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Review Esssay: What Is Human?

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John H. Evans, *What Is a Human? What the Answers Mean for Human Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. 261.

Samatha Frost, *Biocultural Creatures: Toward a New Theory of the Human*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. Pp. 203.

David Walsh, *Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016. Pp. 299.

John Evans announces the question to which all three of these books respond in his title: What is a human? And in the subtitle, he indicates the reason many people today are concerned about the answers offered to that question: what the different answers mean for human rights. As the debates about the fate of a fetus or comatose patient show, definitions of what is human can determine who lives or dies.

As Evans observes in introducing his study, the question is not new. "One would think that of all the personal and scientific subjects we study the one we would be most interested and proficient in understanding would be ourselves, human beings … [but] of the many mysteries in the universe, we humans are perhaps the most mysterious of all to ourselves. … And yet the wise have challenged us for millennia in different ways with the charge, 'Know Thyself'" (1). Shouldn't we have been able to obtain knowledge of creatures who, unlike stones and other animals, are able to ask and obtain answers to their questions both from themselves and from others? But we know from experience that human beings do not always know the truth about ourselves or why we act as we do. So the question, who or what is human? remains.

Evans is not, however, interested in exploring the truth of any of the answers that have been offered to that question. He acknowledges that he cannot tell what a human truly is from the sociological research he does. But he "can say what the public *thinks* a human is." Observing that "people *act* based on what they think is true, not on truth itself," he concludes, "what a human truly is is less important" (2) than what people think.

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Evans first presents a general categorization of the four most common answers to the question, what is human? in current American academic debates. Admitting that there are great differences among the advocates of each and that he is not an expert in the humanistic studies involved, Evans provides his readers with general descriptions of "the biological, philosophical, theological, and socially conferred anthropologies" (4).

"The central component of the Christian theological anthropology" is the contention "that humans are those who are made in the image of God." Although there is not a consensus about what that means even in the Christian tradition that is dominant in the United States, Evans nevertheless observes that "a general theme is the ability to communicate with God" (5). Since "spiritual forces cannot connect if a human is just a body" (6), Christians also posit the existence of a "soul" which makes communication with other humans and God possible.

Proponents of a philosophical anthropology "are technically concerned about a 'person' and not a 'human.'" Philosophers such as Peter Singer and Michael Tooley accept the biological definition of human and other animals, but suggest that these biological characteristics have little moral significance. They thus seek to identify a cluster of properties that are sufficient to make something a person, including consciousness; preferences and conscious desires; feelings and experiences of pleasure and pain; thoughts; self-consciousness; capacity for rational thought and deliberation; a sense of time, including memory of its own past actions and mental states and the ability to envisage a future for itself and to formulate nonmomentary interests, involving a unification of desires over time; the ability to take moral considerations into account in choosing between possible actions; and the ability to interact socially and to communicate with others. This anthropology provokes criticism, because it provides reasons to deny the humanity of creatures that lack these traits. It also suggests that humans who possess these traits or abilities to a greater degree than others are better. In sum, the critics charge, such philosophical anthropologies are undemocratic.

The central charge against "biological" anthropology, on the other hand, is that it is reductionist and thoroughly materialistic. Biologists contend generally that "anything important to know about humans is in their genes." And "since animals also have these genes, humans are essentially 'nothing but' another animal." Going even further, an influential geneticist, Robert Haynes, observed: "What the ability to manipulate genes should indicate to people is the very deep extent to which we are biological machines. The traditional view is built on the foundation that life is sacred … well, not anymore" (9–10).

Evans suggests that what he calls "the socially conferred anthropology exists only in inchoate form in academia" (10). He found it particularly among graduate students in humanities departments, not in direct debate with the other three understandings of what is human. He does not think this understanding defines a human so much as it describes a process for

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conferring human status on those with whom we have a social relationship. Although Evans does not emphasize this result, on the basis of such an understanding, who or what is human would vary from time to time and place to place.

Because people act on the basis of what they think is true, both advocates and critics of the various anthropologies presented in academic debates are concerned about their effects on public opinion. Evans does not think he or anyone else can determine the relation between what any particular individual believes and his or her actions. However, as a sociologist Evans could ask various kinds of individuals questions that would lead his respondents to reveal what they thought made someone human and how such a creature should be treated.

