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## BETWEEN DEMONIZATION AND DEPENDENCE: BAVINCK'S APPROPRIATIONS OF SCHLEIERMACHER<sup>1</sup> | CORY BROCK

In a recent editorial on Brian Gerrish's *Christian Faith* in the *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Joshua Ralston situates Gerrish's dogmatics amid the poles of modern Reformed theology. Supposing the reader interested in the modern Reformed-theological world will find himself closest to one of three names representative of distinct dogmatic trends, Ralston suggests: "Reformed theologians more influenced by Barth or Bavinck than Schleiermacher might protest Gerrish's understanding of the norms of theology."<sup>2</sup> Herman Bavinck's (1854-1921) inclusion in this list is remarkable. The Dutch dogmatician of the neo-Confessionalist movement now stands as a distinct and definitive choice occupying his place over against Schleiermacher and Barth, the two theologians who have dominated the attention of the academy for decades and particularly so in Europe. With the translation of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* completed in 2008,<sup>3</sup> his pedigree has arisen and his modern brand of Reformed confes-

sionalist orthodoxy has come of age in the Anglophone world nearly a century after his death.

And it is indeed the matter of his orthodoxy, especially establishing its fact, that has garnered the most attention since the blossoming of his publications in English. The opening editorials to each of the volumes of the *Reformed Dogmatics* beckon the reader to consider Bavinck's "modern" context and how he faced head-on "the challenges posed to Reformed orthodoxy by modernity" without "forsaking his... roots."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, a group of his Dutch interpreters question the accuracy of the orthodox against modern reading of Bavinck—the sharp antithesis is represented well by Scott Swain: Bavinck "maintained a free relation to modern Protestantism's revisionist program."<sup>5</sup> This is, to be sure, true. Bavinck's own view of the "revisionist program" was that post-Kantian theologies had inverted queen and handmaiden, wherein the "philosophical underpinnings of dogmatics [had come] under fire" and "the human ability to know [became]



HERMAN BAVINCK

1. Aspects of this article appear in Cory Brock, *Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Appropriations of Schleiermacher* (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2017); Cory Brock and Gray Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed eclecticism: On catholicity, consciousness and theological epistemology," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 70, Issue 3 (August 2017), 310-332.

2. Joshua Ralston, 'Editorial', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18:3 (July 2016): 257.

3. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 volumes, edited by John Bolt, translated by John Friend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003-2008). Hereafter, *RD*.

4. John Bolt sets modernity in sharp contrast to Reformed orthodoxy: 'Bavinck was a man of deep piety and great learning who faced head-on the challenges posed to Reformed orthodoxy by modernity without forsaking his deep, pietistic roots'. John Bolt, *Bavinck on the Christian Life: Following Jesus in Faithful Service* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2015), 38.

5. Scott Swain, 'Divine Trinity', in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, eds. Scott Swain and Michael Allen (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 78-106, 80. Swain's point has only the doctrine of the Trinity in view in the context of the quote.

restricted to the visible world, and revelation considered impossible.<sup>6</sup> Since Descartes, he suggests, theology has lost its control. “Theology was the mistress with unlimited authority; she fashioned for herself a philosophy or appropriated an existing one such as that of Aristotle as she had need of it and could use it without doing harm. In more recent times, however, the roles were reversed.”<sup>7</sup> The result:

All dogmas [today] must submit to modification—the doctrine of Scripture, of the Trinity, of election, the divinity of Christ, His satisfaction, the Church, eschatology; they are all to be thrown into the crucible, in order that the impure dross may be purged away, and the pure religious and ethical elements retained... the whole of theology is to be transformed into a religious, ethical, “Christological” direction.<sup>8</sup>

Bavinck, here, offers a subtle critique of theologies influenced by the father of modern Protestantism, Friedrich Schleiermacher. The mediation theological trends that move in an “ethical” and “Christological” direction are references to Schleiermacherian influences.

Nevertheless, as much as Bavinck did indeed face head-on the revisionist program as *the* confessionalist *dogmaticus* of the neo-Calvinist age, Bavinck, I suggest, also experienced his own “turn to the subject” that was in itself distinctly modern. Van der Kooi points in that direction in his essay on the Holy Spirit, where he argues that in Bavinck “a central place is assigned to the knowing subject” in a way that could not be found in previous Reformed theologians, particularly Calvin. Accordingly, “Bavinck cooperates in the turning towards the subject, and thereby (probably more than he likes) pays tribute to the anthropocentrism of modernity.”<sup>9</sup> While van der Kooi gives no substantial indication of just how Bavinck participates in the anthropocentric tendencies of theological modernity (which van der Kooi following Barth sets his own thought over against), in this brief essay I will argue not for any claims of “anthropocentrism” or “subjectivist idealism” but for a nuanced view: that Bavinck’s own vision for Reformed-catholic dogmatic practice gave him respect for the truth, or “what abides as true and valid” wherever it may be found.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, it has not been well-noticed in the past century except in the briefest of remarks that Bavinck had a life-long affinity for the aforementioned father of modern Protestantism, Schleiermacher. And due to his wrestling with Schleiermacher, Bavinck did indeed appropriate aspects of Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* especially regarding religious consciousness that have caused some commentators to notice subjectivist tendencies in Bavinck’s thought without locating its source and reasoning.

The suggestion is not that Bavinck is ‘Schleiermacherian’ in any way that resembles the fact that he is Augustinian, Calvinistic or, more appropriately, Reformed. It is, rather, that he borrowed and indeed learned from Schleiermacher in a very specific way. That way hardly

6. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, IV vols (Kampen: J.H. Bos, 1895), I.45; *RD* 1.106.  
 7. Herman Bavinck, “The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl”, trans. John Bolt, *The Bavinck Review* 3 (2012): 123-63, 123.  
 8. Bavinck, ‘The Future of Calvinism’, *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* V (1894): 1-24, 17-18. These three adjectives, religious, ethical, and Christological, are in this instance pejorative used in a similar way here as in *RD* 1.497ff on dogmatic methods. They are referents to ways of restructuring dogmatic foundations in religious experience, in an “Ethical” existentialism, and in an imprudent Christocentrism. These trends he associates to Schleiermacher originally. Contemporary scholarship generalizes the method as “experiential expressivism.”  
 9. Cornelius van der Kooi, ‘The Appeal to the Inner Testimony of the Spirit, Especially in H. Bavinck’, *Journal of Reformed Theology* 2:2 (May 2008): 103-112, 104, 108.  
 10. Herman Bavinck, ‘Foreword to the First Edition (volume 1) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*’, trans. John Bolt, *CTJ* 45, (2010), 9.

pertains to Schleiermacher’s unique theological method (per the logic of divine causality or the search for a sufficient transcendental applied to the individual and communal Christian consciousness in its religious affections) in deriving the materials of his dogmatics, *seine Glaubenslehre*. Rather, it is that from Bavinck’s conviction that dogmatics arises when Scriptural reason makes use of any philosophy that “it deems true and useful,” that Bavinck appropriated aspects of the philosophical introduction of Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* for his own purposes. In this article, one can only explore the ‘how’ and ‘why’ in brief by looking at Bavinck’s attitude toward Schleiermacher, an example of his appropriation of Schleiermacher, with some comments on Bavinck’s idea of the catholic dogmatician.

