

RETHINKING THE IMAGE OF GOD

by Anna Case-Winters

Abstract. The present ecological crisis imposes a rethinking of the relation between the human being and the rest of nature. Traditional theological articulations of this relation have proven problematic where they foster separatism and anthropocentrism, which give a false report on the relation and have a negative impact on thinking and acting in relation to nature. One place to begin rethinking is through an exploration of the affirmation that the human being is “made in the image of God,” *imago dei*. Some ways of construing the theological meaning of this designation are more helpful than others. Science has recognized the extent to which the human being is not only dependent upon but even emergent from nature. We are made of the same “stuff” that makes up the rest of the universe. We *are* nature. The place of the human being is much more modest, recent, and precarious than usually acknowledged in theological reflection. New ways of interpreting our role within nature must evolve out of this new understanding. Philip Hefner has proposed that we think of the human being as created co-creator. His is a distinctive and promising contribution. This essay responds with both affirmations and friendly questions.

Keywords: anthropomorphism; created co-creator; genetic kinship; *imago dei*; progress; purpose; responsibility; self-transcendence; separatism; sin.

Philip Hefner’s proposal that we think of the human being as a created co-creator is a fruitful one that has much potential for illumining the current discussion of the nature of the human being in relation to the rest of nature. Some traditional theological articulations of this relation have fostered a separatism and anthropocentrism that are untenable from a scientific standpoint and unhelpful in the current ecological crisis. It is useful at this

Anna Case-Winters is Professor of Theology at McCormick Theological Seminary, 5460 S. University, Chicago IL 60615; e-mail acase-winters@McCormick.edu.

[*Zygon*, vol. 39, no. 4 (December 2004).]

© 2004 by the Joint Publication Board of *Zygon*. ISSN 0591-2385

time to revisit the roots of these articulations and revision the traditional doctrine of the image of God (*imago dei*). In this effort, Hefner's model of created co-creator offers a significant contribution.

The text that launched the whole classical discussion is the account of creation in Genesis 1 where it says that God created human beings in God's own image, male and female. In what does the *imago dei* consist? There is a range of viewpoints in the classical tradition on both what it really means to be created in the image of God and whether we can be said still to possess it after the fall.

Irenaeus located the *imago dei* in our human attributes of rationality and freedom. For Augustine it was a more dynamic quality of being in right relationship with God. Aquinas connected it with capacity for reason. Luther identified it with righteousness, by which he meant living life toward God. Calvin concurred with Luther; for him *imago dei* consisted in our orientation toward God.

These meanings fall into two somewhat different categories. One equates the image of God with attributes or capacities that are intrinsic to the human being as such: reason/rationality and freedom. Theologians who think in these terms are meaning *image* in the sense of a stamp indelibly stamped upon the human being as such and something therefore that cannot be lost. Theologians who think of *image* in more dynamic terms, as a way of living life before God or a quality of relationship with God or our orientation toward God, are meaning it more like the image we see in a mirror. If we turn the mirror away from the thing it was reflecting, the image can be distorted or even lost.

WHY CORRECTION IS NEEDED

I do not quarrel with the tradition in locating the *imago dei* in these attributes and qualities of life of the human being but rather with the habit of much of Christian theology in relation to these themes. Many seem to pursue the matter of the *imago dei* as a way of asking, What distinguishes the human being from nature? How are we special/different from the rest of creation? What sets us above and apart? When this is the way questions are framed, one suspects an agenda designed to establish human rights to rule and exploit the rest of nature. I think the whole approach to the *imago dei* needs to be reconsidered. Our present habits of thought have led to separatism and anthropocentrism, which have proven both untenable and dangerous.