In surveying PhD students and members of the general public about their views of what is human, Evans found, unsurprisingly, that the views of academics were more logically consistent than those of the general public. (The graduate students' views, however, were not perfectly coherent. They often combined elements of other anthropologies with the one they adhered to most.) By comparing the views of graduate students with those of the general public, he also found that the academic arguments had relatively little effect on the public. The views of the general public concerning what is human could also be divided into the four kinds of academic arguments he had identified, but the general public tended to understand the components of some of these categories differently from the academics. For example, people generally thought that humans had some biological traits in common, but they tended to identify these traits with observed bodily characteristics, such as walking on two legs and being born from two human parents. Likewise, academic theologians might emphasize the ability to communicate with God, but conservative Protestants tended to say that all human beings are equal and should be treated accordingly, because we are all made by God.

Evans found that "only a minority of the public agrees with the core components of the academic, biological, philosophical, and socially conferred anthropologies." That fact should console critics who worry about the propagation of these anthropologies, especially of the philosophical and biological definitions of the human. His findings also "show that those who agree most with the core components [of these two anthropologies] are indeed less supportive of human rights" (21). Christian theological anthropology provides the clearest and strongest support. But as Evans also observes, less than half of the American public identify themselves as Christian or attend church. Because of the separation of church and state in the United States, an explicitly theological anthropology is not taught in most schools, although it is preached from the pulpits in churches and propagated in softer, more secular form in American culture more generally. By way of contrast, the biology many people learn in high school does not appear to have convinced them to become pure materialists. But, Evans acknowledges, the fact that a

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growing number of young people, though still a small minority, accept the biological account of what makes us human may suggest that college education is gradually having an effect that will become more evident and widespread in the future.

Evans ends his study by observing that the academic literature on the questions of what it means to be human and how we humans treat each other is immense. "Yet one source of wisdom about what a human truly 'is' has been ignored. The collective wisdom of the vast bulk of humans who make up the general public surely deserve [*sic*] at least equal standing" (173). His study shows "that all Americans deeply believe in equal treatment, so the effect of an anthropology would have to overcome a preexisting assumption" (175). He thus advises those concerned about the preservation of human rights to pay more attention to the general public's opinions about what it means to be human. Whereas the academic debate concerns "human beings" (the entity itself), the public wants to talk about "being human," that is, the social interactions that make one a good human. Academic "talk of a 'human being' is associated with saying a human is defined by the autonomous traits found in the academic philosophical anthropology … such as consciousness and rationality," whereas "talk of 'being human' is associated with saying a human is defined by the social traits that are relevant in a social world such as emotion, compassion, and communication" (177). Evans urges academic students of biology and philosophy to take explicit account of the ways in which their arguments can be used to undermine human rights and to try to counteract them, either by denying that the negative results necessarily follow from their anthropologies or by inventing a new anthropology based on compassion. But doubting the ability of academics to teach their ideas to the public, he concludes: "Probably the best thing for an advocate of human rights to do is to encourage the public to just talk amongst itself about what they think a human is. The anthropologies that seem to have a negative impact on human rights would spread the fastest when they do not have to displace anthropologies that people already use, and my interviews suggest that the anthropologies the public already use would not be corrosive to attitudes toward human rights" (189).

Although Evans declares that he is not a humanist scholar, it is not surprising to see a sociologist urge his readers to promote a definition of the human based on social interactions. However, Evans does not appear to recognize how problematic his conclusion is. His study is limited to people living and working in the contemporary United States. They may believe that all humans are equal and that we should be treated as such; but not all peoples, recognizable by us living today as human, have held such beliefs. Nor do all people living today. The validity of Evans's study, such as it is, is severely limited to a certain time and place.

The tendency of the general public to define a human as someone who looks like me and with whom I can have social interactions has a philosophical importance Evans does not seem to recognize. Both the public and

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academics identify certain kinds of creatures as human before they have thought much about what that label means. That is the "commonsensical," nonscientific understanding from which the more philosophical and scientific studies begin. These studies do not begin with genes or character traits and then show how certain combinations of these constitute something, previously unknown and unrecognized, that can be called human. They assume such an understanding and give a more refined explanation of its basis, but they do not explain the "commonsensical understanding" upon which their studies rest.