## BETWEEN DEMONIZATION AND EXALTATION

The dominant reading of Bavinck’s early life is that of a boy raised in an orthodox household and church culture set against the modern world. To constrain these generalized terms per Bavinck’s definitions, orthodoxy refers to Reformed confessional theology, within the parameters of the Three Forms of Unity accompanied by a life of piety, hard work and Sabbath rest. Bavinck defines orthodoxy rather simply as holding high the Christian confessions. Reformed orthodoxy here gives authoritative credence to the Reformation’s liberated conscience under the logic of *sola Scriptura*. Modernity refers, in these conversations, to the post-Enlightenment German and Dutch theological milieu—one where philosophy and science demanded reconsideration of older ways of construing theology and used some form of a principle of mediation between theology and these other sciences. Schleiermacher was the well-known progenitor of such mediation. Just before Bavinck’s birth, a leading Dutch theological journal protested the infiltration of liberal German theology into the Netherlands: “we consider it beneath the office of a Protestant... to translate the writings [of Schleiermacher] and publish them without corrective annotations.”<sup>11</sup> In Bavinck’s context, Schleiermacher’s writings, among others, were annotated to protect the church from their corruptions.

The secessionist church of Bavinck’s childhood, however, exhibits a previously unrecognized diversity regarding its relation to both societal and theological modernities. His own father published an article when Bavinck was only fourteen taking up both Schleiermacher’s (the God of self-consciousness) and Hegel’s grammars (the Absolute Spirit) for expressing the doctrine of God in the contemporary world.<sup>12</sup> Bavinck’s favorite teacher at the secessionist seminary in Kampen, Adriaan Steketee, once gave a lecture while Bavinck sat in the audience arguing that the secession church needed to join in on the renaissance of Platonic dialogical method following Schleiermacher.<sup>13</sup> Bavinck remarked in his personal journal that he traveled to Kampen to listen to a “*schoone rede*” (beautiful lecture).

11. Cited by Roessingh from the journal *Godgeleerde Bijdragen* (1830). K.H. Roessingh, *De Moderne Theologie in Nederland; hare voorbereiding en eerste period* (Dissertation, Groningen, 1914), 24. Also Cited in James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012), 6.  
 12. See Jan Bavinck, “Iets over het Godsbegrip volgens de Heilige Schrift,” *De Getuigenis* (1868-69), 1-28.  
 13. Adriaan Steketee, *De Studie van Plato, met het Oog op de Theologische Vorming* (Kampen: G. Ph. Zalsmen, 1875).

Bavinck chose to study at the University of Leiden rather than remain at the secessionist Kampen Theological School for training after only one year in Kampen. This, he expressed, was because he desired a more scientific education. In addition, he writes in his personal journal about some of the basic reasons for the move including the fact that Kampen was rather dull for a young man. At Leiden, he read the German mediation theologians and particularly focused on Schleiermacher throughout. He worked through a course on *De leer van het geweten* (the doctrine of the conscience) which included a study of the conscience's relation to *gevoel* (feeling), an aspect of consciousness that garnered immense attention among Dutch modernist and Ethical theologians after Schleiermacher's popularization of *Gefühl*. Bavinck's doctoral *scriptie* was titled "A Succinct Demonstration of the Influence of Schleiermacher upon the Exposition of Holy Scripture."<sup>14</sup> In his doctoral thesis, he begins by stating that it is Schleiermacher's revitalization of theological ethics that provoked his own work on Zwingli's ethics.<sup>15</sup> And finally, in one of his earliest journal articles, he esteems Schleiermacher's ethics once more for balancing the relation between Divine command and a doctrine of virtue (*Güterlehre*). He suggests that Schleiermacher was "the most influential theologian of the nineteenth century... who was both deeply misunderstood and too highly esteemed."<sup>16</sup>

This moderate appraisal of Schleiermacher continues throughout Bavinck's entire career. He is, of course, regularly critical of Schleiermacher's material dogmatics throughout the *Reformed Dogmatics*, but not exclusively so. Nevertheless, in 1881, Bavinck refers the reader to a German article by R. Nesselmann in *Der Beweis des Glaubens* titled "Schleiermacher's Appraisal: Presented at Schleiermacher's Jubilee in the Auditorium of Elbinger Gymnasium" published in 1869. Bavinck states that the reader interested in his own opinion of Schleiermacher merely needs to refer to Nesselmann. Bavinck uses Nesselmann's article to affirm a third way beyond demonization and exaltation. Nesselmann argues first that Schleiermacher, "a truly great man," has taught "so much to so many." Yet, "because lesser people always assess a great man only according to a small portion (because their horizon does not extend far enough) they judge the whole man subsequently according to this small portion and, therefore, always judge him one-sidedly." But, he argues, "Schleiermacher was so rare a talent that he protruded off the procrustean bed of every theological party like King Saul above his people, namely, by the height of his whole head."<sup>17</sup> He goes on, "we find [today] on the one hand a blind worship [of Schleiermacher];

on the other hand a thoroughgoing disrespect and in the middle a level-headed, moderate appraisal."<sup>18</sup> He is recognized as a "gift from above" (*als Gabe von oben*), as positively Christian, and yet an overly subjectivist "dowry of his age" (*Mitgift seines Zeitalters*).<sup>19</sup> There is indeed an "excessive worship of him... [which] has gone too far." Yet, on the other hand: "in addition to the blind worship of Schleiermacherian theology, we encounter, but in more recent times, a more thorough disregard..."<sup>20</sup> and "this rejection of Schleiermacher has no sound, solid foundation."<sup>21</sup> For Nesselmann and Bavinck, there is a third way: This agreement is found "amongst nearly all believing theologians:"

That we are in grateful recognition of [Schleiermacher's] highest spiritual gifts, of his deep Christian sense, that with his theology a new epoch has arisen, that he defeated the vulgar rationalism, and added to the recent strengthening of the consciousness of faith giving the first great encouragement; except that we, however, regarding the full appreciation of the essence and work of Christ do not agree with him and, therefore, must leave his ideas behind necessarily.<sup>22</sup>

Across the Atlantic, the chief theologian of the Princetonians gave a similar evaluation. Regarding Schleiermacher, Charles Hodge asked of Schleiermacher's soul: "Can we doubt that he is singing praises [to Christ] now? To whomsoever Christ is God, St. John assures us, Christ is a Savior."<sup>23</sup> And Hodge continues, declaring that he could not follow Schleiermacher methodologically or materially. Schleiermacher, Bavinck argues likewise, is neither to be demonized nor disregarded nor wholly adopted but something else: moderately esteemed, appreciated where possible, and carefully examined for errors—a requirement of a Reformed catholic methodology. He later wrote that one

must treat theologians like Schleiermacher in a similar way that one treats any theologian including the Reformers: be willing to learn from them, search for the truth where it may be found, "stand upon their shoulders," and "avoid [their] errors."<sup>24</sup> And while Schleiermacher certainly possessed numerably more errors than Calvin in Bavinck's estimation, Bavinck's method is steadily applied:

With Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli we differentiate that which is essential and truly reformed, from that of the spirit of the age. We do not return to them after the fact, to re-pristiniate them and their work as much as to respect their value in general... but through



FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER

14. R. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en zijn tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 1921), 23.

