walter Bauer’s, that Christianity *originally* was pluralistic in its expression and content. This judgment appeals to a logic still theological in character. Second Modern theology typically justifies pluralism in doctrine and method by appealing to an understanding of anthropological realities, i.e., the manifest diversity of human nature. This line of thought is no longer based upon a theological logic.<sup>23</sup> Politically, these two modernities co-exist as factions in a common “party,” as it were, but the academic ascendancy of Second Modernity has seen the bracketing off of the history and content of First Modernity. The

heart of First Modern theology, the years 1550 to 1950, has been relegated to what one scholar has called “The New Dark Ages.”<sup>24</sup> This bracketing-off has occurred for what must be considered—from the perspective of the logic of Second Modern theology—a legitimate reason: First Modern theology, like the Enlightenment form of thought that supports it, is in fact too much like the pre-modern theology and general form of thought it ostensibly intended to replace. The commonality between pre-modern and First Modern theologies can be dramatized in the common existence of a “scholasticism” or manualism in both. In terms of affect, First Modern theology draws upon and projects “universal” feelings; Second Modern theology draws upon and projects “contextual” anger. The affect of pre-modern theology was (for lack of a better word) “worship,” that is, an emotion combining delight and sadness in a variety of mixtures. Post-modern theology—not “spun” Second Modern theology—will, I think, draw heavily upon sadness, since both forms of modern theologies have worked so hard at expelling sadness from Christian self-consciousness.<sup>25</sup> (How many congregations singing “On Eagle’s Wings” realize it is a Christological hymn and not a hymn about the believer? It is this latter common misunderstanding that makes it so popular for funerals.)

For what I am calling the “Second Modern” generation of Catholic systematians, the delicate job performed by, e.g., Rahner, is respected for its pivotal contribution to the continuing project of enacting the modern,<sup>26</sup> although for this second generation of Catholic systematians<sup>27</sup> it is clear that the time for such a contribution has substantially passed. In the judgment of this second generation of Catholic theologians (among others), what properly answers to the title “post-modern” is that contemporary thought which begins with the assumption that the significance of pre-modern artifacts occurs exclusively insofar as they function as screens onto which meaning is projected. For Second Moderns, modern thought is understood to have resisted the teleological presuppositions characteristic of pre-modernity by taking on the notion of “objectivity”—just as, according to Harnack, early Christianity inoculated itself against *radical* hellenization by taking on *chronic* hellenization.<sup>28</sup> Second Modernism thus aims to finish the reform of modern consciousness by stripping away the no-longer-needed remedial attachment to the myth of objectivity—just as liberal Protestantism stripped chronic hellenization (i.e., “doctrine”) from Christian self-consciousness.<sup>29</sup>

There is one exception to the “fact” of the discontinuity in significance between the pre-modern and the modern. The one and only meaning in the pre-modern that remains significant for the modern is *moral content*.<sup>30</sup> We moderns can still recognize the moral concerns of pre-moderns, even if we do not share those precise moral concerns. We do not, after all, share the same moral concerns with all of our contemporaries, as continuing ideological struggle teaches us. The exceptional continuity of moral significance across the epoch-making event indicates that moral concerns (i.e., theory and prac-

tion) constitute the single and exclusive distinguishing feature inherent to human consciousness continuously available in human history, however distorted that human consciousness (i.e., moral concern) may be at times. It remains a given that such moral concerns are to be found in their most substantial and sophisticated form in modern consciousness. Phenomenologically, the modern theology which thinks through other forms of theology by referring the ostensive content of those forms to moral concerns I call "ethical-impulse" theology. The end result of this referral is the dissolution of doctrine per se or doctrine as content in itself. An older, conspicuous example of such "ethical-impulse" theology dissolving doctrine would be the theology of John Hick. However, Hick's theology cannot be considered as mainstream and a better illustration of such a referring of the ostensive content of doctrine (with its epistemological claims) to moral concerns can be seen in work of Moltmann, whose theology may be described as a re-mythologizing of the basic narrative for the sake of fortifying the moral imperatives revealed in the narrative.<sup>31</sup>

A third, slightly more ambiguous, example of the constraints of ethical-impulse theology may be seen in the continuing failure of many "Radical Orthodoxy" theologians to treat doctrine in any substantial way, to the point where even a sympathetic reader can wonder if what truly is being developed is simply a post-British Empire Anglican theology (occasionally re-articulated as the desire to develop a post-"American Empire" theology). Finally, in the case of Roman Catholic systematians it may be remarked that whatever Rahner may have meant when he said that Christian theology has no technical language of its own but must constantly appropriate such language from other sources, this judgment now represents a paradigmatic theoretical justification for the "appropriation" of political-moral accounts of reality.

I can illustrate the kind of judgment I am positing in modern theology by working through some text-artifacts. For modern theologians, certain words/ideas are archaic artifacts, really archeological artifacts, which must be recognized as such. These words/ideas have been passed on as though they still carried meaning, but in fact they do not. Such meaningless-but-not-recognized-as-such words/ideas include "miracle," "being," "heaven," "resurrection," etc. These words are unrecognized empty signifiers. What is most decisive about their character is not that they are "empty" but that they are not recognized as such. People use words such as "miracle," "being," "heaven," "resurrection" (etc.) without realizing that unless and until modern significance is projected onto them, these words mean nothing beyond position-filling, or social-recognition totems (like tattoos). If one unpacks the word "miracle" (etc.), then one realizes there is no experience that corresponds to the literal meaning of the word. Moreover, the literal meaning runs afoul of, and thus contradicts, the world of experience that we *do* (assuredly) have. As a New Testament scholar once put it to me, when

speaking of the impossibility of New Testament miracles and thus the necessity of “other” readings of such NT passages: “We live in the same world they lived in, there are not two worlds, and there are no miracles in our world.” Such a judgment reflects what Martin Hengel identified in these terms: “The fundamental axiom of ‘the historical critical method’ is the postulate of ‘one reality’ which can be comprehended by men and is at their disposal; in history this presents itself as ‘the similarity in principle of all historical events’ (Troeltsch).”<sup>32</sup> For such theologians losing the word “miracle” (etc.) and replacing it with something else (e.g., “social transformation,” an “empowering myth,” “cynic pronouncement,” or a “legitimizing of structure”) constitutes not simply erasing a false word (like “unicorn”) but a moral growth through the recognition of that falsity. A similar case of moral growth arising out of the recognition of false terminology would be the rejection of racial or ethnic slurs or—more analogously—not using “Santa Claus.”

There is one more point to be made here about the character of contemporary theology. Even while limits are being drawn on the confidence with which one can assent to the products of any given epistemology, there is an implicit assumption that one can nonetheless confidently assert facts about moral relationships in the world: we can know that “X is doing bad thing Y to Z now” or “In the past X did bad thing Y to Z.” In some quarters this “moral epistemology” qualifies not simply as a “science,” but as *the sole science*.<sup>33</sup> Fuzzy articulations of this confident moral knowing can sound as if they derive from Aristotle’s definition of politics as the art of what is possible to do, but more succinct assertions of this moral knowledge make clear that its certainty lies in the social character of its epistemological objects: to paraphrase Marx on Feuerbach, there is “a resolving of the epistemological world into its social basis.”<sup>34</sup> This epistemological certainty may be said both to make possible and to derive from the exceptional continuity of moral significance across otherwise discontinuous history (as I described just above). Prior to any contemporary theological narrative that would centralize moral concerns generally, and the problem of evil specifically, is the hermeneutical presupposition that only such concerns can “carry” across time and culture, and that only such concerns can be known with certainty—or with enough certainty to make them actionable.<sup>35</sup> The most trivial but most common theological expression of this hermeneutical presupposition is the a priori judgment that “-isms” such as racism and sexism are real, significant and actionable in a way in which such “-isms” as modalism, subordinationism and atheism are not.<sup>36</sup> A more sophisticated but less common expression of this hermeneutical presupposition is that there is an epistemology distinct to moral anthropology, and that this epistemology does not operate under the same limitations as any other epistemology inherent in other anthropologies. In fact, this “moral epistemology” may be said to operate outside the realms of other anthropological epistemologies

generally.<sup>37</sup> Theologians badly trained in philosophy think that Heidegger “proves” this.

*The Modern Understanding of Evil: Moral Purity and Magic Thinking*

In modern moral theology, knowledge of the cause(s) of evil can be attained with our “normal equipment for knowing” and its appropriation is a “natural consequence of the facts.”<sup>38</sup> Not everyone is prepared to know the truth of the cause(s) of evil; some are held back by their own wills (or the wills of others), but nothing beyond unfettered reason is necessary to understand the origins of evil. Not revelation (i.e., mythology) nor even experience is necessary. “Unfettered” reason is that reason free from states (both senses) of coercion, and reason that approaches the problem of evil seeking a solution, i.e., with a commitment to or for the existence of a solution. (“If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.”)

Even though modern moral theology maintains that the cause of and solution for moral evil can be identified rationally, in fact the people who—and institutions that—are judged evil are experienced and treated as stains or defilements.<sup>39</sup> In this sensibility the products of evil are evil not only in their function but by their very existence: they are contaminants. This kind of “unfettered reason” seeks purity in its mental and physical space, an ethical room of its own. The quest for interior purity is not new, but what distinguishes the modern moral quest is its rejection of previous quests for purity because of their irrationality and their lack of enduring meaning. The other feature of the modern moral quest is its inability to articulate a justification for the new moral purity that is not fascist.<sup>40</sup>

If one cannot separate the perception and sensation of an outside object from the feelings and thoughts created in oneself by the object then one has entered the moral realm of defilement and purity (in which the object *is* what I judge it to be) and the pre-condition for magic thinking. When one believes that the strength of one’s moral feelings and thoughts will command obedience from outside objects (not to mention people), then one enters the realm of magic thinking.<sup>41</sup> If you stand in the way of a tank or bulldozer expecting to die, that is realism; if you stand in the way of a tank or bulldozer expecting it to stop because you will it to stop, or because you are “special,” that is magic thinking.<sup>42</sup> Empathy can quickly become magic thinking. “If I feel as they feel, [then] they can feel as I feel”<sup>43</sup> becomes “If I feel as they feel, then that will cause them to feel as I feel.” In this case there is a psychological move from knowledge of others by analogy—as Augustine describes in *Confessions* Book I—to power over others by adualism. The role of power in this example is obvious—“By what I do I can make them feel as I feel”—but the role of insecurity is no less relevant: “If I feel what they feel, then they will feel what I feel and *not hurt me*.”<sup>44</sup>

One significant effect of the belief that there is a reasonable cause for evil (and thus evil is subject to being changed by reason) is a willingness to value an attempt to change evil through reason over the life of individuals. The argument runs something like this: if evil can be changed through reason, then when faced with evil we are morally obliged to attempt to use reason to change evil—to “reason with evil.” By this logic, then, any act which pre-emptly the attempt to use reason to change evil is by this very fact irrational and immoral. Mass murder (to take the most dramatic case) counts as an evil, but the fact of this specific evil does not override the moral obligation to try to “reason with [this] evil.” If someone continues their evil action (e.g., mass murder) amidst the attempt to reason, the guilt of that action is imputed to them (and only to them).