Insofar as it is based on experience and empathy, however, this "commonsensical" understanding of the general public does need to be refined for moral and political as well as for epistemological reasons. Not believing that any society has treated people differently on the basis of their ability to be compassionate, Evans does not appear to notice, as Max Scheler did, that precisely because people have compassion for creatures they perceive to be like them, they can and do treat those who appear to be different—because of the color of their skin or gender, clothes, language, or religious practices—not merely as "other" but as lesser beings to be used or destroyed as their superiors think best.[1] Compassion does not constitute a secure foundation for human rights, because the feeling itself does not define its object.

We are thus led to ask whether Frost or Walsh offers a better answer to Evans's question. Both claim to offer a new and improved understanding of what it means to be human or, in Walsh's case, a person. In other words, both claim to be presenting a better understanding of the human than the four types of more or less traditional anthropologies Evans categorizes. Both explicitly offer their new conceptions, moreover, with an eye to their political effects, if not on the preservation of human rights per se, on our appreciation of the value of life and our shared responsibility to preserve it. Upon examination, however, Frost's account of human beings as "biocultural creatures" proves to be a combination of two of Evans's types of anthropology, the biological and socially constructed, whereas Walsh's extension and improvement of the philosophical anthropology of the "person" has an explicitly theological underpinning. And both of these new conceptions suffer from some of the defects Evans points out in the old.

Frost was provoked "to elaborate the basis of a new theory of the human" by her "concern that recent and withering critiques of the category of the human and of human exceptionalism have left us bereft of a politically useful category of the human subject that theorists can mobilize to address the political crises of the day," especially concerning the environment. In contrast to attempts to define the human "against a background of the natural and physical world, embodiment, animality, and organismic processes of

[1]See Adriana Alfaro Altamirano, "Max Scheler and Adam Smith on Sympathy," *Review of Politics* 79, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 365–87.

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living … to construct the figure of an independent, self-sovereign, autonomous human agent," she thus seeks to elaborate a concept of the human as "creatures who are embedded in various ecologies and networks of relations and who can integrate their acknowledgment of their embodiment, animality, physicality, dependence, and vulnerability into their self-conception and their orientation toward and modes of being in the world" (3). She uses the term "creatures" to emphasize "the ways that humans, like all other creatures, are alive and are able to stay alive because they are embedded in and draw manifold forms of sustenance from a habitat of some kind." And she uses the term "biocultural" to take account not only of "dimensions of our living habitats that shape and give meaning to living bodies and deeply complex forms of social and political subjectivity but also those dimensions that materially compose living bodies" (4).

Whereas Evans evaluates his four types of anthropology in terms of their ability to support or undermine human rights, Frost begins from recent critiques of all attempts to define the human as a distinctive category that show such definitions to have been used and abused in projects of nation building and imperial expansion. She reminds her readers that contemporary science suggests there is no clear biological or genetic difference between humans and other animals; it is a matter of degree. And contrary to what might be taken as a commonsensical view, it is not obvious which creature is a human; that has remained a question "for many nonnormative or marginal populations, such as homosexuals and transsexuals, comatose medical patients, people with physical or mental disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees, prison inmates." "Rather than denoting a creature per se," she concludes, "the category of the human designates a constellation of rights, duties, and prerogatives that attach to those who recognize one another as worthy of carrying them." But, she observes in implicit opposition to Evans, grounding the category of the human on social recognition rather than any inherent quality does not save it. For "if the dignity and rights indexed do not attach to something essentially distinctive in humans, then the quality of regard, dignity, and respect to which the term refers can also attach to nonhuman creatures" (9). Philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas have sought to perpetuate the idea that humans have a distinctive ability to act intentionally on the basis of self-conscious deliberation in order to preserve a notion of moral responsibility. But, Frost objects, scholars have discredited this notion by "pointing to the play and structure of language, to the mutual shaping of reason and the passions, to the embedding of economic norms, social expectations, and cultural conventions in the intimate depths of desire, psyche, and flesh, and to the reverberation of individual and collective actions through social and material space and time" (10). Nevertheless, she acknowledges, "these critiques do not amount to a denial that there are human creatures in and on this world. Nor do they add up to a claim that there is nothing whatsoever that is distinctive about human creatures in the ways that they live, love, and die" (11).

