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Imagining God a critical review of the theology and method of Gordon D. Kaufman

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IMAGINING GOD:
A CRITICAL REVIEW
OF THE THEOLOGY AND METHOD
OF GORDON D. KAUFMAN

by

H. VICTOR FROESE

B.A. UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO, 1982

THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION AND CULTURE
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ABSTRACT

The first four chapters constitute a historical survey of Kaufman's works. My thesis is that the development of Kaufman's thought can best be understood as his attempt to take a consistently historicist position vis-a-vis the issues that present themselves to him. By "historicism" I mean that way of thinking that takes the categories presupposed in history (linear time, empirical space, human freedom and other derivative notions) as its primary ones as opposed to the classical terms of essence, nature, and substance. The survey involves a discussion of Kaufman's Ph.D. thesis (ch. 1), his systematic theological efforts (ch. 2), his search for new foundations for theology (ch. 3), and a discussion of his recently formulated theological method (ch. 4). I argue here that theology has self-creation as its ultimate end when understood in a historicist context. Chapter 5 is a critique of Kaufman's theological method and the historicism that frames it. This critique relies heavily on the critical reflections of George P. Grant and A. James Reimer, who argue that our belief in our essential freedom and autonomy has certain regrettable consequences. Using the analysis of consciousness provided by Paul Ricoeur, I propose a general alternative orientation for theology. Ricoeur points out that our historicity also implies dependence and thereby he limits our claim to autonomy. The possibility of retaining a view of theology as a search for depth and truth is briefly discussed. Kaufman's pragmatic understanding of theological truth is here judged to be inadequate to his purposes. I suggest that Kaufman's concentration on the constructive dimension of human beings obscures the receptivity that is a prerequisite for any genuine creativity. This one-sided emphasis, I suggest with James Reimer, only serves to reinforce a cultural ethos that has brought us to the brink of disaster. A reflection by the author of this thesis concludes the paper.

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INTRODUCTION

The name of "Gordon D. Kaufman" has not often arisen in theological discussions. Though Kaufman has published extensively and has had articles published in French and German, in North America he has not been well known. It is probably this fact that has prompted Anglican theologian Maurice Wiles to refer to him as "that underrated American theologian" (Wiles, 1974:21).

But this situation seems to be changing. David Tracy not only mentions Kaufman in both his Blessed Rage for Order (1975) and The Analogical Imagination (1981) but even places him in the (for Tracy) favourable category of a "revisionist" theologian (1975:32). Furthermore, no fewer than seven articles or reviews have been written between 1976 and 1982 on Kaufman's recent work on theological method (Capps, 1982; Gunn, 1982; Martin, 1982; Reimer, 1978; Runzo, 1976; Sharpe, 1979; Thiemann, 1981). And most recently,

Kaufman's latest book, The Theological Imagination (1981), was given two extended reviews in the Religious Studies Review (Green, 1983; Ottati, 1983). This recognition comes to Kaufman after almost thirty years of teaching and writing, the last twenty of which have found him at Harvard's Divinity School.

Kaufman's recent recognition is not a sufficient reason for devoting a whole thesis to his thought. Like any other intellectual enterprise, theology is subject to fads and Kaufman's relative popularity may in part be due to accident. Garrett Green, for instance, notes that Kaufman is but one of several theologians currently interested in the significance of the imagination for theology (Green, 219). A more adequate reason for doing a more intensive study of Kaufman's thought is that he is an able thinker, an insightful writer, well-grounded in historical theology, and sophisticated philosophically. This at least is my assessment of him, and I trust that the following paper will confirm that judgement in the minds of readers unfamiliar with his work. Those who already know Kaufman will not need to be persuaded.

My thesis has two aims: to survey Kaufman's work and to offer a critique of the philosophical assumptions that frame his theological method. Very briefly, let me summarize my arguments. The argument in my historical

survey is simply this: the development of Kaufman's thought
can be understood as an unfolding of the implications of the
historicistic   perspective   with   which   he   begins   his
theological career and of the anthropology that supports it.
This argument will, of course, be developed in detail later.
Suffice it to say that Kaufman's development proves to be a
dialectical one. In essence, Kaufman attempts to maintain a
tension between the neo-orthodoxy of his formal training,
the   liberal emphasis on the intelligibility of faith, and
the ethical concern of his Mennonite-Anabaptist heritage.

In the second part of the thesis, I develop a critique
of Kaufman's theological method, more precisely, of the
theoretical framework he formulates for the theological
task.   My main criticism is that the anthropology that
grounds Kaufman's method serves to legitimate the iconoclasm
and general scepticism of modernity rather than to bring it
into question. As a result, I believe that Kaufman's method
lends support to the modern definition of human life in
terms of freedom and autonomy! Relying on the analysis of
modernity given by George Grant, I suggest with James Reimer
that it is precisely this definition that is the source of
highly ambiguous developments in the modern era, among them
the threat of a global nuclear holocaust.   On the basis of
this analysis, I argue that the philosophical framework that
serves as the basis for Kaufman's theological method renders

him incapable of recognizing that the notion of our freedom
is problematic and, hence, of developing a truly critical
theology. Indeed, I will argue that when the basis of
understanding the theological task is the capacity of human
beings freely to create their own meaning, theology becomes
yet another tool by which control over the (human)
environment is attempted. I then briefly develop a
qualification to this understanding of our nature based on
the work done by Paul Ricoeur. He argues that our
historicity implies our reliance upon "testimony" external
to ourselves as much as it implies our autonomy. The
implications of this qualification of human autonomy for an
understanding of the theological enterprise are then
sketched out. A short conclusion brings the paper to a
close.

1. PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

1.1 Introduction

Since Nietzsche it has been a virtual truism that moderns are historical in a way that their predecessors were not. The significance of our historicity has perhaps not yet been fully appreciated by philosophers, notwithstanding R.G. Collingwood's vehement and persuasive arguments that they must do so./1/ Theologians have perhaps been even less appreciative, since an acknowledgement of our historicity requires that one think of the historicity of our ideas, knowledge, our religion and above all, our truth./2/

Theologians have not been the only ones to resist incorporating some kind of acknowledgement of human historicity into their thought. Philosophers with a concern about the viability of metaphysical reflection have also taken issue with relativistic implications of historicism.

A common objection to historical relativism is that it involves proponents of this view in a logical contradiction. If one says that all truth is relative to one's historical and cultural situation, one must say the same about the "truth" of relativism. But if one says that relativism is true only for the present historical period, one must logically conclude that it is not true for every historical period and that, therefore, it is a largely meaningless affirmation. /3/

Yet there is an undeniable truth in historical relativism which historical and cultural anthropological studies have amply supported. Even in cultures which have persisted over many centuries there is development and change on social, political, religious, artistic, and intellectual levels. These changes are genuine changes in the sense that they would not be easily intelligible to someone from an earlier period but from the same culture. One of the most vexing problems for those persuaded of the essential truth of historical relativism is making it philosophically respectable by bringing a degree of logical consistency to the affirmation. It is this point that Gordon D. Kaufman takes up.

1.2 Kaufman and Relativism

Kaufman begins his theological writing career with a

resounding affirmation of the historicity of human life. He
does so in the belief that the logical consistency of
historical relativism can be reasonably demonstrated. It is
just this that Kaufman attempted to accomplish in his Ph.D.
thesis.   The full title of the thesis is, "The Problem of
Relativism and the Possibility of Metaphysics: A
Constructive Development of Certain Ideas in R.G.
Collingwood, Wilhelm Dilthey and Paul Tillich" (1955). The
thesis was abridged and published five years after its
completion as Relativism, Knowledge and Faith (1960)./4/

Two main concerns mark these writings. First, Kaufman
seeks to give a consistent account of relativism, one that
acknowledges the truth which it embodies yet accounts for
its character as knowledge for us in the modern era.
Secondly, Kaufman attempts to bring the significance of
metaphysical and theological reflection for historical
existence into relief. Unlike others who have argued that
the historicity of human life reveals theological and
metaphysical enterprises as self-deceptions, Kaufman argues
that it is precisely our historical and cultural relativity
that makes these enterprises necessary.   It is my thesis
that Kaufman's developing thought is essentially an
unravelling of the implications of our historicity and
freedom for theological work. Because it is in Relativism
that Kaufman most carefully works out the anthropological

implications of historicity, I will be giving it

proportionately more space.   Let us look at. his arguments.

1.3 The Historical Bases of Knowledge

The dilemma of relativism is posed by Kaufman in

another way than has so far been done in this paper.   Given

that truth and knowledge are historically and culturally

relative, how does one account for the fact that the very

truth of relativism presents itself not as relatively true

but as' true in an objective sense? Kaufman proceeds to

argue that this apparent discrepancy is resolved when it is

understood that the bases of 'knowledge, the prerequisites

for any human knowing are themselves historical in

character.   The distinction between subject and object, the

acquisition of 'language and its accompanying categories of

interpretation, the criteria of truth that guide our

thinking, are integrally related to existence in space and

time.

The subject-object polarity, for example, the basic

presupposition of all knowledge (33) is not something that

is, given at conception.   The human organism (Kaufman's term)

develops from a state of undifferentiated but dynamic

Erleben (the lowest preconscious level of life on which

attention has not yet developed [39]) into an organism which

distinguishes between a subject that has drives and the

object which limits those drives. This development is difficult to describe since it goes on at a time when a person is not yet conscious in any meaningful sense. But it can be imaginatively reconstructed.

The process of differentiation is constituted by the faculties of attention, imagination, and memory which by their very nature attempt to bring all of the various sensations and stimuli, both external and internal, into some sort of unity. For Kaufman, the first significant level of unification is that which permits the human organism to distinguish, in some rudimentary way, subject from object. Indeed, consciousness in the proper sense can only be said to emerge with that capacity (32). But the subject-object polarity does not spontaneously appear; rather, it is the product of the organism's historical encounter with the world. Through events that evoke pleasure, pain, satisfaction, and frustration, limits to biological and other drives become salient. In Kaufman's words, "It is through the encounter of opposition to our spontaneous drives that we become aware of the drives themselves, as well as of something beyond them which restricts, thwarts, and limits them" (31) . . . "The development of this experience of limitation of intention thus means that the will is no longer merely dynamic, its dynamism is now qualified by a kind of self-consciousness

about the nature of that dynamism. It is out of this total experience that our consciousness of self, on the one hand, and external world, on the other, emerges" (32). Kaufman goes so far as to say that this polarity is an abstraction, even a construction (33), coaxed into being by the organism's innate unifying propensity as it encounters the world. Thus, the awareness of a distinction between subject and object is not unmediated but mediated by this imaginatively constructed polarity.