The modern “progressive” theologian’s willingness to value an attempt to change evil through reason over the life of individuals is in fact especially illustrated by their responses to genocide. When recognized, genocide-in-progress provokes vocal condemnation and programmatic denunciation. Progressive sensibilities mobilize in the effort to stop the killing through negotiation and world public opinion. But nothing is done to stop the killing *now*: to prevent the loss of life that will happen during the time when parties negotiate a dialogue that is only the prelude to negotiation over the killing. The deaths of multiple thousands while dialogue and the peace process “continues” is accepted as inevitable, a tragic consequence of a commitment to resolving conflict through reasoned discourse. Physical intervention to stop the deaths—through military action—is avoided as irrational: the inevitable morally-ambivalent effects of military action—innocent deaths—are grounds for rejecting intervention. The inevitable morally-ambivalent effects of rational discourse—innocent deaths—are not grounds for rejecting negotiation. There is hardly any recent history which escapes this model; Darfur is but the most contemporary case.<sup>45</sup> The willingness of Western theologians to countenance the deaths of thousands and thousands of people of color for the sake of a “peace process” is as undeniable as it is nauseating, but it is entirely rational by modern enlightenment standards.<sup>46</sup> Reason first, human life second.<sup>47</sup> What must be made clear, however, is that the “reason” in question is the reason of magic thinking, the logic of defilement and purity. If I do not see it, I am not stained—like Noah’s sons covering their naked father. Invisible people, those unseen in the imagination, literature or video, are, in fact, no longer people *of any color*.

### *Is a Moral Modern Theology Possible?*

I began this essay by referring to my heuristic proposal of a hypothetical response to a perceived moral failure on the part of the church. There is one other moral failure to be described before I turn to a pre-modern account of evil in which evil is not explained but is understood to be out-narrated by the

act of the Trinity in the Incarnation. This moral failure is not a failure of the Church as institution or hierarchy, but a failure within Catholic theology and among those who understand their academic office to function as an alternative magisterium for the Church.

Attention is regularly drawn to the question of Vatican complicity or self-interest in dealing with Nazi Germany. Motives for contemporary attention to this question vary from the apportionment of past guilt or moral failure to a general delegitimizing of Papal authority in the post-World War II world, i.e., such a moral failure terminates the moral authority of Rome for Catholics. I cannot offer any judgments on whatever degrees of moral failure the hierarchy of the Catholic Church may have suffered in the late 1930s. The more important point, however, is that to whatever degree there was a problematic moral character of the relationship between the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the Third Reich, this problematic moral character is an important part of precisely what makes Papal or Curial theology "modern." My reading is this: it has been a distinctive feature of *modern theology* that it is characterized by an ambiguous or problematic moral or intellectual relationship with the culture of National Socialism. In fundamental ways, to be a *modern* theologian is to be a theologian entangled intellectually and thus morally with National Socialism. (This entanglement is not limited to Catholic theologians.) One can draw an arc of such entanglements which range at one end from the conscious and wholly engaged participation in National Socialism to be found in Martin Heidegger, to the other end with the seemingly pre-volitional participation in the Nazi war machine of Jürgen Moltmann. Within this arc one can map out a variety of degrees of complicity ranging from historical involvement and clear moral culpability to historical involvement with no apparent moral culpability.

Obviously, Heidegger represents a special and exceedingly troublesome case for established schools of modern theology because of the coincidence of two facts: (1) Heidegger's role in the construction of a specifically modern consciousness in theology is substantial and in many trajectories decisive; and (2) Heidegger's involvement in National Socialism was total, ranging from intellectual conceptualization to social action. Heidegger was no "accidental" Nazi; or if he was, then he was a fool.<sup>48</sup> (Heidegger was still paying his party dues in April of 1945.) In short, then, I am saying that post-World War II theology (which here equals "modern") is indebted at a fundamental conceptual level and at an articulation-of-doctrine level to figures whose status vis-à-vis Nazi ideology or the fact of the Third Reich ranges from wholly impugned to problematic. Moltmann may have offered a narrative of disclosure and discovery which maps his movement from problematic participation in the Third Reich to redemption—and we may even be inclined to take that narrative at face value—but most practitioners of modern theology have not worked through the question of the need for their own

analogous intellectual movement and narrative. Why in this case do we find among theologians—and Scripture scholars—no worry about stain and contagion?

In every era questions about the authenticity and reading of a theologian can include the problem of the moral status of the author, when the deviation of that author seems either excessive or contradictory to the message.<sup>49</sup> However, the problem of the ambiguous relationship with the Third Reich is historically specific to “modern” theology, and represents a particular problem with “modern” theology, whereas, e.g., the case of an out-of-control passion of a theologian reflects a problem not specific to modern theology. One cannot say that a moral discontinuity (or contradiction) is specifically indicative or a characteristic of modern theology, but one can say that the problem of physical and intellectual participation in the Third Reich is specifically indicative or a characteristic of modern theology (qua “modern”). The most specific visible effect of the “openness” that American Catholic Systematic theology has to this intellectual heritage may be the progressive (in both senses of that word) “disinterest” in Judaism by such Catholics.

One lesson that modern theology may have learned from the Third Reich is the survival benefit of cultural collaboration and the inhibiting effect martyrdom has on the development and promulgation of one’s own theology. *Opposition leading to death—“martyrdom”—is ineffective at every level except one: personal moral integrity or purity.*<sup>50</sup> There is a regularly expressed sentimental cliché that the effect of killing one’s opponent is to turn her or him into a “martyr”—and so to give that opponent more presence and authority dead than when alive.<sup>51</sup> The truth, however, is that *the signifying value of an individual’s death can always be contained and ultimately negated by surrounding that death with even more death.* How many Christians were martyred in Japan? What is the name of one of the fourteen million kulaks killed by Stalin?<sup>52</sup> The fact remains that the dead are silent and whatever voice they might have depends upon the memory, attentiveness and will of the living.<sup>53</sup> If any of these three fail in us, the living, the dead—including martyrs and dead theologians—cease to connote.<sup>54</sup> But if one is alive one can not only later repent, one can publish in the meantime. Even though one worked for the Vichy government, one can afterwards become a journalist and found an important newspaper, e.g., *Le Monde*, as Hubert Beuve-Mery did; or, like another Petainist government bureaucrat, one can become a politician and go on to become Prime Minister of France, as did François Mitterand.

I turn now from the broad subject of the moral roots of post-Christian Catholic theology (though I did not mean to exclude the post-Christian theology of other denominations) to a pre-modern account of evil, and the example of a modern Christian living by a pre-modern account of evil. There are, of course, a variety of pre-modern accounts of evil, and I am concentrating on the one I think cuts straight to the modern (First and Second) under-

standing that the cause of evil can be known (and thus eliminated through praxis). I turn to the pre-modern account of evil that does not explain evil, but out-narrates it: that of Augustine.<sup>55</sup>

### *The Conscience as Fall*

Despite their differences, most modern Catholic moral theologies have in common the important and central role they give to “conscience.” The conscience figures as a kind of black box in moral theologies: mysterious in content and origin but integral to any account of moral acts.<sup>56</sup> The ubiquity of the assumption in Catholic moral theologies of the fundamental role conscience plays in moral decision-making owes—it may reasonably be suggested—not to Thomas Aquinas and scholasticism, but to Alphonsus Liguori.<sup>57</sup> It is difficult for a modern, intelligent Catholic not to read St. Paul as though he were St. Alphonsus Liguori, busily separating conscience from the burden of law. For St. Augustine, Paul is separating virtue from intention, since for Augustine the law we are most burdened and enslaved by is that of our own will (*Conf.* VIII.v.10).<sup>58</sup> For most of the *Confessions* Augustine’s story is that of his attempt to become virtuous: to achieve beatitude. Augustine’s unhappiness with his sexual distraction means he can measure his progress in virtue in a concrete manner: to the degree that he is free of the force of sexual desire so has he reached virtue. The very concrete and specific identity—for Augustine—of a life without virtue simplifies the question, *What is virtue?* as well as *Am I now virtuous?* Such simple measures of virtue are not without precedent in classical moral psychology or drama; the courses of tragedies are driven by some great single flaw in a protagonist (e.g., the lives of Medea or Oedipus). A life of virtue is equivalent to a life free from the control of tragic passion. Augustine seeks virtue from where he knows he ought to find it: in moral philosophy, the search for wisdom, and paideia.

The path to virtue that Augustine accepts and sets upon is the same path a modern would accept and set upon: education. Antique culture presumed that virtue could be taught—if the student possessed sufficient native intelligence and tuition. Philosophy was nothing else than the shaping of desire through the education of mind. Those bright enough to understand the truth would, through that knowledge, be able to harness their own passions and rescue themselves from their private tragedies. Augustine is a schoolman; he knows that the means of virtue are words, and he searches to hear the words that will silence his passion and seat virtue within him. Augustine initially hoped this course of words would be easy, as was learning Latin, but he comes to understand that learning the words that will teach him virtue is hard; the words are progressively stranger and more foreign, and despite his study the words remain ineffective. There is no virtue. Augustine has been taught to expect that he can be brought to virtue through education: the right lesson, the right habit, the right teacher, and then Augustine will be measured

virtuous by the very standard he has set for himself, chastity. But this never happens; the culture (and cultivation) of virtue—*paideia*—fails. The word we have for the enculturing of virtue is *formation*, and neither the liberal nor the conservative Christian doubts that formation must be maintained sufficient for the desired outcome: virtue led by the right belief. Liberals and conservatives may disagree over whether the stories necessary for moral formation are the novels of the marginalized or the lives of the saints, but they share the belief that the right culture of the correct words will *reduce*—as a besieged city is “reduced”—vice and seat virtue.