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Frost turns to the life sciences to sketch the basis of a "counter-concept of the human … [as] a creature who is an embodied and thoughtful animal as well as a technological aficionado, a creature embedded in and composed by the social and material contexts of its existence, an agent whose actions are dependent on and conditioned by manifold networks of ecological, institutional, social, and symbolic relations" (13). She argues that the insights of social theorists concerning the ways in which human character and action result from complex interactions with others can be combined with recent scientific studies which suggest that mutations in genes can be inherited to explain how human beings acquire and retain distinctive characteristics while embedded in a changing environment. Her "counter-concept" of the human thus combines the biological with the socially constructed or historical.

Frost describes herself as a scholar who "had spent some time making sense of the materialist dimensions of Thomas Hobbes's philosophy and theory of politics," and "wanted to continue to think about how a materialist understanding of the self might reshape our understanding of politics … in a contemporary vein." Although Hobbes provided "a fairly well-elaborated account of the body from its minute bits to its gross form," she recognized that she "did not have a good grasp of current accounts" (21–22). So she took some biology courses; and in her book she draws "on different dimensions of the life sciences to think through and recast the conceptual terms … according to which we understand what humans are." In that recasting, she acknowledges, "humans as a distinct species and as a particular kind of subject do not actually appear much" (24).

Frost begins her reconceptualization by observing that "while matter or materiality is currently conceived as an important starting point for thinking about embodiment and policies" (26), by studying physics and chemistry one discovers that "the atomic elements that compose matter are not really 'stuff' at all. … The solidity or substantiality of the matter we encounter daily is an effect of the constrained flow and interrelation of energy" (32). And "if we consider that the different 'pieces' of an atom are forms of energy, then we can think about the shapes, dimensions, and behavior of atoms in terms of the interactions that take place between those different forms of energy" (35). Those forms, loosely speaking, are neutrons, protons, and electrons. And "the fact that proton count makes each element what it is effects a peculiar and somewhat disorienting de-essentialization of the different elemental forms of matter" (37). And understanding how atoms "bond" to form molecules by sharing or stealing electrons from one another enables us to understand how "carbon atoms form the backbone or scaffolding that structures the molecules that make life possible" (49).

She then explains that the membranes that constitute the border or boundary of a cell are permeable and porous so as to allow a constant influx and efflux of various molecules. Therefore, "what makes a living body distinct from its environment are not the substances of which it is composed

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(which in fact traffic back and forth across the membranes of the body's constituent cells constantly) but rather the activities and the processes that occur within and by means of that body" (75). By producing "a continuously variable chemical or energetic imbalance between the inside and outside of the cell," the membranes create "a disequilibrium that in turn creates the conditions for the movement, flow, or dispersion of molecules and their transformation from one kind into another" (55). Because the molecules that compose a cell membrane do not bond with one another, but jostle side by side in a liquid that becomes both the content of and the context for their formation, they do not form a sealed, impenetrable border. On the contrary, they form a loose boundary through which other kinds of molecules can seep and flow. The membranes are not completely or indifferently porous, however. They are constituted so as to enable the flow of select molecules in and out of the cell. Because an organism persists only so long as the chemical reactions occurring in its cells as a result of the influx and efflux continue, it is not only completely connected to but also utterly dependent upon its environment, even though it remains distinct from its surroundings.

Observers of living organisms can overcome the temptation to see their development as teleological, Frost argues, by coming to understand that each of the chemical interactions required to produce the many proteins that perform an astounding variety of functions in cells constitutes a necessary condition for and thus a constraint upon the next step in the process. Looked at from the end, the steps in the development of an organism may appear to be determined by that end. However, she emphasizes, if the elements and stimuli necessary to produce any one of the necessary reactions are not present, the process will not proceed to its "end." The results of the myriad reactions are thus radically contingent.

She also criticizes the widespread notion that their development is determined by their genes. Genes do not cause anything. "They … constitute a fantastically well-preserved, highly modified, tremendously precise recipe for making proteins. But the need for a protein's activity must be felt by a cell, the ingredients must be supplied, and the instructions for how to use those ingredients must be accessed, read, and followed for that gene recipe to result in the composition of a protein" (91). Nor are genes impenetrable molecules, as once thought; they can be changed as a result of external forces. Geneticists have recently shown that these changes can be inherited, so that the change in their DNA affects the way genes react to a changed environment and themselves change as well.