There is an attitude that we are qualitatively different from the rest of creation and are in effect the center of the universe. The search for difference here, my hermeneutics of suspicion suspects, is really a way of asking how we are *superior to and more important than* nature. It is a quest for a grounding for our right to rule, our permission to exploit. We are in charge,

and what is here exists for us. Our relation to nature is an instrumental relation. Even the environmental movement grounds many of its arguments in terms of human survival acknowledging our very real dependency on our ecosystems. Nature is first and foremost a set of natural resources existing for our use. If we conserve these resources, we do so not for their intrinsic value but so that we will be able to go on using them indefinitely. This way of thinking has had disastrous consequences for the way human beings related to the rest of nature, bringing us to the present ecological crisis. The habit of looking to our theological definitions of the human being as a way of shoring up our sense of difference and centrality may be a dangerous habit, one we need to break.

Separatism and anthropocentrism lose credibility in the light of what we know from science about the human being. What science has discovered presses us to reconstruct our theological anthropology.

Continuity between Human Beings and the Rest of Nature. There is more that connects us with nature than there is that distinguishes us. Our true relation is obscured by language we commonly hear—that we are “dependent upon” nature for our sustenance. The relation is much deeper than that. We have learned from contemporary science that we are in and of the natural world, coming to be, like all other life forms, within the long process of evolution from simpler life forms. We are composed of the same “starry stuff” that makes up the rest of the universe. We emerge from “preceding natural processes that include cosmic events (the appearance of physical elements in the galactic furnaces), as well as biochemical (the emergence of life), genetic, and neurobiological events” (Hefner 2002). There is an unbroken continuity with the rest of nature; separation is a false report on reality. We are part with all else of the rich, diverse, complex, and evolving web of life that has been emerging over eons on this planet. What made everything from the butterflies to the belugas made us, too. We are in this sense “created,” and we are not so different. We *are* nature.

The things that distinguish us are a matter of degree. This is underappreciated. Even the rationality, freedom, and relationality that are ours are not ours exclusively. Some renderings of the God-human being-nature relations place God and the human being on one side of a great divide having a monopoly on spirit, while all else is on the other side as purely material: nature as backdrop for the God-human drama. However, science paints a very different picture. We see degrees—quantitative rather than qualitative distinctions. In fact, as Nancy Howell has pointed out (2002), the very areas that historically have been assumed to make us distinctive from other primates—our genetics, language, culture, and morality—turn out to be similarities rather than differences. We share 98.4 percent of the same genetic material with our closest relatives. We are

closer genetically to chimpanzees than gorillas and orangutans are. In terms of language, while chimpanzees are morphologically different and therefore cannot speak as we do, they are capable of learning sign language, and they teach it to their offspring, who, it is reported, sign more to their friends than to their mothers. In terms of cultures, chimpanzees of the seven regions in Africa show similarities in practice and behavior but also differences that seem to be culturally transmitted. In terms of morality, there is evidence of a whole range of things from sympathy and empathy to the ability to devise and carry out a deception.

Our Place Is Much More Modest than We Have Heretofore Imagined. The evidence of science reveals that we have made a rather late appearance on this scene. Many species have come and gone before us. If we are at the center of it all, what about those eons and the myriad creatures that were here before us? Was cosmic meaning and fulfillment just on hold until we came along? How unlikely it seems.

We have a rather precarious existence. Russell Merle Genet (1998, 2) has pointed out that, as a species,

we consider ourselves to be highly successful, but in actuality, we are not. If one is coldly objective about life—about success—it is biomass that counts. Among animals, the insects, not mammals (let alone mere humans) are the biomass winners. Animal biomass, however, even all of it rolled together, is inconsequential compared with plants. This is not the worst of it, however. Recent research has revealed the actual winners of our planet to be subterranean bacteria.

Stephen Jay Gould notes that complex life forms like ourselves are really at a disadvantage. Our very complexity makes us easy prey to the mass extinctions that periodically plague the planet (Genet 1998, 2). Even if we survive until our Sun goes out with a bang or a whimper, how can it all have been about us with our late appearance and precarious existence?