15. Bavinck, *De ethiek van Ulrich Zwingli* (Kampen: G.Ph. Zalsman, 1880), 1

16. Bavinck, "Het Rijks Gods, het hoogste goed," *De Vrije Kerk* (April 1881), 185-192.

17. R. Nesselmann, "Schleiermachers Werthschätzung," 104. The comparison to King Saul is perhaps a pun pertaining to Schleiermacher's intellectual stature in juxtaposition to his actual height, which is thought to be less than that of Saul.

18. R. Nesselmann, "Schleiermachers Werthschätzung," 110.

19. R. Nesselmann, "Schleiermachers Werthschätzung," 110.

20. R. Nesselmann, "Schleiermachers Werthschätzung," 111.

21. R. Nesselmann, "Schleiermachers Werthschätzung," 111-112.

22. R. Nesselmann, "Schleiermachers Werthschätzung," 112.

23. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 440.

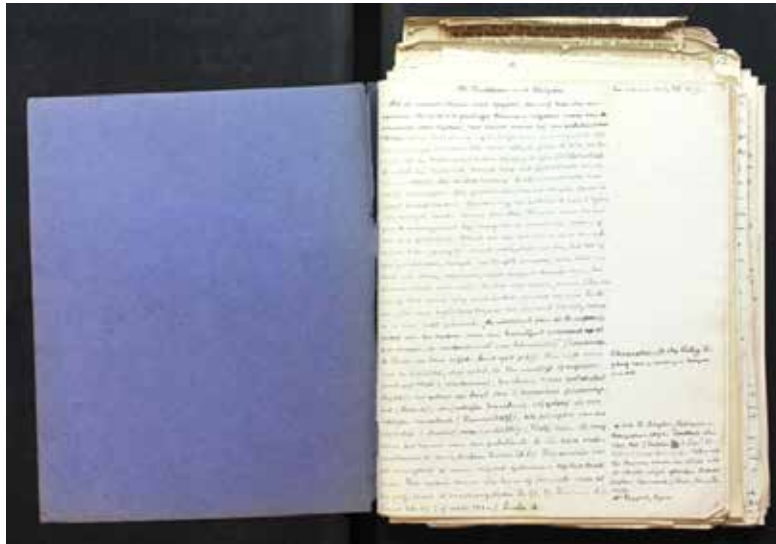
24. Bavinck, *De hedendaagsche wereldbeschouwing*, *De Vrije Kerk* 9 (Oktober 1883) 10.435-461, 458.

their teaching, better than even they, to hold fast to and speak out a reformation principle... not to return to them but to go forward from them is our motto.<sup>25</sup>

Accordingly, it is with both the estimation of Schleiermacher's value as a fact in the nineteenth-century and a personal, critical esteem that Bavinck, in his *Prolegomena*, argues that Schleiermacher's influence upon theology is incalculable and unavoidable even for the confessionalist theologian:

With [Schleiermacher's] three ideas—the immediate consciousness of the self as the source of religion, the community as the necessary form of its existence, and the person of Christ as the center of Christianity—Schleiermacher has exerted *incalculable* influence. All subsequent theology is *dependent* on him. Though no one took over his dogmatics, he has made his influence felt on all theological orientations—liberal, mediating, and confessional—and in all churches—Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed.<sup>26</sup>

## ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE AND GEVOEL



HERMAN BAVINCK'S ORIGINAL LECTURE NOTES FROM THE STONE LECTURES

While one could chronicle subtle and explicit appropriations of Schleiermacher's work throughout the whole of Bavinck's career, the most important comes at its height, the Stone Lectures presented at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1908 and published as the *Philosophy of Revelation* in 1909, just eleven years before his death. Within, Bavinck adopts Schleiermacher's grammar to express the given (*gegeben*) certainty of human experience and the ground of natural religion. At the climax of this work, he invites the reader to draw a distinction with him between Kant and Schleiermacher's vision of the self: "the core (*kern*) of our self-consciousness is, as Schleiermacher perceived much more clearly than Kant, not autonomy but a [feeling] of dependence."<sup>27</sup> Here is one example of Bavinck's pervasive adoption of the term *afhankelijkheidsgevoel* across his corpus, which is often translated inconsistently. It is, nevertheless, a translation of Schleiermacher's *Abhängigkeitsgefühl* (feeling of dependence), a term prolifically used among Dutch Modern (a particular Dutch

theological school) and especially Ethical theologians in the middle to late nineteenth century.

Such appropriation appears within an argument that begins with questions regarding the possibility of perceived organic reality, set against various idealisms on the one hand and pragmatism on the other. "The only possible way of demonstrating the [unity of reality] is by briefly inquiring how we discover its content... the only path by which we are able to attain reality is that of self-consciousness."<sup>28</sup> In "immediate" self-consciousness, Bavinck argues, "the self... is never discovered but always revealed."<sup>29</sup> In opposition to Kant's discovery of the transcendental unity of apperception, and Descartes' privileging of "thinking prior to being" as Bavinck understood them, he concludes that Schleiermacher's presentation of consciousness of both self and

world better demonstrates the revelatory nature of the self to the self through the fact of *Dasein*. "In consciousness," he argues, "our own being, and the being of the world, are disclosed to us antecedently to our thought (*denken*) or volition; that is, they are revealed to us in the strictest sense of the word."<sup>30</sup> Both the self and world and the consciousness of each are "gifts." And, "in our self-consciousness we are not only conscious of being, but also of being something definite, of being the very thing we are. And this definite mode of being, most generally described, consists in a dependent, limited, finite, created being..."<sup>31</sup> which "Schleiermacher better than Kant... described as... a feeling of dependence."

In immediate self-consciousness, Bavinck argues, is a two-fold dependence in relation to the finite and infinite. First, he writes, "we feel ourselves dependent on everything around us." Second, "we feel ourselves with all creatures *absolutely* dependent on some Absolute... on a being which is cause and ground of all being."<sup>32</sup> In this fact of a two-fold dependence from the finite to the infinite is the certainty of both the world and God. This relation between freedom and dependency gives rise to belief. And this "belief" in "God and the world is a fact that no one can deny."<sup>33</sup>

To ignore this fact of self-consciousness, this primary fact, this foundation of all knowledge and action, to make it dependent on our own affirmation, to undermine it by doubt, is to commit against ourselves and against others not merely a logical but also

25. Bavinck, "De hedendaagsche wereldbeschouwing," 458-459. Also, *RD* 4.560: "Through Schleiermacher, who not only rejected the doctrine of Roman Catholics but also that of Socinians and so forth, and recognized the teachings of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin as all being orthodox, there sprang up a movement to maintain the Lord's Supper as an objective means of grace and to ascribe to it a strengthening of the believer's life-fellowship with Christ."

26. *RD* 1.165-66.

27. Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation: The Stone Lectures from 1908-1909*, translated by Geerhardus Vos, Henry E. Dosker, and Nicolas Steffens (New York: Longman, Greens, and Co., 1909), 66. Hereafter *PoR*.

28. *PoR*, 55-56.

29. *PoR*, 66.

30. *PoR*, 75.

31. *PoR*, 66.

32. *PoR*, 66.

33. *PoR*, 67.

an ethical sin. It is to shake not only the foundation of science, but also the indispensable basis of all human conduct... And [contra Kant] no effort of the will can repair afterwards the injury, which has been wrought by thinking.<sup>34</sup>

The Schleiermacher reader will recognize that the relationship between Bavinck's account and both the later editions of Schleiermacher's *Speeches* and propositions 2-5 in Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* is one of moderate dependence. After defining religion as the feeling of absolute dependence, or as a modification of immediate self-consciousness in prop. 3, Schleiermacher describes immediate self-consciousness per the unity of human activity and receptivity (freedom and dependence) in proposition 4. Just to confirm Bavinck's dependence on Schleiermacher in his account, Bavinck uses the German *schlechtinnig* (absolute) without translating it in the middle of his argument, a term that Schleiermacher identifies in prop. 4 as rare for even a German speaker, one Schleiermacher himself learned to use from a Professor Delbrück. Manfred Frank once stated that Schleiermacher's account of the conditions of knowledge turned into a doctrine of faith.<sup>35</sup> And so it is for Bavinck. He co-opts Schleiermacher's philosophical framework for describing the dependent agent in order to add philosophical flesh to his dogmatic commitments to doctrines concerning the knowledge of God including the *sensus divinitatis*, common grace, the relation between general revelation and general religion, and the Creator/creature distinction.

We can only attach one briefer example to this exhibition. In *Magnalia Dei* (The Mighty Works of God) of 1909 (the same year as *PoR*), Bavinck spends nearly two pages paralleling Calvin's "sense of divinity" or "*zaad der religio*" (seed of religion) with what he calls "*gevoel der Godheid*" (feeling of divinity), a "*beseft van het Goddelijke buiten in ons*" (consciousness of the divine in us). At one point, he states that Calvin taught a "*gevoel der Godheid*," as did "Paul," the apostle.<sup>36</sup> Zylstra, the translator of *Magnalia Dei*, chooses to translate the term "*gevoel*" as "sense," (while acceptable grammatically) ignoring the implicit point made clearer by the fact that Bavinck defines Calvin's "feeling of divinity" explicitly. It contains two elements, he argues:

In the first place, a sense [or feeling] of absolute dependence... Underneath the mind and will, underneath thought and action there is in us a self-consciousness which is interdependent with our self-existence and seems to coincide with it... And the core of this near-identity of self-existence and self-consciousness is the feeling of dependence. In our inmost selves we are immediately... conscious of ourselves as... dependent... [Second], this sense [or feeling] of divinity has in itself a sense [or feeling]

34. *PoR*, 62.

35. Manfred Frank, "Metaphysical Foundations: a look at Schleiermacher's *Dialectic*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 33.

36. Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei: Onderwijzing in de christelijke religie naar gereformeerde belijdenis* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1909), 36. ET: *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 42-43.

of the nature of that being on whom man feels himself to be dependent.<sup>37</sup>

The persistent unnamed but clear Schleiermacherian references are striking: a "feeling of absolute dependence," "self-consciousness," "immediately... conscious of ourselves as dependent, that being on whom man feels himself to be dependent." Further, in parallel to Schleiermacher's *On Religion*, Bavinck also argues: "man is a 'dependent' of the universe." The feeling "does not carry discouragement... but rather prompts man to religion... it has in it the element of freedom."<sup>38</sup> Such appropriation follows on from Bavinck's own description of Schleiermacher's philosophy of self. In *Beginselen der Psychologie*, Bavinck summarizes his reading: "Schleiermacher... defined feeling as the immediate self-consciousness, wherein the subject, before all thinking and willing himself, becomes conscious of his own being and thereupon simultaneously his absolute dependence on God."<sup>39</sup> Bavinck cites Schleiermacher nowhere in this discussion of the feeling of absolute dependence in *Magnalia Dei*. Rather, he attributes Schleiermacher's grammar directly to Calvin. He concludes his chapter with this remark which is worth seeing in Dutch per the use of "feeling" instead of "sense": "*Het 'gevoel der Godheid' is dus, naar Calvijns omschrijving, tegelijk het 'zaad der religie'*" ("The "feeling of divinity" is therefore, as Calvin wrote, the same as the "seed of religion").<sup>40</sup> Whereas in *RD*, Bavinck uses the term "*sensus*" regarding Calvin's "sense of divinity," here he chooses *gevoel*, directly relating Calvin's sense to the feeling of absolute dependence.

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ON REFORMED  
CATHOLICITY

While Bavinck consistently critiqued attempts to construct dogmatic theology outside the domains of the ecclesial confessions and Biblical witness, he also consistently appropriated some concepts and arguments of theologians and philosophers deemed out of bounds in parts of the secessionist milieu. And this, I suggest, was precisely a reflection of his commitment to his self-defined label as a Reformed catholic. To understand the "essential principles of contemporary theology," he writes, one must understand modern movements in philosophy and, particularly, the turn to the subject—a requirement due to the modern interchange between queen and handmaiden. Yet, in tandem with this assessment, is his belief that any philosophical concept regardless of the system from which it comes can be made porous enough to serve the purposes of theological reasoning:

Theology is not in need of a specific philosophy. It is not *per se* hostile to any philosophical system and does not, *a priori* and without criticism, give priority to the philosophy of Plato or of Kant, or vice versa. But it brings along its own criteria, tests all

37. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 43.

38. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 43.

39. Bavinck, *Beginselen der Psychologie* (Kampen: Bos, 1897), 53-4.

40. Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 37.

philosophy by them, and takes over what it deems true and useful. What it needs is philosophy in general.<sup>41</sup>

This is why one historian, Puchinger, recasts the Modern/Orthodox binary common in Bavinck's milieu in the terms of Bavinck's irenicism and isolation: "There is irony in the course of history but it is undeniable [that] the most ecumenical work of protestant dogmatics was composed in Kampen, where theology was professed in the most isolationistic way!"<sup>42</sup> Puchinger's insight reflects Bavinck's expression of his own method as a "modern-Calvinist:" "modern Calvinists", he wrote, "do not wish to re-pristiniate and have no desire for the old conditions to return. They heartily accept the freedom of religion and conscience, the equality of all before the law... They strive to make progress, to escape from the deadly embrace of dead conservatism, and to take their place, as before, at the head of every movement."<sup>43</sup> Bavinck's concept of catholicity has its object not only in retrieval or *ressourcement*, which is often suggested as a method to escape from the pitfalls of the modern, but it is the best aspects of theological modernity that he always desired to appropriate. He was not interested in recovering a pristine era of theology. The *RD* along with his wider writings, is not a re-pristiniation of classical orthodoxy so-named but a re-appropriation of it with deep attention to the modern grammars, carefully considering the useful conclusions of modern psychology and higher-criticism, among other sciences, while remaining steadfast to Reformed confessional orthodoxy. His theology never cries *ad fontes* without inciting some development. Bavinck's catholicity brings the ancient into conversation with the modern but never precludes the modern by rousing the ancient: "to cherish the ancient simply because it is ancient," he writes, "is neither Reformed nor Christian. A work of dogmatic theology should not simply describe what was true and valid but what abides as true and valid. It is rooted in the past but labors for the future."<sup>44</sup> It is at the center of Bavinck's concept of catholicity to be both a historically orthodox dogmatician, appealing to the confessions both early ecumenical and (Dutch) reformed as accurate interpretations of Scriptural reasoning,