In emphasizing the crucial role oxygen plays in metabolism, Frost again seeks to lead her readers away from a substantive or compositional view of a material body to a more dynamic, literally "energetic" one. In the last crucial stage of cellular respiration, she reports, oxygen "captures and removes electrons and hydrogen ions so that the processes of making energy molecules can continue. It is not a compositional, but rather a transient molecule" (103–4). And she concludes her book by describing the way in

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which organisms relate to their environments as changing over time or as history. Changes provoked in an organism by one habitat, inherited by the next generation, in turn produce further changes in the organism as it reacts to a new environment. But those changes are constrained, if not determined, by its reactions in and to the past. Therein lies the basis for her combination of "perceptual stimulation" (social or, as traditionally understood, cultural effects) with an organism's bodily responses to its physical environment in constructing a new "biocultural" theory of the human.

As Frost acknowledges at the beginning, her book does not tell us much, if anything, about what is distinctively human or how we can identify it. She provides political theorists like this reader with an accessible and interesting account of the findings of contemporary biology and genetics. But the picture of human life she evokes (because she does not really describe it) is troubling in the extreme. We biocultural creatures are presumably the result of specific series of chemical reactions that occur within the porous boundaries of our cells or bodies in response to external stimuli from the environment—social as well as physical. But Frost does not tell us what those specific chemical reactions are. Nor does she explain how these reactions produce the characteristics traditionally thought to be distinctly human—for instance, speech or reason that enables us to abstract from particulars to form general concepts marked by signs, self-consciousness and consciousness of time that enable us to plan for the future, and so to engage in intentional actions and make choices, which may include the social and natural environment in which we choose to live. In writing almost exclusively about "reactions," Frost would apparently have us reconceive human beings as "subject" to a huge variety of external forces, most of which we do not understand or control. Insofar as we are "agents," we are "agents" in the sense that any configuration of energy that interacts with another is an "agent" that has effects. In contrast to Foucault, for example, she makes no attempt to explain the internal experiences traditionally described as "subjective." She acknowledges but does not actually respond to critics who worry that a reliance on natural science, especially the life sciences, will enhance the ability of some, those knowledgeable about science, to control others. Nor does she respond to those critics who worry that such a reliance on science will erode appreciation and study of the "humanities." In overcoming the admitted abuses of the natural environment by human beings who have conceived of themselves as "autonomous" or even "sovereign," she would appear to deprive us of freedom in any meaningful sense and deny the possibility of anyone's undertaking intentional political action. In sum, it is difficult to see how her "biocultural creatures" could transform their "modes of living in such a manner as to ameliorate rather than compound the problems with climate and environment," much less "mitigate the ways that the accretion of political and economic injustices creates specific forms of vulnerability to disaster for particular regional, national, and subnational populations" (12), although these are her stated goals.

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Although he shares Frost's desire to protect the most vulnerable, David Walsh's argument in the *Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being* proceeds in the opposite direction. Evolutionary science not merely reduces everything to nonliving material elements, he objects; science cannot account for its own origin in the activity of the scientist—or person. Science cannot, therefore, provide us with knowledge of ourselves or of the world in which we find ourselves. Walsh thus looks first to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Continental philosophy, and then to Christian theology, for a better understanding of ourselves.

Walsh writes about "persons" rather than human beings, because the application of the adjective "human" to being suggests that we are fundamentally like the other things we encounter in the world. Such a description thus misses what is distinctive about us and gives us unique value. But, he warns, the problem is not solved merely by changing our language or conception, because "shifting assessments of who is to count as a person" place everyone, but especially the most vulnerable, in jeopardy. For Walsh the question of who is a person is fundamentally a political one, because "political power is the power of life and death" (1). That is the "reason we have sought to contain it within the boundaries that mark the rights of persons." But "there is nothing in the past that ensures that rights hitherto protected will continue to be guaranteed. … How are we going to treat the lowliest member of the social whole? That is the measure by which we are to judge ourselves and, most importantly, the political community" (2–3).