We are an infinitesimally small part of it all. Those who study the character of the larger cosmos class human beings with the heavy elements. Most visible physical reality is lumped together as “things heavier than helium” in a broad category called “metals.” This whole category makes up only .001 percent of what is there. We are almost “not there” in the grand scheme of things. We may ask, with the psalmist, “what, indeed, are mortals that God is mindful of them?” (Psalm 8:4 NRSV)

Our place seems smaller still when we consider that we may not be alone in the universe. With the discovery of other planetary systems around nearby stars, some wonder whether there might not be myriad other planets with myriad life forms. There is a vast cosmos out there. If we are the main show, it would seem that, as the theologian in the movie *Contact* was wont to say, “There is a whole lot of wasted space out there.”

Alternative Resources in the Tradition. Given these realities, one wonders how the dominant tradition came to shape a theological anthropol-

ogy so intent upon setting the human being apart from and above it all. This direction in a Christian theology of human nature is not inevitable, for there are alternative readings available in the tradition. For example, when it is affirmed that human beings are “created in the image of God,” do we lose sight of the reality of being “created” (just like everything else) and latch on to our being “in the image of God”?

Old Testament scholar Theodore Hiebert, in his book *The Yahwist Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (1996) has revisited the two accounts in Genesis of the creation of the human being. Theologians have rather decisively favored the first account over the second. It is the Priestly account, wherein the human being is said to be made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–28), that has become our theological preoccupation. The Priestly writer held a perspective that viewed the human being as a godlike being in relation to the rest of nature, dominating and ruling over all else. The Yahwist account found in Genesis 2 presents a very different picture. In verse 7 the human being is said to be made “from the dust of the ground” (NRSV). The Yahwist writer speaks from an agrarian context wherein the human being is very much a part of and dependent upon natural processes. The perspective is of oneness with the earth and all living creatures. The human being tilling the soil is the servant of the land and not its master.

Why have we not listened as attentively to the Yahwist writer as to the Priestly writer? Why has the insight that we are “dust” taken a back seat to the insight that we are “made in the image of God”? Can it be because the Priestly account aids us in making theological claims that we are set apart from and above the rest of nature, whereas the recognition that we are dust calls us back to a much humbler standpoint within nature? Perhaps another look at Genesis 2 would be profitable.

There may very well be many such untapped resources in the tradition that would underscore our humble place as a part of nature and the intrinsic value of the rest of nature. For example, there are hints in John Calvin of something less anthropocentric. In his theology, particularly in the Commentaries and the Sermons, it is clear that God has a relation to all of creation, not just to human beings. He speaks of nature as the “theater of God’s glory.”¹ The human being has an important part in this theater,² but we are by no means the whole show. The whole of creation is a locus of divine revelation³ and providential activity, and the anticipated eschatological consummation includes not only the redemption of humanity but also the restoration of all things—a new creation.

Even granting the classical definitions of the *imago dei*, there is nothing that requires the peculiar development that our theological elaborations have taken—the practice of taking these descriptions as a means to separate and elevate the human being from the rest of nature. Whether we think of the image of God in terms of intrinsic capacities such as reason/

rationality or the quality of our living in relationship, these admit of more and less and could be seen as placing the human being on a continuum rather than in absolute distinction. There are degrees of rationality and degrees of capacity for relationship.

The resources of contemporary process theology may be helpful in drawing this out. Enhanced rational and relational capacities do not need to be perceived as separating us from the rest of nature in some qualitatively different sense. These capacities admit of a more and a less, a continuum of gradations. With regard to rationality, for example, we are helped by A. N. Whitehead's notion of panpsychism (now being helpfully recast by David Griffin as panexperientialism), which sees mental and physical poles in all things, though in varying degrees. With regard to relationality, the process conviction of the sociality and relativity of all things is pertinent. The claim is that human beings, like every other reality, are co-constituted by their relationships. Relations are internal. To the degree that humans may have a greater rational capacity (a stronger mental pole) or a greater capacity for relation (since we are more self-transcending), we may manifest the *imago dei* in ways that are distinguishable quantitatively. This does not have to entail our being qualitatively different from the rest of creation in the way that has proven so problematic.