and a modern dogmatician engaged in the new questions of both philosophy and theology. If one looks for the so-called 'modern Bavinck' by setting him across from his orthodox self, each staring into the eyes of the other recognizing their opposite as a moment of confusion, then neither will be found. Rather, his modern self is an aspect of his commitment to his orthodox self, standing shoulder to shoulder rather than across. It was his commitment to Reformed theology, he confessed, that drew him to search for truth wherever it could be found. In striking contrast to his context, his ethic precludes none as interlocutor and, at the same time, recognizes no interlocutor as a definite authority, outside the Biblical witness. It is this unity of orthodox confessional rationality and modern philosophical appropriation that earned Bavinck his reputation, of which some in his secessionist church were suspicious in his lifetime.

As Bruce McCormack describes Barth "modern and yet orthodox" he does so by setting Barth in conversation with the father of modern theology, supposing a revision of the Barth/Schleiermacher relation per the possibility of a more significant family resemblance.<sup>45</sup> And, in a similar way, McCormack's project with Barth anticipates this argument. He is orthodox yet modern—a reversal of McCormack's estimation of Karl Barth. This is to say, for Bavinck, the affirmation of his confessional tradition in consanguinity with the general confessional hermeneutic of his Reformed scholastic predecessors is a priority. Yet, his Reformed orthodox identity does not preclude the adoption of a particularly modern philosophical grammar used for the expression of his confessionalist theological rationality written for both the church and academy of his era.

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45. Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 9, 37.

41. *RD* 1.609.

42. G. Puchinger, "Bavinck en de volkshistorie," *Ontmoetingen met theologen* (Terra: Zutphen, 1980), 113.

43. Bavinck, "The Future of Calvinism," 13.

44. Herman Bavinck, "Foreword to the First Edition (volume 1) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*," trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010), 10.



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# POSTMODERNITY AND THE STRUCTURES OF CREATURELY LIFE: A HERMENEUTICAL PROPOSAL

MATTHEW A. STANLEY

When we conceive of finitude, we are often tempted to define this perplexing concept in opposition to infinity. Of course, because infinity is equally if not more perplexing, we find ourselves right back where we started. How can we begin to sketch an account of finitude? One thing which we have going in our favor is that we are finite and thus find ourselves in the midst of finitude. We seem to be just the sort of beings who are fit for such an inquiry. However, this seeming advantage has often been portrayed as exactly the problem. Since we ourselves are finite, this seems to some to present an insurmountable obstacle to grasping the nature of finitude. But it strikes me as odd that we would seek to transcend our finitude in order to understand it. Would we not be better served instead by devoting ourselves to circumspectly investigating our experience of finitude in order to discover its contours, conditions, and boundaries? Does it not seem more plausible that finitude makes sense only through living it rather than trying to get outside of it? That, I propose in this paper, is the insight which can provide us with an interpretive lens for properly reading and engaging with postmodern thought. My desire for this paper is to recommend that Christians approach postmodernity with the goal of embarking on the project of enunciating the structures of creaturely life. If we adopt this hermeneutic for reading postmodern conversations and texts, we will discover in them a valuable toolbox of concepts, questions, and concerns which can serve us well as we seek to uncover just what precisely it means to be a creature.

This paper will proceed in two parts: First, I will present and comment on a specific example of postmodern philosophy, namely, Martin Heidegger's philosophical anthropology as found in his *Being and Time*<sup>1</sup>. My goal will be to briefly consider Heidegger's understanding

1. I say this to differentiate my articulations from the Later Heidegger. First, because *Being and Time*, strictly speaking, is an aborted project. Heidegger ends the final page of the work with the same question that he began with, presumably because he genuinely wonders if he has succeeded or not. Further, earlier in the book he speaks of a planned third part to the work which was never written. Second, the Later Heidegger moves away

of humans and their being in order to point out its potential and surprising resonances with Christian understandings of finitude. Second, I will present to the reader a critique of Heidegger's ontology by the Catholic phenomenologist Edith Stein. My goal in examining Stein's critique of Heidegger will be to present a model of the kind of charitable but critical engagement that I am proposing in this paper. In Stein's engagement, I am particularly interested in her conclusion that while Heidegger does offer us a unique and stimulating account of creaturely being, he ultimately offers us an account of *fallen* creaturely being and thus his account will have both substantial continuities and discontinuities when appropriated by Christians. This serves to instruct the reader that our application of this hermeneutic of creaturely being always also requires a critical turn which cannot accept postmodernity's account of finitude as ultimately satisfactory. Instead, the description of creaturely existence in postmodernity must always be re-imagined by the Christian in light of the eschatological renewal of all things through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I chose specifically to focus on one interchange between two phenomenologists in this paper in order to combat the conception of a monolithic movement known as "Postmodernism." A "thing" called Postmodernism breaks apart upon closer scrutiny. Rather than being a singular movement, the moniker postmodernism applies to many conversations which are disparate in origin and conceptual frameworks, but which are nonetheless united by their attempt to critique what they take to be modern thinkers' emphasis on abstraction, universal reason, disembodiment, and a-historicity. Worldview apologists and evangelicals at large have failed the Church miserably by constructing a fictitious "Postmodernism" which prowls around like a roaring lion. The ideas and practices which arose in various postmod-

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from this early work and shifts towards language and poetics, a shift which I personally have not studied in enough depth to comment on fruitfully.

ern conversations cannot be rightly understood outside of their context. They did not all have the same goals, questions, or historical context, and they often disagreed with one another. Ironically, evangelical constructions of a singular Postmodernism exhibit a classic example of an enlightenment de-historicized, a-contextual, and disembodied sort of knowing which postmodern thinkers want to critique. By abstracting postmodernity from its particular set of historical communities and questions, Christians have constructed a bogeyman which lacks nuance and plausibility. This bogeyman can be easily mocked or blamed for various societal ills, thus effectively insulating ourselves from honestly engaging with the questions being asked by real people or from seeing the surprising insights that postmodern thought can bring to the table. This is deeply unfortunate and we must see that we are impoverished by this state of affairs. I hope that this paper will be a catalyst to change that situation.