As Augustine finished writing *Confessions* he also completed two letters to his mentor, the new bishop of Milan, Simplicianus. At the end of the second letter Augustine draws Simplicianus’ attention to the way virtue and vice are played out in the people around them, the way, in fact, they are played out in violation of the expectations of formation and *paideia*. “Don’t we see that many of our faithful people walking in the way of God suffer when compared in ability not just to the heretics but even with fools? Don’t we see that there are some men and women who live blamelessly in a chaste marriage who are heretics or pagans or so luke-warm in the faith and the Church that we are amazed when we see them surpassed not only in patience and temperance but also in faith, hope and charity by prostitutes and charlatans who suddenly convert?”<sup>59</sup> In short, Augustine says, the appearance of virtue often comes as a surprise, for it appears in those who totally lacked prior formation. If C. S. Lewis was “surprised by joy,” then Augustine is surprised by virtue.

What Augustine observes in the untutored laity who were previously given over to sin is the same truth he discovered in his own life: it is not education or *paideia* that enables the will to turn to the good; it is God-given grace. This Spirit blows where it wills. I am not saying that, for Augustine, God never forms an individual for receiving grace, or that the gift of virtue always stands outside any personal—or world—history. To the contrary, *Confessions* is nothing less than Augustine’s retrospective account of the ways God was shaping his life so that he would be able to respond to the gift of the grace of conversion; the way that God shaped Augustine’s life was precisely through the quest for wisdom and virtue. But Augustine is clear that the actions God took to bring him to salvation consisted of re-ordering the products of Augustine’s intentions (i.e., “grace”). For example, Augustine’s reason for going to Milan was to gain Imperial recognition of his oratory skills and thus to enter government. Augustine went to Milan as part of his project of moving up in the world. What actually happened to Augustine in Milan was his encounter with the circle of platonic Christians represented by Simplicianus and Ambrose. (His reconciliation with his mother also occurs in Milan.) At this point Augustine’s career as a rhetor coasted to a stop even as he became a catechumen in the Catholic Church. The story in *Confessions* of Augustine’s decisions and his conscious quest is revealed to be but a tremor in a tide pushing him to true faith. God’s unfolding of Augustine’s moral life

“out-narrates” the story he was, literally, telling as his own. A proper account of Augustine’s conversion requires a perspective far beyond that of the psychological or intentional, and indeed Augustine’s last perspective on the story of his conversion is, in the last books of the *Confessions*, far beyond the drama of his own life. The cause of virtue in us is only slightly less mysterious than the cause of evil. The mystery of virtue is diminished only because we know its original and originating cause, God; the original or originating cause of evil, on the other hand, always remains unknown and unknowable, in significant part because ultimately it is ourselves.

There are three key doctrines in Augustine’s theology that act to overturn the tyranny of the knowledge of good and evil. The first is Augustine’s theology of grace; the second is his theology of God’s providence. Both theological notions dislocate the yoke of the knowledge of good and evil; they render it, if not null and void, then of limited hermeneutical and anthropological significance. Grace performs an end-run around the knowledge of good and evil, removing it as necessary for acts of virtue, and, as well, providing an entirely new basis for virtue: virtue no longer begins with the will, and it no longer “merits” anything. Virtue now begins with grace. If we remember that for Kant a human “person” is someone who can gain merit for her or his actions, then we can begin to glimpse just how radically grace de-centers, and then renders obsolete, any “personal,” i.e., reasonable, claims to natural conscience, and the privileging of that conscience as a source for decision-making.<sup>60</sup>

The second key Augustinian doctrine that acts to overturn the tyranny of the knowledge of good and evil is his notion of divine providence. For any act to be evil it would have to be able to resist its participation in the working out of God’s ultimate goal, but nothing is capable of resisting the telos of God’s will, therefore nothing can stand outside God’s providence. What is in God’s providence is not truly evil; it is only provisionally so. From our perspective something may seem evil, but we must understand that we can only call it that—know it as such—relatively and, as I said, provisionally. The true worth of anything is unknown to us, because the true role of any physical and psychological event in God’s providence is unknown. The calculus of good versus evil turns out to be chaos theory; some deed in the rain forests of Brazil (a murder, or the rescue of a child from a jaguar) fits into a pattern of events which are unchartable to human knowledge. Our ability to actually see, recognize and map out these consequences is not any less, and certainly not any more, than our ability to actually see, recognize and map out the rippling effect upon the ecosphere of a butterfly flapping its wings in a Brazilian rainforest. In both cases what makes the rippling effect plausible, even though we cannot directly observe the continuity of effects, is a faith that there exists a kind of closed system for causes and effects. God provides the unity to the chaos of actions by His providence; the system is closed because history will have an end. Just as “chaos theory” requires us to

reconceive cause and effect as well as descriptive mathematics, a theology of providence requires us to reconceive intention and effect, while it also gives us a new perspective on history.<sup>61</sup>

*Privation: Out-Narrating Evil*

The third key doctrine in Augustine's theology that acts to overturn the tyranny of the knowledge of good and evil is his doctrine of evil as privation. The theory of privation has two important "moments" that are related but distinct from one another. The first "moment" is the understanding that evil is the lack of some specific capacity or feature fundamental to the identity of an existent. An eye is supposed to see, and the loss of sight may properly be called an evil. It is not fundamental to the identity of skin or a head that it be covered with hair, so baldness cannot really be spoken of as an evil. Evil thus has no existence in itself, and may indeed be understood precisely as a specific lack of being: evil is an incompleteness, a disease or a flaw. Both Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, for example, understood evil not as some *thing* that existed, that is, not as some substance, but as a lack of existence, a deprivation or brokenness in something. Thus Gregory says, "For as sight is an activity of nature, and blindness a deprivation of that natural operation, such is the kind of opposition between virtue and vice. It is, in fact, not possible to form any other notion of the origin of vice than as the absence of virtue. For as when the light has been removed the darkness supervenes, but as long as it is present there is no darkness, so, as long as the good is present in the nature, vice is a thing that has no inherent existence; while the departure of the better state becomes the origin of its opposite."<sup>62</sup> Obviously the point of departure for such an understanding of good and evil is the denial of any theory of radical dualism. Both Gregory and Augustine have the Manichees in mind as advocates of a radical dualism, in which evil has what can be called a "positive" existence.<sup>63</sup> However, the roots of the concern are not in the rebuttal of radical dualism, but in refuting the notion of co-eternal prime matter, that is, in the development of a Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>64</sup>

The second "moment" in classical privation theory is a ranking of existents according to the relative fullness of their being. This produces a hierarchy of worth which begins with God and descends into rational creatures, then irrational creatures, then to lifeless creatures. This finds illustration in Augustine's famous (to those in the know) statement that a bad human still has more worth than a good ape, even Koko. Gregory of Nyssa will talk about such a hierarchy, but he never links this "second moment" in privation theory to the "first," as Augustine does.

There are, however, two applications of, or conclusions from, privation theory that are not generally recognized in accounts of the theory. The first such application or conclusion is that evil cannot be the proper subject of any

narrative. Or, to put this in a slightly different, more developed, form: what is usually understood as an ontological account of good and evil also brings forward a hermeneutical account of evil and a judgment on the narrative play of evil. If we understand “is” as “subject of speech” or “active agent,” and “is not” as “not a subject of speech” or “not an active agent” then the impossibility of speaking of evil directly is clear. Evil can never be the subject of speech; it only can be spoken of insofar as one speaks of the good, that is, something that is, some subject. If we ask, “What is the narrative value or content of privation?” the answer is “none.” The fact that privation theory prevents evil (as such) from being narrated (as it is in, e.g., the “mythologies” of radical dualism) has been taken by some critics to be a weakness or flaw in privation theory. That privation theory prevents any meaningful narration of evil (considered simply as evil) is rather the strength or virtue of the theory. Any narrative of “evil” reaches a limit at which point it becomes clear that any such narrative must become an account of intentionality. (Thus, from a catholic Christian perspective, one cannot simply describe Satan as “evil personified”: traditionally, the question of Satan’s evilness becomes the question of “What did Satan want?” Early articulations—in Judaism and in Christianity—of Satan’s identity and existence turn upon his intention: Satan possesses a *second desire* to God’s.)

While it is obvious that the *Confessions* explore the experience and identity of evil, what has seemed less obvious is that Augustine’s account of evil takes place within a larger narrated understanding of the experience and identity of good, the Good. It is worth pausing to note what might otherwise seem trivial: that in the *Confessions* Augustine explains that while there is a “Good,” there is no corresponding “Evil.” There is really only one fundamental principle or cause, the Good, and whatever happens, whatever there is, *is* through the action of this Good. Evil neither causes nor explains anything. The wit and beauty of the *Confessions* is that Augustine can make such an assertion without falling prey to the blindness of sentimentality; indeed, Augustine can make such an assertion while at the same time offering one of the best descriptions that humans have produced of the experience of evil. In the *Confessions* the recurring question of evil is always positioned within a narrative of salvation. For Augustine there is no explanation of evil in itself; any account of evil exists only by virtue of a real account of good. A privation account of evil is not refusing to talk about evil, it is an out-narrating of evil. This fact is expressed by Augustine in the famous passage from *City of God*:

One should not try to find an efficient cause for a wrong choice. It is not a matter of efficiency but of deficiency; the evil will is not effective but defective. For to begin to have an evil will, is to defect from him who is the supreme existence to something of less reality. To try to discover the causes of such defections—deficient not efficient causes—is like trying to see darkness or hear silence.<sup>65</sup>

In the *City of God* Augustine offers us several case studies in which he takes the most extreme examples of social and individual evil and shows how each is to be truly understood as a miscarriage of a good intention. The social example of extreme evil is *war*; the individual example of extreme evil is a famous individual in the literature of the time named Cacus whose life contained every possible form of human depravity. War, Augustine says, is waged for the goal of peace, and peace is a good. This explanation does not excuse whatever occurs in a war, but it does mean that any general account of war that describes it as existing for its own sake—i.e., for the sake of violence in itself—is wrong.<sup>66</sup> Augustine's account of Cacus is more detailed. Cacus was a legendary character, described by Virgil and others, whose behavior drove him away from all positive human contact, and so he lived in a cave. Augustine's description of him is worth recalling:

He had no wife with whom to give and receive caresses; no children to play with when little or to instruct when a little bigger; and no friends with whom to enjoy conversation, not even his father. . . . He gave nothing to anyone; rather, he took what he wanted from anyone he could and whenever he could. Despite all this, however, in the solitude of his own cave, the floor of which, as Virgil describes it, ever reeked with the blood of recent butchery, he wished for nothing other than a peace in which no one should molest him, and rest which no man's violence, or the fear of it, should disturb. Also, he desired to be at peace with his own body. . . . Thus, for all his monstrousness and savagery, his aim was peace; for he sought, by these monstrous and ferocious means, only to preserve the peace of his own life. Had he been willing to make with others the peace which he was ready enough to make in his cave and with himself, he would not have been called wicked, nor a monster, nor semi-human.<sup>67</sup>

The second generally unrecognized conclusion from privation theory is one I have already intimated: any narrative of "evil" reaches a limit at which point it becomes clear that any such narrative must become an account of intentionality. In all exemplary patristic articulations of "privation" theory—i.e., Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine—the "purely metaphysical" description of evil as privation *never* stands alone; it is *always* connected to an account of volition. This is true for Gregory, in, e.g., *Great Catechism*, and *On Virginity*; and it is true for Augustine, in, e.g., *Confessions*, *On the Nature of the Good* and *City of God*. Privation theory does not simply function to provide a correct orientation of creation (especially matter) to good and evil, but to provide a correct understanding of the role of the will in relation to good and evil.<sup>68</sup> Christians reflect upon the real or relative existence of evil in order to offer an account of the will that makes sense.<sup>69</sup> This is true from Origen to Augustine, and all points in between.<sup>70</sup> What is decisive for us today, then, is the realization that a patristic account of evil as privation never stands apart from an account of volition, and—almost just as important for the purposes of this

article—we must realize that the connection between these two accounts has been lost to modern readers of classical privation theory.