While in the earliest stages of life, the attention, memory and imagination work together spontaneously so that the structure of consciousness is not well defined, this does not long remain so. Since learning and growth always take place within culture, language is sooner or later acquired. The significance of language for the structure of consciousness a person slowly acquires cannot be overestimated. Cultures are structured by meanings which are carried in language. Hence the acquisition of language is not simply the aquisition of a tool which is used to perform a task that would be more difficult to do were it not available. Rather, when one learns one's mother-tongue, one is taken up into a history and a world mediated by meaning; one acquires the values and the categories of thinking that are prevalent in one's culture. Language, thought of here broadly as any activity that expresses

meaning (60), can be understood to be a central condition of human life inasmuch as human life is synonymous with cultural life.

Moreover, there is an analogy, argues Kaufman, between the "total system of meanings carried in language" and Kant's a priori categories:

> It is a vast network of interpretive categories
> which exists prior to the individual, which is a
> crucial factor in the coming to self-consciousness
> of the individual, and which, upon reaching
> self-consciousness, the individual uses as the
> primary set of distinctions and definitions in
> terms of which he apprehends and understands all
> of his experience. (51)

However, unlike the categories of Kant, Kaufman continues,

> This network of meanings is neither universal nor
> necessary; rather, it is in history and time and
> it changes with the historical situation. Though
> a priori [sic] from the point of view of the
> individual, language is a posteriori [sic] from
> the point of view of history of the race: it
> arises out of that history and is conditioned by
> events occurring in that history. (51)

As noted above, "language" can mean any activity that is expressive of meaning. But for Kaufman, there is a distinctiveness about vocal language that makes it a special vehicle of thought. This distinctiveness is that in addition to being able to express meaning such that the expression can "come to have the same meaning for the hearer as for the speaker" (61), it can also "be broken down conveniently into smaller units of expression, in which the

meaning can be carefully stabilized or fixed" (61). Vocal language can, therefore, become denotative as well as expressive and thereby "we become enabled consciously to compare and contrast and distinguish various aspects of our experience and to communicate those distinctions to others" (62)./5/ And this "conscious comparing, contrasting, distinguishing and communicating" is what thought consists of.

Not every thought is necessarily true or valid, however. In every culture and in every age there exist criteria of validity which direct thought. There are three general criteria, argues Kaufman. They are: the criterion of givenness or of objectivity, the criterion of universality and the criterion of logical interconnectedness. These are general criteria, it must be noted, since what is experienced as given, what is affirmed universally, and what logical interconnectedness consists of varies, sometimes quite significantly, from age to age, from culture to culture.

The "objective" character of knowledge, the experience of knowledge as a kind of object which stands over against the mind and is "given" to it, is an important characteristic of knowledge, argues Kaufman (67). In explicating the idea of the historical root of this sense of "givenness," Kaufman adverts once more to the concept of

Erleben.   It will be recalled that Erleben is a
pre-conscious consciousness, a quasi-consciousness, out of
which consciousness eventually emerges. It is this state
that is the fundamental given (67).   All subsequent
developments in consciousness presuppose a simple Erleben.
The givenness experienced on all higher levels is derivative
from this primal level of givenness.

     The givenness with which the subject-object polarity is
experienced is a good example of what is meant here. As
pointed out earlier, consciousness. proper emerges at the
level at which the subject-object polarity has become
established (68). It is at this point, Kaufman argues, that
the givenness of the Erlebnis (a particular instance of
Erleben) is "transferred to the indubitable 'I' . . . on the
one hand, and the equally indubitable object . . . on the
other" (68). With each subsequent level of consciousness
achieved, the "transference" mentioned here occurs again so
that givenness becomes an irreducible dimension of existence
and, hence, of the knowledge associated with existence.
Moreover, the very sense of givenness or objectivity of a
level of consciousness makes it quite appropriate to regard
it as an Erlebnis itself (69). For one is never quite
conscious of the level of consciousness which one has
attained and in which one operates and, hence, it is
experienced as immediate and given. One does become

conscious of it only in a level of consciousness that
transcends that level, only on a level that is itself
experienced as given.

The relation of thought to this discussion is clarified
further by Kaufman.   Each subsequent level of consciousness
emerges by means of expression (or language) from the
preceding level.   "Thought and _Erleben_" argues Kaufman:
"are thus not in complete disjunction; there is mediation
between them by means of the expressions of thought in
language, art, etc." (70).   The sense of givenness about
what one knows is, therefore, also derived from the
primitive _Erlebnis_ via the medium of expression.

There is a tension, however, between the sense of
givenness of one's knowledge and the awareness that what
truly is the case is never fully grasped.   There is, as it
were, an unconditional demand upon thought to grasp being
perfectly (71).   As Kaufman elaborates, "The tension of
normativeness or obligation derives from the awareness that
the given (_Erlebnis_) transcends every level of consciousness
emerging from it and referring back to it" (71).   And yet
thought is under the imperative to grasp even the level of
consciousness that it itself presupposes.   It is this
tension that supplies one important dynamism to thought.
Thought is spurred on by the felt necessity of doing justice
to the fullness of human experience.   The criterion of

givenness, then, is intimately bound up with historical
existence and consequently one need not regard the
"givenness" of a truth or of knowledge as evidence that
relativism is inconsistent. The fact that we experience our
knowledge as somehow objective is due in part to to the fact
that thought is enmeshed in our experience of life in
history. As we will see later, this understanding of the
relation of thought to life guides Kaufman's thinking even
in his most recent writings and has important consequences
for his understanding of the theological task.