Walsh initially bows in the direction of social contract theory by observing that "the state can only *be* through the voluntary transfer of power from the individuals within it" (2), even though how the contract gets enacted may be elusive. But he quickly jettisons the understanding of nature upon which that theory was based and faults previous Catholic "personalist" philosophers such as Jacques Maritain for falling back too readily on traditional notions of nature, reason, and human beings as having been made in the image of God. He builds instead on Martin Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* (generally speaking, what was previously understood to be human existence) not only as literally "being there," that is, located in a specific place and time, but also as "being with" others in a "world." What has been dubbed the "inner" life of "persons" is crucial for Walsh, but following Heidegger he insists that we do not experience ourselves or our lives merely as "subjects" with idiosyncratic "subjective" reactions to the objects, including other persons, we encounter outside ourselves, or as disembodied "souls" encompassed temporarily in a body. "Persons" are distinguished by the fact that we transcend ourselves—not merely by perceiving ourselves as living in a broader world with others but also and most emphatically by responding to a "call" of something or someone beyond us. According to Heidegger, what draws us out of ourselves into an open space and so discloses the truth is Being. Although he seems to equate the "politics of the person" with the "politics of being" in the title of his book, Walsh argues that what

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draws us outside of ourselves to the point of complete self-sacrifice is not abstract, impersonal Being, but God's quintessentially personal love.

Walsh acknowledges the origin of both the notion of responding to a "call" from that which is beyond us and of the difference between the "I-Thou" personal relation so established from that between the "I" and an impersonal "it" in the thought of Martin Buber. But he suggests that Buber's thought remained too explicitly theological to have the effect it should have had on philosophical inquiries. Like Evans, Walsh knows that contemporary philosophers have attempted to identify the characteristics of human beings that make them distinctive "persons." But like Frost, he complains that these attempted definitions of "persons" have emphasized intellectual capacities at the expense of the bodies in which they are housed. Fortunately, he observes, the definitions of "persons" offered by philosophers such as Peter Singer and Michael Tooley, which justify infanticide as well as abortion, arouse a kind of moral queasiness that leads us to ask whether we should be engaged in the calibration of the value of human life at all.

According to Walsh, "the mistake has been to assume we could talk about persons in a non-personalist way" (43). But his own "personalist" way of describing "persons" proves to be frustratingly paradoxical, if not mystical. According to Walsh, "a person is strictly speaking, indefinable. … No matter what a person says or does, he or she is not what is said or done. Whatever the expression, the person has already escaped it. … A person remains a mystery, unfathomable even to himself or herself" (44).

But if a person is impossible to define, what is Walsh writing about? He first observes that human beings are constantly required to decide what is good or bad without knowing for certain. Our existence is thus characterized by a continual moral struggle that leads us to seek knowledge not merely as individuals but in association with others. However, Walsh contends, our consciousness of having to make such decisions already puts us outside and thus beyond the good and evil between which we find ourselves having to choose. We are, in a similar way, also beyond being or "reality." Modern science consists in an effort to remove all the "personal" characteristics of the scientist in order to achieve "objective" knowledge. But in abstracting from those elements, both personal and social, that initially lead scientists to seek knowledge, science loses a sense of its own source.

We humans are able to think, because "we are not like all other beings. We are able to stand outside of them. … In thought we [thus] seem to have slipped into the position of being, capable of containing all beings." To be sure, "to say that being is a person implies a particularity with all of the localization and specificity attached to uniqueness." However, "once we reflect on how the particularity of the person cannot contain him or her, for he or she continually overflows the boundaries in the direction of the whole," we see "why one person is not replaceable with another. … All of existence, the universe of particularities, is contained in each one. That is the affinity with being

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that makes of each person a center of meaning and value that surpasses all that is" (129–30).

The only possible way of explaining how each can be a whole and yet open to others is by recognizing that each must be "a whole perpetually prepared to put itself aside for the sake of the other whole" (134). This setting aside of itself is not based on need or mutual dependency. It is "rooted in the freedom by which the other remains other. Love alone provides such a bond … [because] love alone is the union that preserves separation" (138–39). God's creation, not merely of the world, but of his only begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, provides Walsh's primary example.

At this point Walsh's account of the person becomes not merely theological, but explicitly Christian. Walsh claims, however, that his Trinitarian understanding of love is derived not from revelation but from the logic of love itself. "In itself, love seeks nothing for itself. … There is no compulsion to bring forth the other. … Love generates the other in freedom. … The Father can be without the Son and yet he does not wish to be so. … Contrary to the picture of love as in search of the beloved it has lost, we see that love in itself makes way for the beloved it liberates. Their relationship cannot have the smallest hint of need, even reciprocation, for it must be founded wholly on love. This is why, we realize, there must be a third member of their company" (144).