HEFNER'S DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION: AFFIRMATIONS AND QUESTIONS

Affirmations. Hefner's proposal that we think of the human being as created co-creator has among its many advantages a corrective potential. It puts "created" first. Our ontological dependency and our status of being like the rest of nature is underscored by this step, with all of the theological implications that attend that status. This is a useful course correction when laid alongside other theological anthropologies. The double aspects of our being both "dust" and *imago dei* are better balanced in Hefner's proposal and its elaboration.

Hefner reframes the question. Instead of asking about the *imago dei* in order to discern how the human being is to be set over and apart from the rest of nature, he asks in order to discover what the human being's particular role may be, what we distinctively have to offer to the rest of nature. The motivations of the question and the outcomes are decidedly different. The separatism and anthropocentrism are effectively countered.

Hefner's proposal is a creative joining of the two traditional categories of image as stamp and image as reflection. On the one hand, we are *created* and in that sense "stamped" with certain qualities, rationality and freedom, that attend human being as such. On the other hand, in the concept of *co-creator*, we have something more dynamic, which has to be lived into if we would reflect the image of God. This is an image we are to reflect by

living in relation with (turned toward) God and others. It is a calling into relationality with God, other human beings, and the rest of creation. With this more dynamic aspect there is the prospect for human beings to “turn away” and become “estranged from their own normative nature” (Hefner 2002). Hefner’s proposal embraces attributes of rationality and freedom as well as qualities of life like relationality—in Hefner’s own framing, aspects of our being that are genetic as well as aspects that are cultural. We turn out to be in some sense “gifted” and in some sense “self-made.”

The descriptive potential of Hefner’s proposal for understanding the nature and purpose of the human being is significant. In the larger discussion there is need for a metaphor that will illumine both who human beings are (in relation to God and the rest of nature) and what they should do as the especially free and rational creatures that they are. This model works well in this connection. In some ways, the nature and purpose are one—the “ought” can be derived from the “is” (1993, 31). Hefner is clear that we are related to the entire history of the universe and its evolution: “We are creatures who have emerged from the eons of evolutionary processes that preceded us” (2002, 1). If relationality is constitutive of our very being, then it is both our nature and our calling to live in relation. Estrangement and self-centeredness are not normative for us. Readings of “sin” as a failure in relation are given a fuller articulation in the symbol of created co-creator. We are created for relation; it is our nature and our purpose.

Another substantial contribution of Hefner’s proposal of created co-creator is its potential for engaging wider circles of conversation, among them circles of scientists and feminist theologians. He fully accepts the insights of science regarding the nature of the human being. This makes possible a more constructive engagement with scientists in thinking through the nature of the human being. Furthermore, the discoveries of science prove most illumining for the current project of discerning the “is” and “ought” of the relation between the human being and the rest of nature. Key among these is the discovery of the extent to which human beings are “natural” beings: “The sciences provide us with a relentlessly vivid message concerning how humans are related to nature: We are constituted by natural processes that have preceded us, we have emerged within the career of nature’s evolving processes, and we bear the indelible marks of those processes. In short, we are indissolubly part of nature, fully natural” (Hefner 1993, 64–65).

Hefner uses the model of “genetic kinship” (1993, 65) to express the full implications of what science has uncovered. This is a relationship that is not a function of our choosing to be related to nature or even of our dependency upon our natural environment for our continuing existence. It is rather a genetic inheritance internal to us—an internal, not an external, relation. While we may make a case for cultural inheritance as well as

genetic inheritance as formative for the human being, genetic inheritance has a certain priority. We, along with the rest of nature, are all made of the same “starry stuff” (dust?) and did not make ourselves from cultural sources.