The criterion of universality is similarly bound to
historical existence, argues Kaufman. Language mediates
between levels of consciousness, but it is tied to the
concrete historical life of communities. Thus, any adequate
articulation of knowledge must be able to be affirmed by
others within one's community. That is, some sort of
verification of an insight or alleged "truth" must occur if
the knowledge one claims is to be considered valid. The
ideal of universality, of course, is that one's knowledge go
beyond being knowledge only for oneself and one's community
and be universal knowledge for "at least the whole human
species" (73). Therefore, a tension toward unconditional
universality is present in the drive toward validity in our
thought (74). This tension is a function of our existence
in history and, more specifically, of our participation in a

particular (linguistic) community. One's consciousness is,
to a significant degree, a "common consciousness" (72). In
Kaufman's later reflections on the audience to which
theology ought to address itself, this understanding of the
"commonness" of our consciousness seems to be the basis upon
which he maintains that theology is a culturally significant
enterprise rather than a sectarian, "parochial" one. This
will be discussed in greater detail as we come to his
writings on theological method.

And thirdly, Kaufman argues that our thought must be
logically interconnected if it is to be considered valid.
Explicitly rejected is the suggestion that there are eternal
"laws" of logic that are a priori (75). He argues instead
that what passes for valid logic varies from time to time
and place to place (76). Collingwood's suggestion that the
most one can do is "attempt to expound the principles of
what in the logician's own day passed for valid thought .
. " (Collingwood, 1948:xii) is approvingly quoted by Kaufman
(77).

But how is this element of logical interconnectedness
in the idea of validity to be related to historical
existence? Kaufman argues that this element is related to
the nature of a human self. "The self," argues Kaufman,

> can be regarded as fundamentally a kind of
> "unifier," a structure which from the outset
> attempts to draw together the elements of present
> consciousness, as well as past and future, into
> an all-comprehending unity in which everything has

> a place in relation to everything else; this
> relationship of everything in consciousness to the
> cognizing self and, through it, to everything else
> therein is the self's most obvious feature. (77f.)

In Kaufman's view, the laws of logic that are discernible by
Western logicians "are nothing but abstract descriptions of
the structure of the finished product of this unifying
activity [of the self] as it is carried on in the West"
(78). That is, they are descriptive of the way Western
people attempt to structure all that is a part of their
consciousness.

At least three tensions, then, constitute the dynamic
of human thought, at least as it is practised in the West.
Each is a function of some dimension of historical
existence.

1.4 Metaphysics and Historicity

However, as thought is actually carried on in a
culture, it does not proceed according to abstract criteria.
Certain definite presuppositions ground the thinking that
goes on, and their particularity is what distinguishes
cultures from one another. Kaufman makes a helpful
distinction at this point in his argument. The natural
unifying activity of the self, he suggests, can be thought
of as first-order consciousness; reflection upon that
unifying activity and its products (the attitudes, values,
opinions one naturally acquires) is what constitutes thought

or second order consciousness; and reflection upon one's thought, upon the assumptions and presuppositions of one's thought, defines third-order consciousness or critical thinking.

For Kaufman, philosophy and theology are third order consciousness (90f.). The cultural equivalent to first-order consciousness is the structure of meaning carried in language and presupposed in all action/6/ and thought that goes on in the culture. It is this structure that philosophy and theology presuppose and upon which they systematically reflect. Accordingly, philosophical and theological systems "serve as convenient summaries of certain tendencies of thought alive in the culture at any one given time" (90).

Like the unifying activity of a self, the unifying work of metaphysics in culture is no dispensable activity. Cultures, like individuals, are able to have an identity only because they bring their past and present into a unity which allows the significance or meaning of their continuing experience to be seen. Thus, in Kaufman's words,

> The very nature of meaning thus drives us toward a
> final unity of meaning, in which every particular
> meaning in our experience is comprehended but not
> dissolved away. It is this fact that makes
> necessary the metaphysical task. For a
> metaphysician is simply one who attempts to see
> and portray and create explicitly the unity that
> is implicit in, and necessary to, all of our
> meaningful experience. Insofar as metaphysics is
> the carrying-through of this kind of fundamental
> unification, it is a task not only existentially

necessary but also essential for sustaining and furthering all of man's cognitive enterprises. (100)

Of course, none of this means that absolute claims can be made for any metaphysical or theological system. Such systems use the terms and categories prevalent in culture, which, like the culture itself, are evolving. "Every metaphysics," Kaufman maintains, "can be shown to be historically and psychologically relative" (101).

But because metaphysics and theology attempt to deal with the ground of all experience and thought, their "highest and most fundamental concepts . . . . must always be symbolic; they can never be understood literally," Kaufman continues, "because, when understood literally, they refer to conditioned objects, not to that which is the ground of all conditioned objects" (102).

1.5 Theology and Historicity

Thus far I have suggested that for Kaufman, theology and metaphysics are virtually identical. And in some sense they are. It will soon become clear, however, that in Kaufman's view Christian theology/7/ is a metaphysics that takes our historico-cultural nature with greater seriousness than has philosophy up until now.

Theology, argues Kaufman, "is concerned with the investigation and interpretation and criticism of the faith

by which men in fact live, whether it be idolatrous or atheistic, Christian or Moslem . . . . [It] is concerned with the investigation of certain crucial faith-presuppositions underlying consciousness and knowledge in general and metaphysical work in particular" (104).

In explicating this understanding of theology, Kaufman adverts again to the historical nature of human life, meaning and knowledge. What is often forgotten in systematic thinking, he suggests, is that "the whole structure of meanings with which we are working is dependent upon the experience through which we have lived and out of which . . . the structure of meanings itself has gradually emerged . . . . Our understanding of these meanings . . . is dependent on our history" (106). Taking this one step further, Kaufman argues that upon close analysis one will likely find that there is one event, either in one's personal life or in the history of one's culture, that illuminates the meaning of the whole and brings it into a unity (106). This is as true of specific philosophies and ideologies as it is of religions. For each there is a centre of history that is presupposed and which serves as the unifying principle in their respective metaphysics (whether that metaphysics be implicit or explicit).