Walsh follows Hegel in arguing that spirit reveals itself over time by making the world intelligible. But he moves back in the direction of Heidegger by arguing that "the great misstep of Western metaphysics" was not to see that "the key to creation is that the Creator must withdraw. This is not merely a logic of necessity, the provision of a space to be occupied by independent creatures, but it is much more a logic of love. … A Creator who disclosed himself completely to his creatures would overwhelm them, depriving them of their freedom and absorbing them again into himself." The Creator thus provided the greatest testament of his love by withdrawing to wait patiently for his creature to love him and so making Himself vulnerable to rejection. The Creator thus seeks to "raise us up to be persons … like him, overflowing with love. … He wants us to be like him in creating ourselves" (146).

Human beings are thus free to heed the call of God and to love Him by seeking to create themselves in his image—or not. They do so not merely by seeking knowledge, but even more by creating works of art that reveal ever new meanings implicit in existing things and in making history. God revealed Himself and His love in history and then withdrew in order to leave space for human persons continually to re-create themselves—infinitely, without end.

The condition for human persons acting in history, however, is the existence of a political community. And this community is constituted, according to Walsh, by all of its members agreeing to sacrifice themselves to establish and maintain it. The individuals who found and later die to defend the

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polity are thus in a sense more citizens than the living. They are also citizens of the universal community of all humanity (Augustine's city of God) at which all political communities aim, but which no worldly polity can achieve, because of the necessarily corporeal, finite existence of all the human persons who compose them. As products of free acts, Walsh argues, all political communities necessarily rest on consent. Although the mutual agreement on which they rest consists in the willingness of all the constituent parts of the community to sacrifice themselves for the whole, each part is nevertheless superior to the whole that is established to preserve it. The fundamental and inalienable freedom of each person to determine the meaning not only of his or her own life but of the whole world incorporated in and by each is expressed in the language of rights—the rights of individuals, especially to life, which communities are established to secure and which are in themselves not only inalienable but also unlimited.

Despite Walsh's immense learning and philosophical sophistication, a non-Christian has to ask whether he has actually shown the supreme, infinite value of every human "person." All human persons may both perceive and constitute a kind of whole and perceive a whole of sorts. But, as Frost would no doubt remind Walsh, all living organisms constitute wholes of a sort. Even though they are not open to *the* whole or live beyond themselves in perception and action the way human persons do, each lives inextricably related and thus open to its environment. To be sure, a whole is not the same as the whole. But how is the whole constituted by each person related to the wholes constituted by others? There must be some overlap, but there must also be differences, if each person is unique. Are all these "wholes" equal? Do some not comprehend more than others? And if so, what kind of love leads those with more comprehensive visions and abilities to sacrifice themselves for a "person" unable to perceive or do as much—or anything at all? Indeed, if "persons" are those who live by living beyond themselves, are comatose human beings really persons? We may respect the bodies of the dead for what they were or human fetuses for what they could become. But does a fetus, a comatose human, or corpse without consciousness really contain a world? Is there a whole, if space and time are infinite? According to Walsh, the finite is known only in contrast to the infinite. But if persons, like all other beings, according to Hegel, are known only in contrast to what they are not, what is the difference between their "openness" or indeterminacy and the constant "becoming" of everything in the sensible world? Walsh suggests that the distinctive characteristic of human "persons" consists in our ability not only to receive God's love along with the rest of His creation, but also to reciprocate it by imitating it with regard to other persons. But he also emphasizes that God has left us free to recognize and respond to His love or not. Human "persons" are thus distinguished from all other forms of being by our freedom to choose to love God—or the good—rather than to deny Him. But since we can never entirely know or

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comprehend God, it appears that we must ultimately act on the basis not of reason so much as of faith.

Christian theological anthropology may offer the firmest foundation for the assertion of human rights, as Evans suggests. But the utility of this anthropology in supporting rights does not show that it is true. We continue to lack a definitive answer to the question, what is a human? Yet without an answer to that question, it is impossible for us to determine how we may best live.

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