Hefner’s proposal engages feminist theologians in the widening circle of conversation, especially in the places where his proposal presses beyond the understandings of sin that are most prevalent in Christian tradition. “We are sinners in that we do not and cannot exercise our created co-creatorhood as creatures of God who reflect God’s image” (Hefner 2002). Such a view can join in coalition with feminists who insist that sin as pride does not tell the whole story. Given our socialization in patriarchy it tells *his-story* but not *her-story*. Self-negation and enmeshment may hold as many pitfalls for the human being as pride and self-centeredness do, and in patriarchal cultures women are more prone to this failing. Hefner’s reading sees sin manifest as much in underachieving as in overreaching, in not living up to our potential and becoming all we are meant to be, in not taking responsibility and agency where it is rightly ours. This is what feminists have been saying.

Another feminist agenda item, that of subverting the dominant dualisms, receives assistance here as well. The dualism named in the old adversarial relation of “man against nature” is undercut, as is any way of thinking that would oppose culture to nature. In the human being, we have cultured nature—natural creatures that are self-reflective, self-transcending, predisposed not only to understand our world but also to intervene in it and reshape it.

Questions. Hefner’s proposal that we think of the human being as created co-creator is a workable option, helpful on many fronts. There are questions that remain. These I introduce here in the interest of furthering his very fruitful proposal.

1. How continuous is the continuity between the human being and the rest of nature? Once the old dualisms are laid to rest, the nature of the relation must be reconsidered. Several questions arise for me. I wonder whether more of nature than human beings might be thought of as cultured and co-creative. Insofar as higher primates, for example, share much genetic information with us and have a relative freedom and (some would argue) a degree of self-transcendence, how do we think about their status? If it is a question of degree and we see a continuity along a spectrum, how continuous is the continuity? Consider Frans de Waal’s work with higher primates. He claims to find “intense sociality and conviviality” and the existence of “genuine kindness” (de Waal 1996, 5). He contends that moral behavior goes far back in evolutionary history and is “neither a recent innovation nor a thin veneer that covers up a beastly and selfish makeup” (p. 218). Can human beings share with other creatures, by degrees at least, in the created co-creator status?

2. To what degree is freedom the human condition? This is asking the same question (that of our continuity with the rest of nature) but from the other direction. I wonder whether we overestimate the extent of our freedom. We experience ourselves as making choices as self- and world-creating beings. However, we make these choices out of will and a nature that is deeply constrained by genetics and environment. I guess I am arguing for something like a biocultural bondage of the will. Hefner gets at this from time to time, noting for example that “genetic and environmental factors are interwoven on the loom of constraint and freedom” (Hefner 1997, 199).

3. Is the boundary of Creator/created transgressed? Is that a problem? Traditional notions have left an absolute divide between Creator and created. Is that boundary transgressed as the human being is declared co-creator? Is Hefner willing to go along with those of us in the process company to think in terms of creativity as a more general term that embraces both God’s activity and ours?

4. How does “created co-creator” improve upon “steward of creation”? This is a question I am asking myself as well as Hefner. Even the most generous and revisionary interpretations, for example Douglas John Hall’s reinterpretation of dominion as “stewardship” (1986), still assume a separation wherein the human being is set over and above nature in a divinely authorized managerial relation. How is the custodial managerial relation of stewardship that both Hefner and I reject fundamentally different from the co-creator role that we both affirm? Either implies a special relation and a degree of power over and responsibility for the rest of nature. It may be argued that “stewardship” is at one and the same time too much and too little: too much in that it seems to authorize and bless our being in charge, subduing and having dominion, and too little in that “stewardship” is not an adequate description of such human enterprises as genetic engineering. How can we more fully articulate the difference between being a steward and being a co-creator?

5. Does the close association of human capacities/purposes with the purpose of nature risk a return of anthropocentrism? Some of Hefner’s discussion of the role of human being and what the human being can contribute distinctively borders on saying that nature’s “purpose” is the evolution of conscious, intentional beings like us, that in fact the evolutionary process has progressed toward us. It might be more fitting to argue that *one* of the purposes of nature seems to be the evolution of creatures like us, since that is what has happened. This is a more modest claim and would not lend itself to either the myth-of-progress way of thinking or the anthropocentrism that could reenter by the back door.