Gregory provides us with several illustrations of how privation theory functions as a support for volition-psychologies. For example, in *Great Catechism* V, Gregory says,

But the evil is, in some way or other, engendered from within, springing up in the will at that moment when there is a retrocession of the soul from the beautiful. For as sight is an activity of nature, and blindness a deprivation of that natural operation, such is the kind of opposition between virtue and vice. It is, in fact, not possible to form any other notion of the origin of vice than as the absence of virtue. For as when the light has been removed the darkness supervenes, but as long as it is present there is no darkness, so, as long as the good is present in the nature, vice is a thing that has no inherent existence; while the departure of the better state becomes the origin of its opposite. Since then, this is the peculiarity of the possession of a free will, that it chooses as it likes the thing that pleases it, you will find that it is not God Who is the author of the present evils, seeing that He has ordered your nature so as to be its own master and free; but rather the recklessness that makes choice of the worse in preference to the better.

If we turn to Augustine, we see that in the *Confessions* the articulation of a privation theory of evil occurs within the larger context of a final meditation on whether the will is free. It is in Book VII of *Confessions* that Augustine offers privation as a description of the character of evil; a careful reading of that book makes clear that the larger problematic is the character and nature of the will.

### *Can any Virtue Be Taught?*

The theologies of grace and providence are illustrated in the novel *Brideshead Revisited*. At the end of the novel, when there has been so much personal failure, frustration and loneliness, Charles recognizes the point of it all: to restore the Host to Brideshead chapel and relight the red lamp signaling God's presence. Augustine tells exactly the same kind of story in the *Confessions*. All that he does he does for personal, sometimes vain reasons: he leaves Thagaste for Carthage because a friend has died in Thagaste and he hopes to escape the painful memories; he leaves Carthage for Rome because his students in Carthage are rowdy and he has heard that such is not the case in Rome (and besides, he hopes to move up in life); he goes to Milan to compete in a contest of public oration so that he might gain the attention of a well-placed patron, and thus move into a career less taxing of his sick lungs (and besides, the students in Rome never pay their tuition on time); and while in Milan Augustine goes to hear Ambrose in his church only to observe his style

of public speaking. Not one of these decisions is made for the sake of moral improvement or greater faith, or even for a less disturbing sense of sexuality. But, in retrospect, every decision moved him further along on the path to his “true Fatherland,” and all the events shaped Augustine so that when the call came he would accept it (or, more accurately, he would come to the moment when he could recognize his own life as a call).<sup>71</sup> The stories of Augustine’s chosen acts that constituted most of *Confessions* must be reread from a different perspective: Augustine discovers this about his life stories, and shares the discovery of the proper perspective with his reader. What was happening to Augustine was not what he thought, in his awareness of his life day by day. Augustine’s story of his life has to be renarrated; the meaning that Augustine set for that life was out-narrated by God.<sup>72</sup>

Are all acts and intentions equal, then, because they all must figure in God’s providence? By no means. The precise question we are dealing with is the overcoming of the knowledge of good and evil that was both the first temptation to sin and the first consequence of sin. We are talking about good and evil as objects of knowledge, and that knowledge as the basis for moral actions.<sup>73</sup> This “knowledge of good and evil” is based in human nature, expressed through the conscience, and accounted for by reason. This knowledge is, repeating myself, the consequence of sin, and its first product, the second sin, is to explain evil, to reduce it to a cause: “This woman, whom you gave me. . . .” Christ overcomes this knowledge: he produces no account of the origin of evil (he taught no Gnostic gospel), and he overthrows all moral calculus. What is available to reason in his claim to be the Son of God? Nothing.<sup>74</sup> Standing in the epistemological field of the knowledge of good and evil Jesus was, according to the Law and its interpreters (the scribes and Pharisees), a blasphemer. Standing in the modern epistemological field of the knowledge of good and evil Jesus was, according to moral impulse theology and its proponents (both First and Second Moderns), “another holy person” or “of decisive historical significance.”<sup>75</sup> Both epistemological fields deny his identity, and both produce clear consciences.

One important consequence of what I am saying is its implications for a proper understanding of “moral formation” in education. Augustine sought virtue through paidea. Paidea failed Augustine—and an entire civilization. Strangely, despite the failure of paidea, Augustine continued to value and extol education as moral formation. Why? For Augustine the proper role of formation is to better prepare the mind to think in terms of immaterial realities and to prepare the heart to love immaterial beauties.<sup>76</sup> Essential to expanding these capabilities is the acquisition of humility. Many of the liberal arts of the trivium and quadrivium lead the mind to think in terms of immaterial realities: geometry, astronomy, music. An ability for “thinking immaterially”—to use a “logic of immateriality”—is necessary for any advanced understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>77</sup> Other forms of knowledge—geography, history, literature, medicine—enable us to better

understand Scripture, which itself directs the mind and heart to immaterial realities, as well as giving us a sight of God's power and deity which have been revealed "in the things that have been made." (Rom. 1:20.) Literature and history reveal, through "analogy" (*Conf.* I), our own hearts to us (which should give us substantial cause for humility). The goal of this education is not to give us more facts about "the good" so that we can, statistically, make better judgments about what we recognize as the good. The goal of this education is to give our minds and hearts the "skills" necessary for knowing the invisible and immaterial Trinity, desiring that Trinity, and recognizing our need for the Trinity. Given that the goal of our life is to be with God, then our task in this life is to purify our hearts so that we might be able to see and know later what now we only understand through faith. If our goal is God as God truly exists—i.e., as the Trinity revealed through the Incarnation—then we can only be properly "formed" if we are formed towards the true God Who is Trinity. Formation can never be separated from doctrine. This is what a pure "Augustinian" education would be like.<sup>78</sup>

There is also an unpredictable "providential" element to education that Augustine reveals in his autobiography. "Lessons" (broadly construed) can lead us with a strength and clarity beyond anything that could be expected of them in advance: the decisive role, for example, of Monica telling the young Augustine that the name of Jesus would be a part of true wisdom. There is no way to judge in advance what such sacramental facts will be for any individual, and no way to program them as such into formation.<sup>79</sup> This is the realm of God's ordering of our lives so that His call will be received efficaciously: providence and grace.

*Conclusion: Domine, non sum dignus*

As an event within the trajectory of Second Temple theology of the messiah<sup>80</sup> what is distinctive in Christian theology of the messiah is that the messiah dies as a sacrifice to redeem sinners. The sacrifice of Jesus—in both the objective and subjective genitive—saves. This sacrifice is not understood as a transitive act—as though the messiah sacrifices *something else* in a new way, except insofar as the new something that is sacrificed is himself. Jesus as new high priest is but the other side of the coin of Jesus as new oblation: the two identities are not separate realities. In the preaching of the "Christ crucified" the resurrection serves to reveal that Jesus was/is the Christ, and that his sacrifice was accepted by God. Faith means believing the testimony about the risen previously-dead Jesus, so that one knows these two facts of revelation (i.e., Jesus was/is the Christ, and that his sacrifice was accepted by God), and believing the promise that one day others will be resurrected too. Jesus was not resurrected by God to undo his death as if that death was a sad accident that God could repair, but because of his death. If Jesus was not resurrected by God then he was not the messiah and his death did not affect the funda-

mental relationship between God and humans. That non-Christians would come to such conclusions is a tautology; that some “Christians” think that Jesus was not resurrected, that he was not the messiah, and that his death had no decisive and fundamental effect makes the continuity between such a “Christianity” and early Christianity of the same order as the continuity between modern “Druids” and the inhabitants of ancient Gaul.

Robert Daley has remarked that in the Old Testament how sacrifices worked was left to the individual to explain in his or her own mind;<sup>81</sup> the same seems to be true for the New Testament. Also common to both bodies of literature is the presumption that proper sacrifice “works”—it does something, somehow. Exactly what Jesus’ sacrifice so efficiently works upon is not made clear, but what is clear is that it is of fundamental importance to recognize that Jesus’ sacrifice did something decisive and unique. Why, exactly, the tenants in the parable of the landlord’s son rebel against the landlord is not important—urban renewal or urban decay? What is important is that (1) the landlord’s son is killed precisely because he is the landlord’s son, and (2) the rebel tenants do not have the last word—they are punished. That Jesus’ sacrifice did something decisive and unique is the last word: the story of that sacrifice out-narrates evil.

It was James Agee’s judgment that Jesus’ three hours on the cross was “but a noble and too trivial an emblem”<sup>82</sup> of how each human lives “crucified,” and he was right in this way: any attempt to symbolize violence runs the risk of making violence banal. Agee said that rather than describe in words any real person in his or her woundedness, that “A piece of the body torn out by the roots might be more to the point”<sup>83</sup> and I agree that violence is only properly perceived in its individuality. Attempts to make Jesus’ suffering and death symbolic render that suffering and death banal; such attempts seek to control that violence and end up treating Jesus’ suffering like a video game in which our score progresses as we move the content of that suffering through levels of meaning. This is modern Docetism and Gnosticism combined: to imagine Jesus’ death as though its truest experience lay outside of the fact that it was *his* death, his unimaginably painful and deeply humiliating death.<sup>84</sup> The only legitimate way in which the individuality of Jesus’ death may be pre-empted is insofar as we see it as a repetition of the fundamental fact of human existence: “after the first death there is no other”<sup>85</sup>—for, properly speaking, our grief should already be full.<sup>86</sup> But even so, to see Jesus’ death as such a repetition is to see it only as a human event or experience, and thus not to see it precisely as Jesus’ death. To see that death fully and individually is to recognize, as the centurion witness in Mark’s Gospel did, that truly this was the Son of God, and so this death was different.