The metaphysical problems raised by the fact that the meaning of an individual or collective history is seen to be

embodied in a particular moment of that history are, in
Kaufman's view, the problems of Christology (108).
Christological analysis is applicable to any philosophical
position since all are "immersed in history and [draw their]
meaning from some (implicit or explicit) center of history,
or, as we might now say, from some 'Christ'" (109). In
Christology, then, we have the implicit acknowledgement of
the historicity of human life and of the centrality of
concrete historical events in the development or formation
of a unified understanding of life. Far from mystifying
human reality, Christology can be understood as entirely in
keeping with the anthropological analysis of human knowing
and thinking.

Christian eschatology likewise involves an implicit
awareness of the nature of our situation as
knowers/thinkers. The meaning that constitutes our lives is
not only grounded in a past which illuminates our present;
it also shapes our future. The future is always assumed to
unfold in a manner that is consistent with the meaning one
has taken up as the. meaning of one's life. But this
supposition is not based on a knowledge of the future (which
has not yet "arrived" to be known); rather, it is based on a
belief or hope that it will be so; it is based on a faith.
"Faith" need not be understood here in the narrower
religious sense of the word, though that meaning is

certainly included. In the broader sense, faith "involves
nothing less . than faith in the power of the center of
meaning over the future, over the entire future . . ."
(111.).   Such faith, argues Kaufman, is an inescapable
reality for human beings, Christian or not. To suppose that
one's life has meaning is inevitably to suppose that the
future will not belie _that meaning, but preserve it and
bring it into further relief. In other words, it involves
the faith that "the meaning which we know is nothing else
than the Lord of history, the One who gives all of history
its meaning and who finally stands at the 'end of history'
in judgment and redemption of both the meaninglessness and
the meaningfulness of history" (112). .

    There remains a certain tension, however, between a
future whose features one believes one can (in broad terms)
describe and the fundamental anthropological fact of
freedom. Just as there is a certain freedom for individuals
in the way they transcend a given Erlebnis and achieve a new
level of consciousness, there is a freedom in regard to the
way they shape their futures. On the other hand, one also
has the sense of a transcendent meaning in which one is
enveloped and which "determines" ones life. This tension
can be described in the classical terms of free will and
predestination. The antinomy is, to an extent, a product of
conceptual thinking, argues Kaufman, for such thinking

always involves an absraction from experience in which these elements are inseparably linked (113). Their unity is maintained, however, in mythical thinking. The symbolic character of such thinking and its attendant ambiguity is "more adequate to express the character of the faith that is here involved, and its 'object,' than is precisely defined language." (113). Again, mythic thinking is not special or unique to religious traditions. Kaufman makes it clear that even moderns live by myths such as "the notions of progress, will to power, American destiny, the democratic way of life" (114) which, by their ambiguous, symbolic character, bridge the "hidden gap between destiny and freedom" (114). So the myth and symbol that are so blatant in religion points to an irrevocable anthropological fact; namely, "that man cannot live without a faith in something that ultimately supports his finite historically relative existence" (114).

1.6 Faith and Historicity

What Kaufman finally concludes from this involved argument is this. The objectivity with which the understanding of the relativity of human life confronts moderns ultimately points to the inevitability of a life of faith. The historical, cultural, and psychological studies that unveiled the historical nature of human existence are themselves based on crucial faith presuppositions or

"absolute presuppositions" which are taken for granted. They are presupposed to participate in what is ultimately true or real. Yet such presuppositions are themselves unique to particular historical cultures, are carried in language that is evolving and therefore are relative and subject to change.

While it is true that our knowledge of relativism has been attained from the position of a present which is seen to transcend all of the past and which, therefore, reveals the past as relative, this need not lead to the assertion that somehow our present is uniquely able to grasp the truth of the matter. As Kaufman says, "we are always in a position which transcends all previous positions and which therefore can analyze them and see their relativity . . . The present is just that standpoint which transcends every position in the past--i.e., in memory--in such a way as to reveal the historically relative . . . character of every other position" (120). And this need not imply that our present is uniquely absolute. From a future position, what we now think and formulate will itself be perceived in its relativity.

Moreover, our relativity need not undercut our efforts to determine what is true. As Kaufman says, the fact that the truth we arrive at is relative

> does not mean that one has no truth at all, that
> truth is undercut completely and destroyed. For
> there is nothing in this position which might lead

> us to hold that, even if we strive and work to
> give our thought as coherent, objective, and
> universal a character as we can, we still shall
> not be enabled to discover the truth to be seen
> from the point of view of the present in which we
> are living. This work of ours stands under canons
> of truth, error, validity, and the like
> (themselves changing in history), just as thought
> in other presents has known itself to be standing
> under such norms. We know, of course, that our
> work in turn will be judged and reinterpreted and
> changed by the work of others in the future, and
> we have no way of knowing what directions these
> reinterpretations will take; but we also know that
> this is the work which we who are living in this
> present have to do, and we know that we must do it
> in terms of the norms which have been given to us.
> (122)

So the relativity of our truth claims cannot be used to

justify the abdication of our responsibility to determine as

nearly as we can what truth there might be available to us.