Regarding the purpose-of-nature discussion, now and then Hefner seems to be saying that God’s purpose in nature was to bring forth beings who can be these “co-creators.” Gerd Theissen reads Hefner as saying that “God

has created this evolutionary process in order to bring forth human beings as God's free co-creators. . . . Thus, they fulfill the will of God for the entire creation" (1994, 391). If this is Hefner's meaning, there is indeed risk of falling back into the anthropocentrism he has elsewhere challenged. Hefner does argue that the teleonomy of a being is to be read from the natural equipment provided to that being. Clearly the human being is capable of a high level of intentionality (and therefore freedom, adaptive plasticity, and culture) due to our highly developed central nervous system. But what about other creatures? Should not their purpose and meaning be read from *their* particular equipment rather than privileging the capacities of the human being as revealing God's purpose with all of nature? Otherwise, it seems that only the human being can fulfill the purpose of nature and that the other creatures, differently equipped, do not have distinctive purposes. If human beings destroy themselves in a nuclear holocaust, will God's project have failed utterly?

It seems important to affirm that nature in its rich diversity of forms has multiple purposes. This would be a more consistent application of Hefner's own principle of teleonomy. Other resources for theological reflection on nature's purposes might be drawn in from Christian tradition. Augustine's "principle of plenitude" or process theology's "maximal harmony and intensity" might prove helpful in this connection (Enchiridion v.2.1; Whitehead 1978, 84ff.).

6. Is the assumption of evolution as purposive and progressive borne out by the data of science? Langdon Gilkey has challenged Hefner's proposal as being "a covert expression of nineteenth century liberal beliefs in progress" (1995, 293). While this may overstate the matter, those assumptions that leave Hefner vulnerable to such a charge might profitably be reconsidered—the assumption that evolution is purposive and progressive and the optimistic reading of human culture and exercise of freedom.

There are underlying questions arising from contemporary evolutionary theory concerning whether evolution is progressive or even directional in nature. Michael Ruse claims, "The idea of evolution is the child of the hope of progress. Like the parent, it too incorporated the hope of the upward climb" (1996, 72). However, as Terrence Nichols has demonstrated, the idea of progress has been mostly dismissed in modern evolutionary thought (2002, 194). It is rare in contemporary evolutionary biology to think in terms of progress toward a goal (humanity). Improvement of adaptive fit is admitted by some (Richard Dawkins), and a building upon preexisting order to achieve a "higher degree of sustained complexity" is admitted by others (E. O. Wilson, as quoted in Ruse 1996, 512–13). But generally natural selection is considered a "blind" process. As Dawkins puts it,

Natural selection, the blind, unconscious, automatic process which Darwin discovered, and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and appar-

ently purposeful form of life, has no purpose in mind. It has no mind, and no mind's eye. It does not plan for the future. It has no vision, no foresight, no sight at all. If it can be said to play the role of "watchmaker" in nature, it is the *blind* watchmaker. (1987, 5)

Even Gould, who sees natural selection as a necessary but by no means sufficient principle for explaining the full history of life (1997, 1022) and finds purpose in the sense of agency of the organisms involved, still refuses notions of progress in the overall process. He holds that progress is a statistical illusion fostered by humanity's anthropocentric hopes (1996).

It is debatable whether and to what extent the human being in our creation of culture and exercise of freedom represents progress. The evidence is ambiguous. Indeed human beings are more free and consequently more responsible than other creatures. However, altruism does not tell the whole story of the exercise of that freedom. High cultures are capable of great injustices, cruelty, and even genocide.

Here and there, the assessment of the human condition feels a little optimistic (especially to a Reformed theologian like myself). Hefner expresses a view that the crises of the human race can be traced to "our incompetence in constructing adequately the cultural systems of information and guidance that we depend on" (1997, 198). The inadequacy of our cultural guidance systems does not seem to convey the seriousness of the human problematic named theologically under the category of sin. It does seem an optimistic reading that if only human beings could construct more adequate cultural systems of information and guidance, the problem could be overcome. Such optimism has been severely chastened by historical realities of the twentieth century, including two world wars, the Holocaust, and the dropping of the atomic bomb. The contemporary resurgence of interest in the theological notion of original sin may stem from the tragedies of our history. There is a renewed sense that human beings are born into ambiguities that we did not ourselves create and from which we cannot extricate ourselves.