For some Christian theologians, there is no Incarnation, in the sense of a pre-existent being taking flesh and dwelling amongst us. Some of these theologians might say, as the Ebionites did, that Jesus was born only as

human and nothing more, though at some time in his life the Spirit came into him, his consciousness was raised, and he became a world-historical figure: the perfect prophet.<sup>87</sup> Death remains unchanged, our mortal ontological status is unaffected, except that we now understand that the death that really matters is the death of the will, and now in this life our volition can experience a “resurrection”—i.e., a reactivation, which enables us to act in this life. If there is any “life after death” it is because the substance of consciousness—“spirit”—endures in some condition or state after the death of the body. Christ came as teacher and prophet, as a catalyst for change: the change he caused has already occurred in consciousness if we but appropriate it for ourselves. At the beginning of this article I quoted logion 50–51 of the Gospel of Thomas: “His disciples said to him: ‘When will the repose of the dead occur? . . .’ He said to them: ‘This thing which you expect has come, but you do not recognize it.’” It is time, some say, to recognize that the repose of the dead—even our death—has already occurred in the enspirited mind and resurrected will. The call to action is the call to come out of the tomb, and the call to come out of the tomb is nothing else but the call to action.

Either Christianity is an idiom or its claim is absolute. If Christianity is an idiom then there exist only “hyphenated” Christians—Christian-Democrats, Christian-Liberals, Christian-Socialists, Christian-Communists, Christian-Marxists, Christian-Kantians, or Christian-Hegelians. If Christianity is not an idiom but a belief or faith that has its own identity, then Christianity does not take its authority from its congruity with any secular moral or ethical system. If Christianity is not an idiom then its claim upon the believer cannot be explained in any other terms than its own: the “putting on” of Christ, the unity of the believer with Christ, and the reality of existence in the body of Christ. The content and reality of Christ cannot be seen or verified from anywhere but inside. Moreover, the message of the gospel announced in the Scriptures cannot properly be understood by anyone who is not in love with the beloved. Tertullian advised his fellow Christians not to dispute Scripture with those who failed to keep faith because the Scriptures were not theirs; non-believers grasping at the meaning of the Scriptures were no more than strangers grasping at uncovering what—or rather, Who—they had no right to see. Only the pure of heart could see God, and purity—it has since been said—is to will one thing: to will Christ. The Christ of a hyphenated Christian is a hyphenated Christ. If Paul said that there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, in Christ, then in the hyphenated Christ there is only this or that, she or he: the Christian’s context. To will only one object of desire, Christ, is not only to have a single will, but to have a single object of that will: a seamless Christ, one who is not given over piecemeal to claims from many utilities.

When it comes to our own virtue, I think we operate largely in ignorance, although, like Socrates’ interlocutors, we are attached to thinking otherwise. The truth is more like trying to build a house in pitch black. We have so little

idea of who we each are, what the consequences of each action are, and how to accomplish what we think it is we want to accomplish. The great sin is in defining the value of one's thoughts and actions according to a standard that purchases clarity by removing God—in particular, removing God from Christ. I think that what really counts about God being omniscient is that He can see the depths of our ignorance and judge us according to the appropriate mercy or justice. I suspect that the greatest evils we face may be those we are least aware of and less consciously engaged with, and that our acts of greatest virtue are almost invisible to us.<sup>88</sup>

When I worked with the profoundly retarded, people would “ooh” and “ahh” over how kind and generous that was of me. I knew that there was no virtue involved on my part. These people could just as well have been praising my virtue because I was tall or had a beard. I saw no difference in the degree or character of choice involved in working with the retarded, drinking a coke, or watching a movie.<sup>89</sup> Each choice involves responding to a desire for these “goods”—being with and helping the profoundly retarded,<sup>90</sup> drinking a Coca-Cola, or watching a movie—and the fact that I have these desires to fulfill or not is through no choice or act of my own (or at least no conscious choice): there never was a day when I decided, “I should make myself enjoy being with the profoundly retarded,” or “I should make myself enjoy Coca-Cola instead of Pepsi.” There may be a higher good to “being with the profoundly retarded” over “drinking Coca-Cola” but the range is not something I decided had to happen.<sup>91</sup>

My faith is that God will be a good judge, and whatever He decides I deserve for this life, it will be the right decision. I trust Him. I try to keep the number of things I might fry for to a minimum. Meanwhile, points of clarity are few. Everything now is tentative, through a glass darkly. We must try to be good, because to do otherwise would be a sin against hope. But we must also understand that the Kingdom has not yet been handed over; it is being gathered. And we are a pitiful lot—which is why it is good that we receive pity.<sup>92</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 Relativism among the young is genuine: it arises out of adolescent confusion, exacerbated by consumerism and by the de-ontologizing of the photographic image. (No one reads André Bazin anymore.) “Relativism” among the not-young is simply a rhetorical strategy, a cover story.
- 2 A recent, and egregious, example of an atheist (self-proclaimed, in this case) failing to recognize the post-twentieth century burden of programmatic atheism can be found in “The Ethics of Being a Theologian,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 27, 2009), in which K. L. Noll proposes vivisection as a paradigm for “advancing knowledge.” After the twentieth century, the only moral stance an atheist can have—and he or she must have it loudly—is to condemn any kind of methodological link between taking the organs out of a living creature until it dies and “advancing knowledge.” The connection between programmatic atheism and this kind of “advancing knowledge” is too strong, and too recent, for atheists to think that they can get away with talking this way *again*.

- 3 Because the programmatic atheism of Nazi Germany occurred in a country that was historically Christian it seemed as though Germany had to apologize and atone for its violence. Russia, by then a self-declared "post-Christian" country, did not need to apologize or atone: it was sheltered by its ideological cloak of programmatic atheism. Japan could not be said to be culturally atheist, but it was culturally anti-Christian, and that sufficed. The non-Christian past of Japan removed expectation that it should apologize and atone for its violence—and so it never has.
- 4 The consistent historical result of programmatic atheism has been to raise the bar for what qualifies someone as a human person. Modern Christians still have problems facing the depth of their twentieth-century intellectual and emotional entanglement with programmatic atheism. One important reason for this is that during the 1930s Christian theologians saw that they had common cause with National Socialism and Marxist-Leninism: like these two programmatically atheist ideologies, Christian theologians were anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois; and like these two quintessentially Enlightenment ideologies, Christian theologians criticized Liberalism. The last fatal attraction these ideologies held for Christian theologians perhaps produced the deepest seduction in modern Christianity: *communio*. Christian intellectuals as varied as Tillich and Pieper, for example, admired Nazi ideology for the emphasis it placed on providing a true community: if the State was necessarily the basis for a new real community, then so be it. It is difficult to know just how far European Christian intellectuals would have gone with National Socialism if the Night of the Long Knives had not occurred and momentarily interrupted theology's co-dependency. Power, Henry Kissinger once said, is the strongest aphrodisiac, and after the war, when the bruises faded, churches forgave and came back. The thrill was not gone.
- 5 Obviously the list of left-wing sensitivities I've just paraded locates the time I am here remembering as that of the 1980s, but I would argue that the time and the list have a broader significance than just my own autobiographical history. These cases are still important because they represent the coming-of-age issues for a host of European (especially British) Anglican and Catholic liberal theologians; these constitute the defining milieu for a generation of Christian theologians who are now active authors and parts of academic and ecclesiastical establishments, not to mention archbishops of Canterbury. There is much more to the relationship in theology between the seventies and the nineties than Lampe's 1977 *God as Spirit* and Haight's 1992 "Spirit Christology." The years between 1975 and 1985 (loosely speaking) were the years in which the now-reigning politico-moral narratives were institutionalized. During these years the narratives were not first articulated, or even first rallied around. From 1975 to 1985 the now-reigning politico-religious narratives took concrete social forms so that they were no longer simply the content of a particular discourse; they were the shape within which discourse took place, either externally (in academia or church) or internally (as presumed meta-narratives and "horizons" of thought). If my generation constantly relives the politico-moral dramas of the sixties (e.g., the Vietnam war) that is so not because of clergy, academics and politicians who held their offices in 1968, but because of people who began to hold those offices between 1975 and 1985. The "institutionalized" character of such politico-moral narratives must never be underestimated, for they are, in this, every bit as reified as the stones, concrete and bricks of the institutions they live in: they are thoughts and feelings frozen in time, each year made more dense by the hypothermia of *power*.
- 6 Lewis Ayres, "Against Hegel, Fire and Sword," in *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 384–429.
- 7 It will become clear that I am using the word "modern" in two distinct senses: one sense is the chronological, and in that capacity names an era of time which while recognizable nonetheless has only vaguely determined boundaries; the second sense of "modern" is as a genre of thought which can be distinguished from other genres of thought which are somehow "non-modern" (e.g., pre-modern, post-modern, whatever).
- 8 Just as the dog that did not bark is sometimes more significant than the dog that does, what failed to happen can sometimes be as provocative as what does. World War I ended, in American Protestantism, the social optimism that had reigned previously. After World War I an eschatology of post-Millennialism (in which Christians would present to the returning Christ a world that was the kingdom of God) lost all credibility, and was replaced by a pre-Millennialism, in which the arrival of Christ was necessary for the re-ordering of this

world. In a different way, some European Protestants experienced this same seismic shift: Barth may be understood as rejecting the old Liberal Protestant understanding of Divine Providence. Strangely, although Roman Catholicism, being so centered in Europe at the time, suffered more severely from the violence of the Great War than did American Protestantism, there was no Catholic stepping back from social optimism. We still sing “Building the City of God”—and without any sense of irony. The revelation that was the First World War, which was repeated, for the slow-minded, in the Second World War, was the bottomlessness of moral depravity that individual humans, and their social institutions, were capable of. Not only was “progress” revealed to be a fiction, it was revealed to be an evil lie, for it was the notion of “progress” that directed and fueled the worst atrocities of the European wars. It can be imagined that the War(s) could have provoked the return of invigorated Augustinianism, like, e.g., the kind shut down in the seventeenth century. [See Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995.)] This did not happen. The self-satisfied optimism of Scholasticism reigned without interruption, until it was replaced by an even stronger optimism with greater powers of self-satisfaction. (“Self-satisfied” means this: that the achievement of the “optimistic” goals is measured by the degree to which, within a closed circle of discourse, these goals can seem to be, or can be spoken about as if they are, fulfilled. This “self-satisfied” optimism seeks a social mirror in which it can see itself acknowledging the good.)