## HEIDEGGER'S PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Heidegger begins *Being and Time* by clearly stating his intentions for his project, saying, "The aim of the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of "being" and to do so concretely. The provisional aim is the interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of being."<sup>2</sup> In this first chapter, Heidegger takes it that the *meaning* of Being has not been sufficiently asked in the past, because philosophers have typically taken the meaning of Being to be about *beings*. It is Heidegger's contention that whatever Being is, it is not itself a being amongst beings, but is rather that which *determines* all beings as beings.<sup>3</sup> This arises out of Heidegger's guiding concern that Western metaphysics has been preoccupied with investigating particular inner-worldly beings, especially conceived of in terms of spatial presence and temporal endurance (as epitomized in concepts of 'matter' or '*res extensa*')<sup>4</sup>. Heidegger proposes instead that we consider time as that horizon in relation to which beings might be determined as beings.

How do we inquire after this Being of beings though? Heidegger takes the very impulse to investigate Being as itself a peculiar mode of being. In contrast to beings like leaves, stars, and compasses, humans continually inquire after the meaning of being. Why do humans ask about the meaning of existence? Heidegger believes this to be a defining structure of humans, one which differentiates them from other

2. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), marginal page 1.

3. Heidegger, 4.

4. Heidegger, 23-26, §19-21.

sorts of beings.<sup>5</sup> We are the sort of beings who are concerned in our being about our being, that is, we have the relation to our being by caring about it. Throughout *Being and Time*, he uses the term 'Dasein' (being-there) to refer to the humanly mode of being which is guided by the principle of 'care,' which means that Dasein orients itself in the world in terms of what concerns it. He therefore begins his project by explicating the various structures of Dasein so that he might properly ask about the meaning of Being which Dasein already has a relationship with.

Heidegger begins his exploration of Dasein's structures by explicating Dasein's being as being-in-the-world, that is, as its having a world. We would be mistaken if we thought of this world as the numerical totality of all beings, for Dasein's world is actually the horizon towards which Dasein orients itself such that the totality of beings can be called a whole.<sup>6</sup> Dasein finds itself already relationally connected with all beings in this world, and thus it also has the being of being-in. This means that Dasein does not first discover itself and then discover the world, but rather it discovers itself in discovering its world.<sup>7</sup> Putting

this another way, our dwelling in the world is so foundational to who we are that we cannot develop selfhood unless we first realize our relationship with other Dasein and other objects. This primordial connectedness of being-in allows the significance of things to rise to the surface as we engage with them in lived activity.<sup>8</sup> For instance, by taking up a hammer, I intend this hammer as hammer which means that I intend it as this being with this possibility for being, namely, of hammering a nail. The possibility for

being, the for-the-sake-of-which that I project together with this being discloses our collective significance that we already had but has now come to presentation in activity. Of course, this means that I must negotiate with this being, for perhaps this hammer is weak or the nail too stubborn, and then I am awakened to the significance of this relation in a new and interesting way. What structures these encounters is how Dasein orients itself in the world in terms of care, which means that it projects new possibilities which reveal significances about its essential interconnection with other beings.<sup>9</sup>

Nor does Dasein simply understand innerworldly objects in this way. Having found itself within a unity which both precedes and yet includes it, Dasein comes to understand itself through its own certain set of possibilities. Heidegger observes that we understand ourselves

5. Heidegger, 7, 12.

6. Heidegger, 63-65.

7. Heidegger, 54-59.

8. Heidegger, 59-62.

9. Heidegger, 67-70.



in terms of projections for possibilities of being in the future, and we move into the future by pursuing these possibilities and bringing them into actuality. In this way, he sees Dasein as being essentially ecstatic, that is, being itself in always being ahead of itself. Our having a history, a community, a language, and a world full of objects which possess their own distinct histories allows us to have this ecstatic identity. Heidegger calls this our 'thrownness,' that is, we find ourselves already being somewhere, as though we had been thrown there.<sup>10</sup> Our thrownness presents us with the facts of what was and this in turn presents us with the parameters and possibilities for what could be. Dasein's being thrown into its particular history closes off possibilities for the future, but its thrownness also simultaneously gives Dasein its possibilities. Thus Dasein's being as being-thrown is both the narrowing of possibilities but also the possibility of possibilities.

This understanding through projecting possibilities which are predicated upon our being-in relies on Dasein's fundamental structure of 'understanding.' For Heidegger, understanding is not cognition or affirmation of truth propositions, but rather understanding constitutes the essential way that Dasein is in the world. Understanding is Dasein's mode of being, not simply a cognitive activity.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, understanding is not even properly speaking knowing, for things like knowing, judging, and the like are derivative activities which can only be predicated upon this prior being attuned to the interconnected unity of the world. Because Dasein is the being which is oriented by care, Dasein acts as the clearing where the significances of itself and other beings can come to presentation. Therefore, if care is to disclose a thing's possibilities for being, and Dasein is the clearing where these possibilities in relation can be disclosed,<sup>12</sup> then Heidegger's claim that understanding is a mode of being amounts to the claim that possibility is the fundamental shape of being.

If possibility is the underlying structure of understanding, then the understanding which gives rise to knowledge must have the shape of 'projecting' just like Dasein. In this way, we see also that our being is fundamentally hermeneutical, that is, understanding is interpretive. Interpretation is not an element added on to knowledge, but rather every act of knowledge is interpretation.<sup>13</sup> Why? Because it has the dynamic structure of fore-having an understanding which then projects possibilities for being, which then comes to actualization through a temporal process.<sup>14</sup> Heidegger here offers something of an answer to Meno's Paradox, and his answer has striking similarities to Plato's. Heidegger says that Dasein already has it in an understanding way, that is, through its essentially already relational mode of being, but it must "come to itself" in an act of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> This act of knowledge is interpretation because it possesses the shape of projecting a possibility for being on the basis of already fore-having understanding.<sup>16</sup> In a way then, Heidegger seems to be working out a new ontology of possibility, arguing that a possibility is not simply that-which-is-not-here-yet nor is it simply abstract logical possibility, but possibility as an ontological mode is that which already possesses what it will become.

10. Heidegger, 135.

11. Heidegger, 143-144.

12. Heidegger, 146.

13. Heidegger, 150.

14. Ibid.

15. Heidegger, 62.

16. Heidegger, 144.

How then am I supposed to be? Heidegger devotes §45 - 60 of *Being and Time* to investigating what he takes to be the most authentic way for Dasein to be. This question arises because Heidegger sees that Dasein's way of being can be profoundly scary to us humans. He thinks that anxiety arises when we are confronted by the essential contingency of the world. Whereas fear is directed at specific inner-worldly beings, anxiety is Dasein's being anxious in itself about Being itself. Dasein is anxious because it always and everywhere confronts the nothingness of death. This means that Dasein's being is a being-towards-death. Heidegger takes great pains to disabuse us of the notion that by death he means simple biological cessation. He does not mean the future moment of our death. No, he means the ever present possibility of having no possibilities. To have possibilities always presupposes the essentially prior possibility of having no possibilities at all, and this is what Heidegger means by death. Thus Dasein lives into the future with nothingness as its fundamental ground. Throughout *Being and Time*, Heidegger explores the various ways that humans deal with this terrifying reality, such as retreating into what he calls the "they-self" or through burying ourselves in an absorption in innerworldly objects. These are all ways of living in-authentically because they constitute a fleeing from Dasein's true mode of being. Instead, Heidegger believes that Dasein lives most authentically by hearkening to the call of conscience, which is Dasein's call which wells up from within itself to call itself back to itself, and to thereby resolutely live into the possibility of nothingness by boldly projecting its ownmost possibility for being.