Hefner examines proposals in *The Human Factor* (1993) regarding the biosocial evolutionary etymology of such religious concepts as sin and guilt. Don Campbell has proposed that this phenomenon arises from the tension of "human culture contra selfish human nature" (1976, 187). It is pressure from cultural evolution that causes genetically predisposed competitors to function as cooperators. This is an interesting proposal and certainly would have some explanatory value, but I agree with Hefner that the themes seem to be imported from free-market capitalism in a way that makes competition seem natural and sets up a new dualism between our "cooperative culture" and our "competitive nature." The position risks dualism, and that concerns Hefner (1993, 135).

I would add to Hefner's reservations about Campbell's analysis the objection that recent work with higher primates does not bear out his as-

sumptions. De Waal insists in his *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (1996) that cooperation is not a “thin veneer” covering over our “natural” beastly selfishness. Symbiosis and cooperation are in fact manifest all the way down in us or all the way back in our genetic heritage. Competition and cooperation are both present in our complex social systems. Does culture always teach cooperation? Do genes always teach selfishness? Why propose that we are overcoming our natural selves when we are altruistic? Why not assume that being altruistic is also in our genetic repertoire? Such proposals are reminiscent of theological discussions wherein it was debated whether original sin is a biological inheritance or a social inheritance. Do we sin because our first parents did, and this is transmitted to us in their procreation, or do we sin because we are born into sin? It would seem that both our selfishness and our altruism are both genetically and culturally transmitted.

7. Can the “ought” be derived from the “is”? Hefner believes that the “naturalistic fallacy” is itself a fallacy (1993, 58). The “ought” can be derived from the “is.” This strong statement may need more nuancing. For example, if it is the case that in most cultures around the world and through the centuries women have been assigned a secondary status, does this “is” imply an “ought”? While I concur with Hefner’s basic assumption that all values finally receive their validity from being rooted in and in harmony with the way things really are (1993, 57ff.), I question whether anyone can get at “the way things really are.” The postmodern context invites acknowledgment that the “is” cannot simply be read off the face of things. Each reading is a construction, in part a function of social location and interests. From the standpoint of divine intentionality, one might indeed see into the deeper reality at the heart of things. That view of the “is” might be sufficient to guide the “ought.” It is not that we should not aim toward such a vision, just that the difficulty of achieving it should not be underestimated. Any claims about the “is” are best stated modestly as the constructions they are. Hefner’s particular reading of the “is,” that sees altruism at the heart of things, is compelling. It is a vision that claims self-giving as “natural” for the human being and our true calling. One admissible test of competing constructions might be the pragmatic one: What does this reading cause people to do? Hefner’s reading would stand up well under this test.

CONCLUSION

Hefner’s proposal of the created co-creator offers tremendous corrective potential in the current discussion. It effectively counters the separatism and anthropocentrism that has predominated. He has in fact reframed the question of our existence—and therefore the approach to theological concepts like *imago dei*—by asking not how human beings are separate/differ-

ent and better than/over-and-above the rest of creation but rather what distinctive contribution human beings may make to the rest of creation.

Hefner's proposal of the human being as created co-creator provides a way of thinking about the *imago dei* that has a number of advantages. It is congruent with the scientific picture of the human being, it names our full integration with the rest of nature, and it acknowledges the special responsibility that attends our enhanced capacities in rationality and relationality. Human nature as well as human purpose are given meaningful content here.

The "created" component in this designation can look in two directions. It can embrace the affirmation that we are created *by God*; we did not make ourselves. Our life is a gift that we have received; we live in ontological dependency. It also can acknowledge that we are created *by nature*. That is, we came to be in the ordinary process of nature, we are thoroughly biological and utterly connected to all that is nature—we *are* nature, we are "dust."