1.7 Conclusion

The general thrust of Kaufman's argument is, I believe,

sound and persuasive. For all the logical problems that

relativism may pose, it is erroneous to suppose that they

must be solved on strictly philosophical grounds. Our

relativity is essentially an historical and

cultural-anthropological insight; its justification must be

made on those grounds. Kaufman is therefore quite right to

focus on the anthropological grounds of human knowing and to

examine the "story" of those grounds, i.e., to construct a

history of the development of those conditions that make

human knowing possible.

That human beings are essentially cultural creatures is
similarly a persuasive argument and I see no need to
belabour the point here. What ought to be pointed out,
however, is that there is a certain inconsistency in
Kaufman's attempt to relate the categories of Christian
theology to historical relativism in a way that implies
their eternal validity or, in other words, their
a-historicity. While Kaufman is quite aware that
historically, Christian theology accepted the substantialist
Greek categories of thought, he clearly believes that this
involved the acceptance of categories alien to the
fundamentally historicistic emphasis of biblical thinking
(cf. 1956c:168n. 6) to which he tacitly allots a special
significance. He willingly engages in a theological
interpretation of (secular) historical relativism but shows
no inclination toward interpreting Christian faith within
the context of a secular historical-relativism or
anthropology. The premise of his argument is not the
mutually interpreting possibilities of historicism and
Christian faith but the apologetic possibilities of the
convergence of a Christian anthropology with that
presupposed by secular relativism and, perhaps even more
important at this time, the systematic possibilities of
historicism. Hence, while there is evident a certain
"liberal" propensity in Kaufman's willingness to deal with

the modern problem of historical relativism, this is in large measure due to the optimism one can sense in Kaufman about the possibility of both maintaining the integrity of Christian theology and rendering it intelligible to the wider culture. Kaufman is still quite unprepared to bring Christian faith itself into question on the basis of the anthropology he has developed. At no point does he suggest that Christianity itself is a product of human creative powers and our need for a metaphysical context for our lives. Indeed, the effect of his argument in Relativism is to imply that the amenability of Christian theology to modern insights testifies to its divine (extra-historical) source. In doing so, Kaufman betrays the essentially neo-orthodox/8/ character of his theological position. Christianity is assumed to be quite different from humanly created religions everywhere to be found. But this assumption will be quite radically brought into question as we will see later in this paper.

What makes Kaufman's argument in Relativism so interesting, however, is the manner in which he links modern relativism and historicism to Christian faith and theology. It is as if he placed a Christian theological grid over the whole secular discussion of relativism, the main points of alignment being between the Christian doctrine of human finitude and the secular doctrine of relativity and between

the historical emphasis in the Bible and modern historicism.
Having aligned these two points, Kaufman is able to
imaginatively construct the secular equivalents of
Christology, freedom and predestinatiion, faith and
eschatology in a fairly convincing way. /9/

The question that arises, however, is whether Kaufman
has accommodated Christian theology to a modern
understanding of human life to such a degree that theology
has been compromised. Whatever other theologians may decide
about that, it is quite clear that Kaufman does not believe
he has done so. He would be more inclined to suggest that
classical theology embodies a more radical accommodation of
Christian theology, in this case, to classical Greek
philosophy with its a-historical categories of nature and
substance (cf. Kaufman, 1957a). The anthropology he puts
forward here as both explanatory of the knowledge-character
of relativism and as illuminative of principal Christian
categories of thought he calls in his preface a "theological
anthropology" (xi). Some such historico-cultural
understanding of human life seems to be presupposed by the
biblical writers from whom the primary categories of
Christian thought have been derived. And if this
understanding that is presupposed by the doctrine of
historical relativism happens to be consonant with the
understanding of the nature of human life presupposed by

Christian   theology, so much the better for both, Kaufman
seems to say.

But the problem of the relation of theology to modern
ways of thinking is not wholly resolved in Kaufman at this
point. (And in some sense, it never is, as I think this
paper will demonstrate.) He is aware of the inevitable
interpenetration of faith and culture and, hence, of
Christian and modern ideas, and he therefore takes with
somewhat less seriousness the concerns of Barth for the
integrity of theology./10/ But this is because he is quite
optimistic about the possibility of preserving the integrity
of theology and at the same time making it intelligible to
modern thinkers. This optimism, in some form, supplies one
of the dynamics that will eventually lead him to formulate
the understanding of theological method we find in An Essay
on Theological Method.

2:   TOWARD A HISTORICIST THEOLOGY

Having examined Kaufman's philosophical/anthropological
framework, let us move on to his post-Ph.D. writings, in
particular those written between 1955 and about 1965.   While
Kaufman's writings take him to many different questions,
almost every essay or book reveals his concern to take a
consistently historicist position.   In many papers, this
position is evident just from the titles: "The Imago Dei as
Man's Historicity."/11/ "Theological Dogma and Historical
Work," and "History and Mysticism."   But even in those
papers whose titles do not have some form of the word
"history," one can be quite sure that a historicist posture
is being assumed, i.e., a perspective that defines human
life in terms of history, freedom, and culture/community
rather than in terms of nature and (static) essence.

A brief examination of "The Ground of Biblical
Authority" (1956a) will illustrate this well.   At the same

time it will serve to introduce what becomes Kaufman's major
interest during this period, a systematic theology written
from a historicist perspective.