## EDITH STEIN AND THE UNREDEEMED BEING OF DASEIN

While Edith Stein was a peer of Martin Heidegger's and a fellow student of Edmund Husserl, their lives could not have been more different. Whereas Heidegger was raised in rural Germany as a Roman Catholic but later deviated from the faith, Stein was a Jew who became Roman Catholic later in life, eventually entering the Carmelite order, and being martyred in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.<sup>17</sup> She dedicated her final philosophical work *Finite and Eternal Being* to working out a synthesis of Thomist metaphysics and the phenomenological method which she learned during her time as a student under and assistant to Edmund Husserl. Her proficiency in the phenomenological method, her personal acquaintance with Heidegger, and her fundamental grounding in the tradition of Thomistic metaphysics and medieval mysticism uniquely positions her to comment on the relevance of Heidegger's work to the Christian scholar. Stein interacts with Heidegger's work with nuance and gravity, always seeking to understand its potential, but without leaving her Christian commitments at the door. In fact, her grounding Christian commitments are what allow her to discern in Heidegger's work all of the stimulating half-truths and pregnant lacunas which she thereby seeks to draw on in order to simultaneously incorporate his thought and transcend it. While Stein reveals tantalizing ambiguities in Heidegger's account of Dasein and asks deeply probing questions throughout her lucid summary and critique of *Being and Time*, her most extensive and fundamental critique of Heidegger comes near the end of her discussion of his concept of being-towards death. In her critique, she hones in on Dasein's utter insufficiency in itself unto itself and the significant gap

17. For a gripping presentation of Stein's life, see Sarah Borden, *Edith Stein* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

this creates in Heidegger's account of creaturely being. Heidegger uses the word 'being-guilty' to refer to the essential structure of Dasein in which its resolute choice to project a possibility for being necessarily involves rejecting another possible choice.<sup>18</sup> But Stein wants to probe this experience where Dasein seems to long to be more than it can be within the horizon of temporality. Where does this yearning for an abundant life which overflows and bursts the limits of our creaturely frame come from? Stein takes it that this longing need not be quashed, but is actually indicative of the fact that we are not yet what we will be. Whereas Heidegger sees that same desire as a fleeing from the harsh individual responsibility of choosing to actualize one possibility amongst many, Stein sees this yearning as indicative of Dasein's insufficiency to be all that it wants to be. She says, "The inability of our temporal being to fully unfold our essence, to express what we are bid to assume into ourselves and possess 'as a whole,' points to the fact that the 'authentic' being which we in temporality are capable of... is still not our final authentic being."<sup>19</sup> Thus, Dasein's overwhelming desire to be united with the totality of things, to truly possess communion with some sort of whole, constitutes a simultaneous orientation towards the transcendent and a testimony to the inadequacy of Dasein to fulfill itself.

As mentioned earlier, Heidegger takes 'care' to be the primary principle that Dasein understands itself in terms of. This care is concerned with its own being, that is, it must constantly be becoming through positing itself in terms of its possibilities. Stein cannot accept this flattened out picture of life though. Is not Heidegger's view simply an eternal deferral of satisfaction? Stein is convinced that a desire exists because it longs for *satisfaction*, not Heidegger's "sequence from nothing to nothing."<sup>20</sup> The picture of human life that Heidegger has painted for us consists in Dasein continually casting itself forward, grounded on nothing, facing death at every moment, precisely because it is driven forward by the concern within itself for its own being. Of course, for Heidegger, this is just the way things are and the situation is to be faced with a heroic resoluteness that lives towards the ever present possibility of nothingness. But Stein finds this picture implausible because it cannot comprehend a being satisfied or a fullness of being. What is Dasein seeking? What is it moving towards? What would truly satisfy it? Heidegger's Dasein finds itself adrift on an ocean of nothingness, and the only life it possesses is the one it can wrench from the jaws of nothingness before it is inevitably swallowed. But what sort of life is this and could there be something more?

Stein's alternate proposal seeks to ask what it might look like for these seemingly unfulfillable desires to be fulfilled. If 'care' and 'temporal-

18. Edith Stein, "Martin Heidegger's Existential Philosophy," translated by Mette Lebeck, *Maynooth Philosophical Papers* 4, (2007): 79, and Heidegger, 269.

19. Stein, 79.

20. Stein, 80.



EDITH STEIN (CA. 1938-1939)

ity' testify to their own incompleteness, their own unfulfilled longing, this seems to give us grounds to doubt their finality. Stein says, "A being that has reached its full possession of its own being is no longer concerned for it."<sup>21</sup> At precisely the moment that a being comes into full possession of its being, it no longer needs to orient itself towards the future in terms of care. Instead, this being may enter into a state of "abandonment" and "the relaxation of the self-forgetting gift of self to eternal."<sup>22</sup> Stein is a good Thomist. She is committed to the conception of eternal fulfillment in the Beatific Vision, which she describes as that which Dasein longs for, saying, "Joy without end, happiness without shadows, love without boundaries, the most intense life without sleep, the most powerful action which at the same time is complete stillness and freed from all tension – this is *eternal bliss*. This is the *being about which human existence is*."<sup>23</sup> She does not

use such language as 'God' and 'beatific vision,' but her meaning could not be more clear. Heidegger's ontology finds itself groundless, empty, and unsatisfied because it can only look to itself, and thus finds itself utterly impotent to fulfill itself. There is a fullness that Dasein longs for and that is why it continually projects itself, grasping at a future, desperately trying to 'give itself time.'<sup>24</sup> Thus, contrary to Heidegger, Stein interprets temporality as "the way in which the finite gains participation in the eternal."<sup>25</sup>

What can we learn from Stein's engagement with Heidegger's work? I take Stein's work to be instructive for us in two primary ways. First, Stein treats Heidegger's work with the seriousness that one human owes to another. One crucial way she does this is by thoroughly understanding his work before commenting on it. In fact, she devotes the first ten pages of her

critique to a dense and masterful explanation of Heidegger's project and main concepts before she even gets to the point of raising questions. Further, she orients herself towards his work by taking him to be attempting to speak truthfully about human experience, and consequently as speaking about issues and raising questions that are as much his as they are hers. Also, even as Stein critiques Heidegger's work, she seeks to affirm and find plausibility in Heidegger's work as much as she can. In her final assessment, she says concerning his work, "it is accurate in a certain sense, in [the sense namely] that it reveals something of the basic constitution of the human being, and sketches a certain way of being human with great clarity."<sup>26</sup> She even describes his descriptions of the constitutive processes of Dasein as

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21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Heidegger's phrase. But Barth actually uses this same phrase to describe how sinful being attempts to 'give itself time' because it is struggling against the fact that God is the one who gives us time.

25. Stein, 80.

26. Stein, 81.

“masterly.” Do not take this to mean that I think we ought to sprinkle our conversation with postmodern individuals with tidbits of praise. Rather, I believe Stein is admitting that she finds much in Heidegger’s description which resonates with her experience and which she finds to be genuinely illuminating. As I said before, she finds commonality with Heidegger in the sense that they are both asking fundamentally human questions and there is significant overlap in their experience of this creaturely life.