- 9 Whenever I speak of the idea that “the cause of evil can be truly identified” or “can be known” I mean this: the idea that by some form of rational analysis the cause of evil (however it is defined according to axioms of the analysis) can be known to the degree that the cause can be eliminated and evil (as defined) ceases to exist (or to be “practiced”). Some low church Protestants might call this idea “pre-dispensationalism”: by doing so, they accurately identify the social environment that supports this idea as well as the events which destroyed its credibility for a great number of Christians.
- 10 The “problem” of Christian moral judgment is the problem of our knowledge of good and evil gained and maintained as an independence from God.
- 11 In *Ethics* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1949; 1995), p. 81, Dietrich Bonhoeffer criticizes the moral claims by theologies of social or practical Christianity by pointing out that there is no evidence that this kind of Christianity is more effective than dogmatic Christianity in bringing about any desired cultural change. (It would be next to impossible to judge the “transformative” effects of dogmatic Christianity working from the perspective of modern theology, since all the dominant meta-narratives in theology assume the inefficacy of dogmatic Christianity and the unique effectiveness of social Christianity.) Certainly one of the strongest and most widespread examples of Christianity having a substantial and long-term “transformative” effect upon western secular culture is the one that G. E. M. Anscombe describes in her influential essay, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” namely, a sense of moral *obligation*, a sense originally developed in Christian doctrine. Anscombe’s point is that the western sense of moral obligation is in fact an intellectual gift of Christianity, and she makes the provocative point that since the justifying intellectual superstructure of dogmatic Christianity no longer holds in the culture that prizes the concept of moral obligation, then it has to be set aside: “. . . the concepts of obligation, and duty—moral obligation and moral duty, that is to say—and of what is morally right and wrong, and of the moral sense of ‘ought,’ ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer survives, and is only harmful without it.” (Emphasis in original.) The essay was originally published in *Philosophy* 33 (1958). I quote from the essay’s publication in *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe, Volume Three: Ethics, Religion and Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. 26–42; here, p. 26. What Bonhoeffer and Anscombe, a devout Catholic, have in common as Christians reflecting upon moral thought is that they both critique the modern project of “ethics,” a project in which post-dogmatic theology participates, and with which post-Christian Catholic theology identifies.
- 12 Something very similar to this thesis, but one which produces a very different judgment about the significance and credibility of Christianity, may be found in Bart D. Ehrman, *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008). What Ehrman brings forward as his “discovery” (i.e., that the

- Bible does not explain suffering), I suggest has been in plain sight in Christian theology since the beginning. The presuppositions in a strong, or at least loud, narrative can hide the obvious, however.
- 13 Noll gives examples in his article of atheist presuppositions in Religious Studies methodology that he claims “theologians” are incapable of accepting. (These examples must be fantasies—from Noll’s own perspective—because he offers them without any of the “scientific” proofs he advocates as necessary for the advancement of knowledge.) Noll is mistaken, because some “theologians” can and do accept the fundamental presuppositions that an atheist like Noll requires. Noll thinks that “theologians”—by virtue of being “theologians”—regard as “reductionistic” the thesis that the effects of rituals are limited to creating a sense of community, maintaining identity boundaries, and defeating inclinations to pursue heterodox behaviors. On the contrary, there are a number of theologians who think that this is precisely and exclusively what rituals do—which is why, for example, rituals can be changed simply to meet newly judged social needs. Noll also thinks that theologians ought to declare to congregations (it is Noll who links theologians to churches) that “the god described in this sacred text [the Bible] is fictional, and any resemblance to an actual god is purely coincidental.” Again, Noll is ignorant of the fact that there are theologians who teach exactly this. If we change Noll’s thesis to “the god described in this sacred text is fictional, and any resemblance to an actual god is that of the logic of ideas” the number of theologians who would agree increases exponentially. See [provide first name] Noll’s article, “The Ethics of Being a Theologian.”
  - 14 In several ways my thesis has much in common with the judgment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Creation and Fall—Temptation: Two Biblical Studies* (1959; New York, NY: MacMillan, 1967), pp. 72–76, “The Fall,” among other of his writings. What I call the “larger narrative” is, in Bonhoeffer’s account, the “overcoming of evil on the Cross.” (*Ibid.*, p. 76.) The question of the origin of evil, its aetiology, is “not a theological question” at all, according to Bonhoeffer—I agree.
  - 15 Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, p. 389.
  - 16 The most important philosopher of left-wing Hegelianism was the Paris-based Jean Hippolyte, whose translated writings include: *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman, trans., (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974); *Logic and Existence*, Lawrence Taylor and Amit Sen, trans., (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997); and *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, John O’Neill, ed. and trans., (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1969).
  - 17 To remove any ambiguity in terminology: “Post-Christian” does not mean “in the context of Christianity”; it means “After Christianity is done” or “Without Christianity.”
  - 18 I mean “repression” here in both its psychological and political senses. As an example, one thinks of the history of the monastery of Mt. St. Michel in northern France. As any tourist can see, the interior walls are bare, without any trace of murals or tapestries. This barrenness owes to the French Revolution, when the monastery was seized, all religious art and artifacts destroyed, and the building turned into a political prison to hold enemies of the Revolution. (A better metaphor for the French Revolution would be hard to invent.) For a working-through of the telling absence of the question—distinguishing repression from progress—in other aspects of modern culture, see the first two chapters of Russell Jacoby’s *Social Amnesia* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975).
  - 19 In this context, a “broken” text-artifact is one whose integrity is so degraded by circumstances that it can no longer act as a screen for the projection of modern significance.
  - 20 I understand that my readers probably expect a description of these types of “modern” theologies by referring one or both to “post-modernism.” However, I have observed in the humanities generally that the term “post-modern” is used as an ideological marker in myths of self-definition. Both theology and religious studies present strong examples of ideological identities being read onto the term. My terms “First” and “Second” Moderns step outside the burdens of myths of self-definition. The reader is free to link my use of “moderns” with their own understanding of “post-modern” as she or he pleases.
  - 21 Second Moderns tend to think that the time of metaphysics is long passed—and here Kant counts as “metaphysics”—and that theology now has to be constructed upon this new “fact.” Unfortunately, the theologians who most fervently announce the death of metaphysics are almost always people with no scholarly authority or credibility in the field of

- philosophy. It is one thing to build a theology on a hypothesis—e.g., “this theology will be articulated *as if* metaphysics were dead”—but it is something quite different to base one’s theology upon one’s own impersonation of a philosopher. The proper question to ask whenever judgments about philosophy are integral to a theology are mooted is, “Why should I value your opinion on the field of philosophy?”
- 22 The “accidental” character of text-artifacts in the theology of “Second Modern” Catholics corresponds to the attack on individuality that Dietrich Bonhoeffer attributes to what he calls “docetic Christology” in *Christ the Center* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1966, 1978), pp. 76–79. My category of “Ebionite” does not correspond with his, but I have no quarrel with his analysis.
  - 23 An *argument* for Christian pluralism based upon a Bauer-like understanding of early Christianity does not in itself indicate a First Modern theology at work, as the rhetoric of First Modern can be utilized to produce a Second Modern result.
  - 24 The state of primary and secondary material on European Catholic theology and identity in the second half of the nineteenth century is now so poor that any attempt to give an account of this era runs a profound risk of simply being co-opted into the drama of Catholic Systematics’ hyper-sentimental attachment to the Modernist crisis: it is still very much a part of Catholic Systematics’ melodrama that one wraps one’s self in the flag of Modernism and that one be on the “right side” of the Modernist crisis. Christian Systematians who are not Catholic can hardly imagine the passion that burns in the heart of those Catholics for whom the Vatican’s failure in the “Crisis” was a moral failure second only to its complicity with the Nazis.
  - 25 I will say more about this in a forthcoming essay, “The End of ‘Communio’: Towards a Preferential Option for the Mortal.” I will add this further point to what I have said above: just as the doctrines of Second Modern theology cannot co-exist with those of Patristic theology, so too the affect (anger) of Second Modern theology cannot co-exist with the dominant affect in Patristic theology. You cannot “do,” think, or receive Patristic theology (and its doctrines) from within Second Modern theology. This is why those with a Second Modern theology do the Early Church with socio-political or critical anthropological methodologies: the theology of the early Church is, *qua* theology, not simply empty and meaningless: it is the butt of cleverness.
  - 26 It is a peculiarity of the state of contemporary Catholic Systematic theology that a high value is placed upon Second Modern theologians who can talk like First Moderns, and First Modern theologians who can talk like classical theologians.
  - 27 I am not using “generation(s)” literally, as though with the advent of Second Moderns there would be no more First Moderns. I am using “modern” in the sense of genre and not era.
  - 28 The classic modern critique of teleology is found in Part II of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. Teleology represents the most substantial and complex assertion of intrinsic meaning; it is, in fact, the paradigmatic ontologization of intrinsic meaning. While “objectivity” seems equally to presume intrinsic meaning, an examination of the character of the modern prescribed methods which might reveal intrinsic meaning—“science”—makes clear that any such meaning is approached as no more than the “limit” in calculus is approached: one never arrives.
  - 29 The best way to understand the nature of the assertion of epoch-centered hermeneutical discontinuity and the two different kinds of reading is as a *theory*: it is not tested by being proved or disproved; rather, its credibility rests on how well it organizes and explains otherwise disparate Baconian facts. For First Moderns the historicity of traditional text-artifacts renders them exemplary but only insofar as they can be read as shaping or contributing to a moral discourse whose fundamental conditions of possibility are Enlightenment assumptions about the structure of human subjectivity and the character of the basic rights, structure and autonomy of the human community. For Second Moderns the historicity of traditional text-artifacts renders them “accidental” statements of the content of Christianity, and as such they can function as no more than examples of moral exhortation, without any normative status. Where these examples fail to exhort us towards what we now know to be correct moral judgments and practice they simply cease to be employed heuristically (e.g., Paul on homosexuality). In First Modern theology there is still an attempt at correlation or at rescuing the earlier texts, but on the implied premise that such rescuing is necessary because of the superior character of modern thought. Thus in Rahner the limita-