2.1 Biblical Authority and Historicism

One should first note that, for Kaufman, the church is
not primarily a place where one hears the word of God
rightly preached and has the sacraments rightly
administered. Nor is it primarily a congregation of
individuals who meet for the sake of personal spiritual
edification, though it is that too. For Kaufman, the church
is fundamentally a community, perhaps even a kind of culture
unto itself. And like any other culture, it has certain
traditions that define it and function as authorities for
those within it. One can never "prove" that one's
traditions are finally true; one lives them and is able only
to confess that these are the authorities in one's life.
The same holds true for Christians. For them, it is Christ
who is regarded as finally true. And this can never be
proven; it can only be confessed (28, 29).

But to regard Christ as the final authority, the symbol
of all that is good, true and right involves Christians in
the claim that Jesus was not merely a person but God's
self-revelation to humankind (28f.). Being a Christian
involves believing that in Jesus, God definitively revealed

himself.   It means that   "for some strange reason we
Christians find, as we look back at this man of two thousand
years ago, that that which is finally and absolutely true
and real and good about the universe seems to be made known
to us there" (29). This, in turn, takes us to a discussion
of the Bible.

The authority of the Bible lies precisely in its
character as a witness to this revelation, to this
historical act of God. "The only way that we can encounter
this historical person in and through whom God revealed
himself is through the pages of the Bible or writings based
on the Biblical documents" (30). Again, "The Bible ...
must be of the utmost importance to every Christian and to
all Christian thought because it is in and through the Bible
that we encounter the revelation of God in Jesus Christ"
(30). The Bible, in other words is essentially a history
book, a record of the founding events of the Christian (and
Jewish) communities.

This implies that the events to which the Bible points
are of greater importance than the Bible itself. That
Kaufman takes this quite seriously is evident from the
methods he believes are most appropriate in interpreting the
Bible: "Christian faith and the Christian community
acknowledge the authority of the Bible only when they give
the most serious attention by the best historical methods to

the history and the person of which the Bible speaks, and

not simply to the Bible itself" (30). Indeed, "to bring

anything less than the best historical methods and thinking

to the Bible is to treat it trivially" (30).

        Kaufman seem oblivious to the fact that in making

certain historical events the basis of the Bible's authority

he creates a canon within the biblical canon--not of the

Pauline writings as with Luther but of those books written

in the narrative genre. At least he provides no basis for

thinking of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or the Song of

Solomon as authoritative. Yet the proposal is suggestive in

that it locates God's revelation, not in the hearts of

believers or in certain propositions one might distil from

the Bible, or the Bible itself, but in public, historical

events which themselves constitute the revelation. It is

the concrete, historical Jesus and his story which is the

revelation of God to humankind. Christianity is the faith

that what the Bible says about this event is so.

        What is striking about this account of biblical

authority is that no reference whatsoever is made to terms

such as "inerrancy," or "verbal" or "plenary inspiration"

which one might expect to arise in this context even if only

in a derogatory way. He does mention the notion of the

Bible being the word of God but only to refute it on the

basis that the Bible itself refers only to Jesus Christ as

the word of God (29). All supernatural explanations of how the Bible must be an authority are omitted. The Bible is authoritative for Christians just as the American Constitution and Bill of Rights are authoritative for Americans; they witness and give expression to certain founding events. Even his discussion of Jesus as God's revelation is carried on without reference to an incarnation. Kaufman opts for a more rationalized description of him as one in whom we somehow see the truth of the universe (28f.). All of this is an indication of what we will find in his systematic theology. But why does Kaufman feel drawn to write a systematic theology at all?

2.2 The Rationale for a Systematic Theology

A number of factors provide Kaufman with reasons for writing his own systematic theology. First, as already noted, Kaufman believes that a historicistic interpretation of such doctrines as christology, eschatology, and providence bring into relief important, even central, dimensions of those doctrines. How those doctrines might be related to other doctrines of the Christian faith from the position of a historicism presents a real challenge and the possibility of a new and significant interpretation of Christian faith. Secondly, no theologians have yet attempted a systematic theology that takes history and human

freedom as its primary categories. While Kaufman counts the early Tillich as an important guide in his own development towards a   historicistic   perspective, 12'   Kaufman is chagrined at Tillich's movement toward what he later calls a "nonhistoricistic   ontologism"   (1968a:360n.), 13' particularly as expressed in Tillich's Systematic Theology (1967). Thus, the task of a historicist systematic theology has yet to be completed.   And finally, Kaufman's own understanding of the nature 'of human consciousness, its nature as a unifier, - demands some kind of systematic statement.   Anything less would be to ignore the tension that continually draws consciousness to greater and greater comprehensiveness and unity.   Moreover, this concern with comprehensiveness   and   unity   corresponds   to   the universalistic and metaphysical claim implied in Kaufman's theological monotheism.   If there is one God and the universe is a creation of that God, then some attempt to understand all of reality as God's creation and as "under God" is called for.

2.3 The Historicity of God

"The Imago Dei as Man's Historicity" (1956c) is illustrative both of how early Kaufman's systematic interest arose and of the flavour of his later Systematic Theology (1968a; 1978a). The essay may well have been entitled "The

Historicity of God" since it contains Kaufman's first attempt to work out the implications of his historicism for a conception of God. If the image of God in human beings is their historicity, as Kaufman argues, then he must show how historicity is a defining characteristic of God as well. He attempts to demonstrate this by adverting to another doctrine, that of God's aseity.