The "co-creator" in this designation recognizes our reality as an emergent consciousness, as nature become aware of itself, as beings of enhanced capacity for rationality and relationality. As a consequence, we are more free and therefore more responsible—we are *imago dei*.

NOTES

A version of this essay was delivered at the Chicago Advanced Seminar in Religion and Science, "The Created Co-Creator: Interpreting Science, Technology, and Theology," organized by the Zygon Center for Religion and Science, Spring 2002.

1. "For our salvation was a matter of concern to God in such a way that, not forgetful of himself, he kept his glory primarily in view, and therefore, created the whole world for this end, that it may be a theater of his glory" (Calvin, *Consensus Genevensis* CO 8:294).

2. Although both Karl Barth (1936–1962) and Calvin (1958; 1959) speak of creation as a theater of God's glory, they use this image very differently. For Calvin creation provides the stage upon which God's wondrous works are displayed. The human being is a spectator in relation to this witness to God's glory, blind spectators though we be. But for Barth the human being is very much on stage. Creation is the stage on which the drama of the God-human relation will take place. Creation's role is diminished to that of a backdrop. The history of the covenant of grace is the main thing: "provision has been made and is continually made for the history of the covenant of grace, for time, space and opportunity for the divine work of grace and salvation" (III/3, p. 48). Creation is the external basis of the covenant. "But the theatre obviously cannot be the subject of the work enacted on it. It can only make it externally possible" (III/3, p. 48) When it comes to creation as such, it is fashioned as a "dwelling place" for human beings (III/1, p. 157) and bears its value by virtue of this function, not in its own right.

3. "In respect of his essence, God undoubtedly dwells in light inaccessible; but as he irradiates the whole world by his splendor, this is the garment in which he, who is hidden in himself, appears in a manner visible to us" (Calvin 1958, Psalms 104.1).

REFERENCES

- Barth, Karl. 1945. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrence. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Calvin, John. 1958. *Calvin: Commentaries*. Edited by Joseph Haroutunian. Library of Christian Classics, vol. 23. Philadelphia: Westminster.

- . 1959. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeill and translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20 and 21. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Campbell, Donald T. 1976. "On the Conflict between Social and Biological Evolution and between Psychology and Moral Tradition." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 11 (September): 167–208.
- Dawkins, Richard. 1987. *The Blind Watchmaker*. New York: Norton.
- De Waal, Frans. 1996. *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Genet, Russell Merle. 1998. "Is Evolution Evolving?" *Science and Spirit* 9, no. 1: 2–3, 20–21.
- Gilkey, Langdon. 1995. "Evolution, Culture, and Sin: Responding to Philip Hefner's Proposal." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 30 (June): 293–308.
- Gould, Stephen Jay. 1996. *Full House*. New York: Harmony Books.
- . 1997. "Self-help for a Hedgehog Stuck on a Molehill." *Evolution* 51:1020–24.
- Griffin, David Ray. 2000. *Religion and Scientific Naturalism: Overcoming the Conflicts*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Hall, Douglas John. 1986. *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.
- Hiebert, Theodore. 1996. *The Yahwist Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Hefner, Philip. 1993. *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture and Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- . 1997. "Biocultural Evolution and the Created Co-Creator." *Dialog* 36 (Summer): 197–205.
- . 2002. "The Created Co-Creator As Symbol." Lecture for Advanced Seminar in Religion and Science, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Spring.
- Howell, Nancy. 2002. "A God Adequate for Primate Culture." Unpublished manuscript, AAR, Science and Religion Section.
- Nichols, Terrence. 2002. "Evolution: Journey or Random Walk?" *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 37 (March): 193–210.
- Ruse, Michael. 1996. *From Monad to Man*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Theissen, Gerd. 1994. "A New Synthesis of Knowledge and Faith." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 29 (September): 389–99.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. 1978. *Process and Reality*. New York: Free Press.