- tion of meaning in traditional text-artifacts is implied but never explicitly articulated. In *Second Modern* theology the desire for correlation ceases.
- 30 This is true as a minimum insofar as pre-modern text-artifacts dramatize modern moral concerns.
- 31 One can make further distinctions and say that Moltmann's theology re-mythologizes the basic narrative at its dramatic level, while Miroslav Volf's theology is directed to restoring the narrative insofar as it is considered as a technical construct, in order to keep the text-artifact from breaking down in the middle of the screening.
- 32 Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*, John Bowden, trans., (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 129 (emphasis in the original). He continues: "Thus the present-day experience of reality—which in any case is a limited one—is made the decisive criterion for what can and what cannot have happened in the past." pp. 129–130.
- 33 The modern judgment of the fundamental character of moral concerns is—ironically—most clearly dramatized in theology's encounter with contemporary aesthetic-literary theories. When Deconstruction was in vogue it eventually became clear that as a reading strategy Deconstruction could de-center *all* kinds of texts, including moral and political ones. Theological and ideological interest in deconstruction faded quickly. Newer "post-modern" reading strategies either have been governed by moral narratives, or, with unconscious humor, identified as a moral-political strategy.
- 34 A statement I develop from Kenneth Surin's assertion of Dorothee Soelle's continuity with Marx. See Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 122–123, especially where he refers to Marx's judgment that Feuerbach "was seeking a way of 'resolving the religious world into its secular basis.'" My paraphrase could be construed as a cheap insight describing the project(s) of Foucault and parts of the Frankfurt School.
- 35 Mark Lilla offers one account of the rise of this identification of religion with moral anthropology in *The Stillborn God* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), pp. 107–162. Lilla argues that the shift occurs in Rousseau after the deep criticisms by Hobbes of religious impulses. The content of religion is limited to simple truths discovered through self-reflection: that there is a God who is good; that our emotional reach always exceeds our intellectual grasp so we must learn to securely locate religion within those limits; and that humans possess a free will. These are the fundamentals Kant learns from Rousseau and which Kant systematizes. Lilla summarizes Rousseau's analysis of religion in this way: "In *Emile* he [Rousseau] suggests that so long as men are social, religion will arise, though not for the reasons given by Hobbes. But their naive faith in God will be fragile, so long as it is tied to an external, objective, authoritative revelation and not tailored to their moral needs. The best way to protect that faith, and thus morality, is to reinterpret it in subjective terms and root it in our moral sentiments, or conscience. That exercise in reinterpretation is not an exercise in determining the true nature of the divine nexus; it is an exercise in determining what we can plausibly believe about such a nexus as an aid to cultivating our virtue. And since virtue depends upon independence and self-confidence, this theology must be one that reconciles us with our freedom, not with God." (p. 125). We may wonder, now, whether post-modernism in the sense of "after modernity" must require the giving up of both the Enlightenment critique of religious sensibility (Hobbes) as well as its Enlightenment rehabilitation in the face of that critique (Rousseau and Kant). In any case, "stopping with the subject" now seems a quintessentially Enlightenment project, whatever anti-"objective" claims that project might make for itself.
- 36 I acknowledge that Jacques Ellul has focused upon the advent of "-ism" as an ideological event, but he and I are not making the same point, nor do we diagnose the problem to the same end. See Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986).
- 37 Thus we see the central role confident intuitions or insights have played in John Milbank's thought.
- 38 A variant statement derived from Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*: "Nothing must mute the fact that all truth lies right before our eyes, and that its appropriation is a natural consequence of the facts. There is no need for any additional perfection of man as though he could not focus on the 'supernatural' truth with his normal equipment for knowing."

- 39 The apparent exceptions or contra-indicators are in fact not cases of evil, but of the victims of evil.
- 40 "Fascist" is a word used most often in stupidity, an everywo/man's political version of "neoplatonism." I use the word in its proper sense, as scholars use it in scholarly discourse. Fascism is an ideology of revolt advocating a revolution of the spirit and the will, of manners and morals, promising not only new political and social structures but also new relationships between man and society, between man and nature, based upon a theory of an organic or communitarian society, with a rejection of individualism and (above all) materialism in all its forms: the rejection of individualism, utilitarianism, and bourgeois values, of democracy and majority rule, of the principle of the absolute primacy of the individual in relation to society; and a condemnation of the notion of the equal rights of all, and of politics as a consultation of the will of the majority. This definition is based upon Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, David Maisel, trans., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986/1991). As Rene Albrecht-Carrie points out in *The Meaning of the First World War* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), the most visible distinguishing feature of fascism is its total unwillingness to abide any criticism of a democratic sort. See also *Society* 18 (1981) for nine essays on "Left-Wing Fascism." Sadly, Susan Sontag's essay on this subject (published in the *Village Voice*) has not been anthologized among her writings, and has thus been airbrushed from history.
- 41 Charles Odier, *Anxiety and Magic Thinking*, Marie-Louis Schoelly, M.D., and Mary Jane Sherfey, M.D., trans., (New York, NY: International Universities Press, Inc., 1956/1974), p. 8.
- 42 The idea that "War is over/obsolete" is magic thinking whether declared by John Lennon or Lewis Lapham. The only *non*-magical thinking repudiation of war is, "I will not fight. I will be killed or enslaved: everyone I love will be killed or enslaved. Those who kill and enslave will triumph in this world." The life of Franz Jagerstatter is a good example of moral choice completely free of magic thinking, as is Bonhoeffer's.
- 43 Charles Odier, *Anxiety and Magic Thinking*, p. 11.
- 44 It is pagan (or clinically "infantile") and not Christian to believe that trust can buy off deceit: that trust can—and should—purchase security for the trustee against deceit. Nothing in the Gospels suggests this dynamic: nothing in the Gospels suggests that this is a proper motivation for Christians to be faithful, or trusting, or undefended, etc. This total incommensurateness between trust given and any presumed moral state in return is true for the Christian publicly as well as privately: if you trust someone in order to make them trustworthy, or to bind them to your expectations, you indulge in magic thinking and not Christian faith. Christianity does not turn trust into a spell.
- 45 Some may object to military intervention in Darfur or Burma with "geopolitical" reasons, or whatever; my point here takes issue with the specific argument against the use of force.
- 46 We must be very clear that while Second Moderns define themselves out of the Enlightenment project, they are nonetheless its children even if they deny links to their parents.
- 47 Such a logic is so cherished that clear examples of genocide in the name of reason are forgotten and removed from modern consciousness: it is popular "knowledge" that many have been killed in the name of Christianity; it is *not* popular knowledge that in the twentieth century millions were killed in the name of Reason or Science, for the Nazis identified their thought as true reason and the Marxists identify their thought as Science.
- 48 See, e.g., Gunther Neske and Emil Kettering, *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, Lisa Harris, trans., (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1990); Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger—A Political Life*, Allan Blunden, trans., (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1993); *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, Richard Wolin, ed., (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991); and Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation With Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990).
- 49 An excellent treatment of such cases is Donald M. MacKinnon's "Tillich, Frege, Kittel: Some Reflections on a Dark Theme," *Explorations in Theology* 5 (London: SCM, 1979).
- 50 This is actually a lesson re-learned, for the rise of this understanding originally produced structural differences between *Christianity before* Islam and *Christianity after*. However, the present existence of a large religious body of believers who regard martyrdom to be effective on many levels provokes theological confusion (not to mention embarrassment and fear) among those who subscribe to the modern judgment that martyrdom is ineffective at every level except the personal. The strangely familiar character of the social

- effects of “self-initiated” martyrdom derives from the modern narrative that the theological content of early Christian martyrdom was social: Christians impressed pagans by their deaths and changed pagan minds. This understanding of early Christian martyrdom is a clear application of the root judgment that Christianity is about the “practical” and the narrative of Christ’s ministry, *and* not about contemplation of the divine as the goal and root of theology.
- 51 I suspect this is a type of slogan developed by the weak as a defensive weapon to cause hesitation on the part of those who in reality can kill with impunity. Or it is another expression of magic thinking: “If they kill me then I will become *really* powerful.”
- 52 Stalin famously said that one death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic. He spoke as an expert.
- 53 Bonhoeffer’s standing is a good illustration of the consumer-oriented character of the robe of martyrdom. In North America Bonhoeffer has almost no presence as a Christian martyr, or even as a martyr for justice; Gandhi, by contrast, looms large even though he was not killed by those he protested against (i.e., the British). Part of Bonhoeffer’s “problem” is that he endorsed and participated in *violent action* against a genocidal tyranny. (Gandhi’s relationship in the early 1940s to the Japanese war machine more closely resembles the relationship of the Ukraine with the Nazi war machine at the same time.) Moreover, Bonhoeffer was not acting against “colonialism.” Finally, Bonhoeffer’s theology is so varied that no one ideo-theological group is comfortable claiming him.
- 54 The day after Arafat died, Jeff Jacoby wrote in the *Boston Globe*: “In May 1974, three PLO terrorists slipped from Lebanon into the northern Israeli town of Ma’alot. They murdered two parents and a child whom they found at home, then seized a local school, taking more than 100 boys and girls hostage and threatening to kill them unless a number of imprisoned terrorists were released. When Israeli troops attempted a rescue, the terrorists exploded hand grenades and opened fire on the students. By the time the horror ended, 25 people were dead; 21 of them were children. Thirty years later, no one speaks of Ma’alot anymore. The dead children have been forgotten. Everyone knows Arafat’s name, but who ever recalls the names of his victims? So let us recall them: Ilana Turgeman. Rachel Aputa. Yocheved Mazoz. Sarah Ben-Shim’on. Yona Sabag. Yafa Cohen. Shoshana Cohen. Michal Sitrok. Malka Amrosy. Aviva Saada. Yocheved Diyi. Yaakov Levi. Yaakov Kabla. Rina Cohen. Ilana Ne’eman. Sarah Madar. Tamar Dahan. Sarah Soper. Lili Morad. David Madar. Yehudit Madar.”
- 55 Augustine’s pre-modern account of evil is not to be identified with “Augustinian” accounts: Augustine’s theology and Augustinianism are two very different things (like a grain of wheat and white bread). For different perspectives on “Augustinianism,” see Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, Lancelot Sheppard, trans., (London: G. Chapman, 1969); Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Charles T. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and J. D. Green, “Augustinianism”: *Studies in the Process of Spiritual Transvaluation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007). If the term “Augustinian” slips by me I mean nothing other than “what Augustine thought” or “like what Augustine thought,” depending on the context. (Bonhoeffer is an “Augustinian” insofar as certain of his thoughts or judgments owe to Augustine and are very much like Augustine’s.)
- 56 For an excellent description of the way in which conscience functions as the sufficient, exclusive moral arbiter in contemporary moral culture, see David B. Hart, “Christ and Nothing,” *First Things* 136 (October 2003), pp. 47–57.
- 57 See Theodule Rey-Mermet, *Moral Choices: The Moral Theology of Saint Alphonsus Liguori*, Paul Laverdure, trans., (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1998).
- 58 If it seems I am casting “saint against saint” in this article by suggesting a de-centering of the received notions of conscience and of conscience or moral formation, I am not—by this de-centering—pitting Augustine against Thomas, but Augustine against Liguori.
- 59 *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, J. H. S Burleigh, trans., (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 406.
- 60 See Susan Meld Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- 61 Thus, *City of God*—and *Confessions*, all thirteen books, not just the first ten.
- 62 *Cat. Or. V.*