But, and this brings me to my final point, Stein cannot accept Heidegger’s account wholesale. Inevitably, she finds that mixed amongst the illuminating insights are equally illuminating omissions. She uncovers his idiosyncracies which serve to cover over other aspects of human life. She finds herself ultimately unsatisfied with his account of Dasein’s being which projects itself in terms of care and temporality, because she takes these two terms to be indicative of a deeper desire which speaks of satisfaction. Heidegger’s finite being requires a participation in Eternal being in order to achieve the fullness that it longs for. This is why Stein describes Heidegger’s work as a description of “unredeemed being.”<sup>27</sup> Here we have Stein espousing the hermeneutic that I too am proposing, and she does so with a crucial nuance. While she takes Heidegger to be offering an instructive and even masterly description of creaturely life, this account will always be incomplete and thus require re-imagination in light of the work of God in Jesus Christ. One cannot simply describe the creature in abstraction, but must describe the creature in its concrete experience of sin and misery. When the creature finds itself in this state of sin and misery, the world appears distorted, but it is nonetheless *the world* which appears to the sinful creature. The reality of sin is that it fails to achieve its goal of total freedom from God and thus inevitably finds itself blundering through God’s world. Heidegger’s analysis of fallen being therefore illuminates for us crucial elements of what it means to be human and finite, but his account also inevitably requires a critical analysis which is only made possible by the internal renewal of creation through the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

In his book *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer offers a comment on his teacher’s work, saying, “Interpreting being from the horizon of time does not mean, as it is constantly misunderstood to mean, that Dasein is radically temporal, so that it can never be considered as everlasting or eternal but is understood only in relation to its own time and future.”<sup>28</sup> This interpretation, which Gadamer calls a misunderstanding, seems to be precisely what Stein is saying. What does Gadamer propose instead? “In disclosing time as the ground hidden from self-understanding, it does not preach blind commitment out of a nihilistic despair, but opens itself to a hitherto concealed experience that transcends thinking from the position of subjectivity, an experience that Heidegger calls *being*.”<sup>29</sup> Could it be that we can appropriate Heidegger’s thought more fruitfully by

27. Stein, 81.

28. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method, 2nd edition*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), 99.

29. Gadamer, 99.

not accepting Stein’s interpretation of Dasein as transcendently closed and radically immanent? If we follow Gadamer, can we perhaps open up new vistas in Heidegger’s thought which allow for Dasein to take more from Heidegger than Stein does by envisioning Dasein’s eschatological fulfillment differently than Stein does?<sup>30</sup>

I quote Gadamer here because, despite my commendation of Stein’s work to the reader, I still possess reservations about whether her alternate proposal succeeds in supplanting Heidegger’s work. Stein’s critique accepts what she can from Heidegger’s model, and seeks to move beyond it on the basis of her commitment to communion with God as the ultimate telos of humanity, but in this process she operates with a particular interpretation of the eschaton as a state of arrival or completion, and I think that this question can remain open for us as Christians. What if this state of Dasein’s being satisfied does not consist in a state of having arrived, but a state of utterly fulfilled activity? Some of Stein’s statements could be read that way, but others seem to point towards a more static conception too. Further investigation would be required to get clear on that point of interpretation in Stein, but I take this to demonstrate that the question can remain open amongst Christians for *how* postmodern philosophy must be appropriated. This question relies for an answer on which models of eschatological restoration we find more persuasive. Will we experience time in the new heavens and the new earth? How? What will we be doing? What were we made for? How will we use language? Signs? Thought? In short, what does redemption tell us about what is essential to being a human and how do we therefore understand ourselves this side of the eschaton?

ONE CANNOT SIMPLY DESCRIBE  
THE CREATURE IN ABSTRACTION,  
BUT MUST DESCRIBE THE  
CREATURE IN ITS CONCRETE  
EXPERIENCE OF SIN AND MISERY.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In Heidegger’s description of Dasein, even if we do not have all the details that we may want, we have here a compelling and useful schema for understanding creation and especially the human’s nature and role within it as a fellow creature. Heidegger’s proposal seeks to remedy past understandings of the human person which see us as an isolated ego searching for indubitable knowledge, being primarily rational beings who are motivated by ideas, or as beings who must abstract ourselves from our time and place in order to know the world aright. Instead, the picture of humans that we get in many postmodern thinkers complicates the simple conceptions that many evangelical Christians are tempted to operate with. Instead of being primarily ‘thinking things,’ Heidegger argues that we are fundamentally oriented in this world by cares, desires, needs. We understand ourselves only in terms of a historic set of possibilities in which we find ourselves and these compose our concrete existence. We understand ourselves primarily therefore in terms of that which we can become and we

30. I believe we can begin to see the payoff of this approach in the final chapter of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*. Through drawing on Nicholas of Cusa and employing the relation between the Father and the Son as an analogy of the relation between being and language, Gadamer begins to gesture towards the potentially Christological structure of finite understanding, particularly, *Truth and Method* 418-430.

do this by projecting possibilities for being. Further, he shows us the complex structure of selfhood. We are not selves first and foremost, but we actually *become* a self only through our relations which position us within a totality, a world. Knowledge of self does not precede knowledge of the world. Knowledge of ourselves is equiprimordial with our knowledge of the world; they arise co-dependently. This finally leads us to see that our living and knowing are intertwined and embedded in our concrete existence within a time, place, culture, language, and community. This opens up a host of possible lines of inquiry whereby we can examine those processes, activities, and symbols which function in our lives as the conditions of knowing. From Foucault to Barthes, to Derrida to Deleuze, all these figures are interested in these distinct but ineliminable structures which compose the walls, beams, and supports of our experience, giving it its shape and texture.

Though these conversations are varied and unique, the Christian can find edification nonetheless in engaging these conversations in a piecemeal manner by employing the conceptual unity which I have proposed here, namely, that of exploring the structure of creaturely life. Karl Barth once said, “After all, is it our job as Christians to accept or reject worldviews? Have not Christians always been eclectic in their worldviews – and this for very good reason?”<sup>31</sup> Here I see Barth endorsing a principled eclecticism which seeks to dismantle

31. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume III, Part 2*, trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 447.

systems and salvage them for various useful parts, and which engages in this seemingly haphazard inquiry by allowing its deepest convictions to provide guidance throughout. This means that our road will appear winding and move at odd angles, but we need not be terribly concerned about this. We are not accountable to any abstract principle which would presume to dictate the shape of our inquiry for us ahead of time. Our inquiry will always be motivated by our own questions and will require each Christian to engage in an inquiry which picks and chooses for the sake of their own personal project. In short, I propose that we view the many postmodern conversations from this angle of seeking to enunciate the warp and woof of creaturely being. By contextualizing postmodern thought within the Christian’s theological commitments in this way, we can allow the story of creation’s eschatological redemption through the work of its Creator and Lord Jesus Christ to become the tool which allows us both to see the value in postmodern thought and also to engage in the internal conceptual renewal which will be necessary in any act of its appropriation.

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