- 63 Gregory also applies related arguments to refute what he takes to be his opponents' (i.e., the Eunomians) incorrect understanding of God; Augustine seems not to have an analogous trinitarian application of privation theory.
- 64 Irenaeus is a good example of this: "But we shall not be wrong if we affirm the same thing also concerning the substance of matter, that God produced it. For we have learned from the Scriptures that God holds the supremacy over all things. But whence or in what way He produced it, neither has Scripture anywhere declared; nor does it become us to conjecture, so as, in accordance with our own opinions, to form endless conjectures concerning God, but we should leave such knowledge in the hands of God Himself. In like manner, also, we must leave the cause why, while all things were made by God, certain of His creatures sinned and revolted from a state of submission to God, and others, indeed the great majority, persevered, and do still persevere, in [willing] subjection to Him who formed them. . . . That eternal fire, [for instance,] is prepared for sinners, both the Lord has plainly declared, and the rest of the Scriptures demonstrate. And that God foreknew that this would happen, the Scriptures do in like manner demonstrate, since He prepared eternal fire from the beginning for those who were [afterwards] to transgress [His commandments]; but the cause itself of the nature of such transgressors neither has any Scripture informed us, nor has an apostle told us, nor has the Lord taught us." AH II.28.7 ANF 401.
- 65 *City of God Against the Pagans*, XII.7, R. W. Dyson, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 507–508. Book XII, chapters 2–8, is devoted to the question of privation and volition.
- 66 I think it is fair to say that Augustine understood more clearly than most moderns that accurate accounts of a war would inevitably come upon good intentions; the "discovery" of these intentions was not a moment of surprise for him.
- 67 *City of God Against the Pagans*, XIX.12, p. 935. In this description by Augustine we can recognize the implicit similitude between the motives of an "evil" individual and the motives driving the evil of war.
- 68 Indeed, if we include Origen and Methodius (especially), we see that it is consistently true that cosmological (creation) accounts relating evil to being are related to accounts of volition.
- 69 A good example of this can be found at the beginning of *On The Nature of the Good*, where Augustine says, "To his most excellent creatures, that is to rational spirits, God has given the power not to be corrupted if they do not will to be; but remain obedient under the Lord their God and cleave to his incorruptible beauty." *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, J. H. S Burleigh, trans., p. 328.
- 70 One might want to suggest that this fundamental feature of catholic Christian thought is due to its engagement with varieties of radical dualism (Gnosticism and Manichaeism), but one could just as well say that catholic and dualist Christianity shared a categorical understanding of the link between metaphysical or cosmological accounts and volitional accounts.
- 71 I agree with James Wetzel that Augustine's conversion occurs principally in his memory, and that this conversion is not a single moment which transforms everything like some kind of psychological philosopher's stone. It happens in the memory, over time. See James Wetzel, *The Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 187–215.
- 72 In his *Deconstructing Theodicy: Why Job has Nothing to Say to the Puzzle of Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), pp. 126–133, David B. Burrell understands Augustine to be "deconstructing theodicy" in *Confessions* by moving the question of good and evil from one that speaks in terms of explaining (good and evil) to addressing God: more precisely, moving from a stand that asks—demands—an explanation because that is what is "needed" to one that speaks to God (knowing that that is what is needed). I do not disagree with Burrell's thesis: I simply have another one to offer that I think also describes how Augustine is "deconstructing theodicy."
- 73 Leon Kass reads the significance of Genesis 1–2 in this way: "In short, Genesis 1 challenges the dignity of natural objects of thought and the ground of natural natural reverence; Genesis 2–3 challenges the human inclination to try to guide human life (solely) by our free will and our own human reason, exercised on the natural objects of thought. Ordinary human intelligence, eventually culminating in philosophy, seeks wisdom regarding how to live—that is, knowledge of good and bad—through contemplation of the nature of things. The Bible opposes, from the beginning, this intention and this possibility, first, in chapter

- one, by denying the dignity of the primary object of philosophy, the natural things, and second, in chapter two, by rebutting the primary intention of philosophy, guidance for life found by reason and rooted in nature. God, not nature, is divine; obedience to God, not the independent and rational pursuit of wisdom, is the true and righteous human way." See Leon Kass, "The Follies of Freedom and Reason: An Old Story," in *Freedom and the Human Person*, Richard Velkley, ed., Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy Volume 48 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp. 13–38; here, p. 14.
- 74 There are his miracles, which provide a kind of knowledge, a knowledge through sight and experience, a "knowledge" wholly unsusceptible to logic and over time standing outside reason. The knowledge of good and evil knows that experience and vision are irrational (because, although personal, they are not universal) and the voice of the knowledge of good and evil rejects the moral and theological significance of experience: see, e.g., Kant, Bultmann, Wiles, etc. What were once "proofs" of Jesus' divinity—when the miracles were seen—are now wholly outside the realm of proof.
- 75 The justification is this: Propositions articulated through the knowledge of good and evil transition over time, and as such it is now clear to the modern conscience that no one can actually and truly blaspheme.
- 76 Again Bonhoeffer articulates this Augustinian perspective: "... just as we misunderstand the form of Christ if we take Him to be essentially the teacher of a pious and good life, so too we shall misunderstand the formation of man if we regard it as the way in which the pious life is to be attained." Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 82.
- 77 The dogmatic logic of this is discussed in section 3 of Michel René Barnes, "The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," *Modern Theology* Vol. 19 no. 3 (July, 2003), pp. 329–355. For Augustine, real formation occurs within the life of the Church: creed, Scripture, liturgy, sacraments, and the lives of the saints as exemplars.
- 78 It is at this moment that this essay's sub-text of "Bonhoeffer as Augustinian Critic of 'Conscience'" cashes out, for while Bonhoeffer was a profound critic of the modern notion of an autonomous moral conscience, he truly had an alternative theological insight that made clear and made possible his own path as a Christian. Bonhoeffer was no quietist, no moral solipsist; he acted more whole-heartedly and decisively than many of the "prophets of conscience" among his peers. Bonhoeffer's life and death make it clear that rejecting the moral autonomy presumed in the modern notion of conscience does not reduce the Christian to passivity. Bonhoeffer's "post-moral" theology, based upon a living obedience to God, described a life for God enabled by God, and, in Bonhoeffer's case, a life given up in witness to God.
- 79 See Genevieve Lloyd, *Providence Lost* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
- 80 I use the singular here—Second Temple *theology* of the messiah—not to say that there was only one theology of the messiah, but that a feature of Second Temple Judaism was reflection upon a messiah. Christianity is *prima facie* a theology of messiah—the Christ: identifying Jesus as the messiah is not a theology of the messiah, except insofar as the story of Jesus—the events in his life—tell us what the content of messiah is.
- 81 Robert Daly, *Christian Sacrifice: The Judaean-Christian Background Before Origen* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1978), p. 41.
- 82 "... so situated in the universe that those three hours upon the cross are but a noble and too trivial an emblem how in each individual amongst the two billion now alive and in each successive instant of the existence of each existence is ... generations upon generations unceasingly crucified and is bringing forth crucifixions into their necessities and each is in the most casual of his life so measurelessly discredited, harmed, insulted, poisoned, cheated, as all the wrath, compassion, intelligence, power of rectification in all the reach of the future shall in the least expiate or make one ounce more light. ..." James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941; reprint, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988) p. 100.
- 83 Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, p. 13.
- 84 For an in-depth treatment of the theological significance in the New Testament of Jesus' painful and humiliating death by crucifixion, see Morna D. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994).
- 85 Dylan Thomas, "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London."

- 86 "All that each person is, and experiences, and shall never experience, in body and in mind, all these things are differing expressions of himself and of one root, and are identical: and not one of these things nor one of these persons is ever quite to be duplicated, nor replaced, nor has it ever quite had precedent: but each is a new and incommunicably tender life, wounded in every breath, and almost as hardly killed as easily wounded: sustaining, for a while, without defense, the enormous assaults of the universe. . . ." Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, p. 56.
- 87 "Thus, Ebion, assuming that the starting point of the Son of God is entirely from Mary, produces not a man from God, but a God from man." Hilary, *On the Trinity* 2.4.
- 88 This sensibility of mine turns out to be in intuitive agreement with Bonhoeffer's, who turns it into a positive statement about "overcoming the knowledge of good and evil" gained in (and coincident with) the fall. Bonhoeffer interprets Matthew 6:3 (when giving alms, the left hand should not know what the right hand does) as meaning that Jesus "forbids the man who does good to know of this good." (Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 38.) Moreover, "[t]he parable of the last judgment (Matt. 25:31 ff.) completes and concludes what has so far been said. When Jesus sits in judgment His own will not know that they have given Him food and drink and clothing and comfort. They will not know their own goodness; Jesus will disclose it to them." (*Ibid.*, p. 39).
- 89 Originally I would have said that if God knows why one of those three has to do with me being "good" while the other two don't, it cannot be because there was some discernable difference in my experience in the quality of my will in doing any one of the three. Even though "helping the retarded" is a kind of immaterial good, it is experienced as a material action. However, I now like to think that I have learned to distinguish, albeit weakly, differences in my experience of my will in doing any one of the three, but it remains true that discerning differences among types of will "for" a kind of good is much easier when the "willing for" involves a simultaneous rejection of another object.
- 90 It is more gentle to say "high functioning special needs" rather than "mildly retarded," but it is not more gentle to say "[very] low functioning special needs" rather than "profoundly retarded." Besides, I have never had much truck with Wolf Wolfensberger, whose philosophy seemed to me to be about *using the retarded* for social ends.
- 91 There may be a "higher good" to drinking Coca-Cola and watching a movie: this pleasurable attachment to materialism rebuts fascisms of the Left and Right. (See footnote 40.) (It constitutes a perspective. See p. vii of Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*.)
- 92 The essay is dedicated to the memory of Iris Chang, Michael Kelly and Phil Hartmann.