God's aseity is his "self-existence and absolute ontological independence from any other being" (1956c:163). Both for those with a modern historical consciousness and those who want to take seriously a biblical concept of God, this cannot mean that God is static and eternally changeless. For moderns, eternal changelessness can only suggest a throwback to an outdated and Greek substantialist philosophy. And for biblically oriented thinkers, such an Unmoved Mover who stands aloof from history "cannot be reconciled with the God of the Bible, who is always active, moving, creating, responding" (163). Rather, argues Kaufman, one should understand God's aseity more in accordance with the etymology of the term. A se means "from himself." God is "derived from himself, or, conversely . . . he produces or creates himself" (163). God is still absolutely self-dependent since he makes himself through his own freedom. This is not a static absoluteness because aseity here refers to "a relation in him between himself as

the ground of what he has become and himself as what he has become" (163). Thus, an orthodox (trinitarian) emphasis is maintained in a historicistic interpretation of God: God is the ground, the creation and the relation between the ground and creation that he is. And the historical dimension of this self-creation is maintained in that "the process through which this movement or development of the living God proceeds" (163) is God's history.

What Kaufman proposes here then is a way of thinking of God as intrinsically dynamic and changing. Because the analogy used is one of relation 14. it is conceivable that God's unity or oneness need not imply a static being.

Yet there is something troublesome about the idea that God continuously creates himself.   Such creation clearly implies change.   (This will soon be seen as we look at how human beings create themselves.) And while the Bible can speak about God changing his mind about certain matters, the liberty allowed in a poetic history would seem to create havoc for any attempt to systematically relate the various categories. concepts, and images of Christian faith. This would be true unless, of course, the self-creation that defines God were itself to be understood as subservient to a higher and unchanging principle.   Indeed, Kaufman suggests something like this when he says that what further defines God is that his relationship to himself is characterized by

love and by a creativity that not merely produces but produces good (165). And this seems to take us back to a discussion of the ontological character of God. But Kaufman resists this temptation and admits only that the self-creativity that defines God is characterized by love , and a creativity productive of good; God is first creative and secondly creative of good. Why he maintains this becomes clear as we look at his doctrine of human beings as the imago Dei.

2.4 The Imago Dei as Historicity

In a way analogous to God, human beings are a se, argues Kaufman. This historical aseity, with the self-creation that this implies, constitutes the imago Dei in them. Of course, human beings are dependent upon God and have been created by God, but they have been created in such a way that "in certain respects" they are capable of creating themselves. First, "Man creates his descendants" (1956c:164). This is true in the obvious biological sense but also in a spiritual sense. The ideas, values, attitudes and artistic tastes one acquires and which define a person are shaped by the history and language of the society in which one is raised. Secondly, individuals are created by their contemporaries. In Kaufman's words, "All the responses of others to me throughout my life have left their

mark on me and have helped to make me what I now am" (164).
Thus, we create each other; we shape the lives of those
around us simply by acting. And finally, individuals create
themselves. The decisions they have made in the past make
them what they are in the present (164). The fact that no
one "precisely and rationally" (164) decides to become a
certain kind of person does nothing to diminish the truth
that people are what they are because of their decisions.
Therefore, concludes Kaufman, an analogy between God's
relationship to himself and our relationship to ourselves
exists; both can be understood as a se when considered in
historical terms. Both have the capacity to create
themselves; both have historicity as their defining
characteristic.

     There are several observations one could make here.
First, Kaufman's description of how human beings create
themselves has a sociological flavour to it. Berger and
Luckmann's The Social Construction of Reality (1966) comes
to mind. Kaufman is using an essentially sociological
analysis to make his argument. Society and culture are the
basic human realities for Kaufman. In this emphasis we gain
a clearer view of what Kaufman means by a historicist
approach. Insofar as history is possible only for
social/cultural beings, understanding human life in social
terms is an intricate part of Kaufman's theological

historicism.   And to a culture increasingly understanding
itself in sociological and psychological terms, Kaufman's
description would undoubtedly be persuasive.

Precisely because it would be persuasive to modern
culture certain other questions arise.   Does not the
definition of both God and human beings in terms of
historicity and self-creation constitute a blatant
accommodation to a culture which increasingly places a high
value on change,   action, and productivity?   Does not
defining human beings in terms of freedom call for a
positive appraisal of secularism.   Does not Kaufman's
doctrine become an apology for contemporary culture?   (In
the next section we will encounter Kaufman's interpretation
of modern secularism.)   Furthermore, there are ethical
implications to consider.   While Kaufman can affirm that
"Man is good in so far as he is" (1956c:166), because of his
historicist perspective he must qualify this by pointing out
that "Since man's being is to be active and creative—in
short to be historical—this now means that, to the extent
that man is _creative_, he is good, for in being creative he
is as God has created him" (166).   Kaufman may not have had
the issues of abortion, euthanasia, and life-support systems
in mind when he wrote these words, but they clearly carry
with them the dangerous idea that our worth is tied to our
capacity to create or produce.

Finally, Kaufman's account of the *imago Dei* raises questions of a systematic nature. What does it mean for an understanding of the fall? How is one to think of the redemption of Christ in historicistic terms? Let us look at how Kaufman approaches these questions in his *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (1968a: 1978a). /15/

2.5 Historicism and the Fall

A closer look at Kaufman's doctrine of the fall will illustrate the radicalness of Kaufman's historicism and, I think, will highlight the problem Kaufman has in accounting for the necessity of God's redemption of humankind in Christ.

The fall involves a very real and historical "event-process," argues Kaufman (1968a:353ff.). In his words,

> Despite the lack of direct historical documentation, however, the fall should be regarded as a genuinely historical event or process; for we cannot understand the continuing historical processes, filled as they are with hatred and disharmony, guilt and distrust, without presupposing an earlier one through which these came to be what they are. (353)

Kaufman does not suggest that there was actually a period of innocence from which humankind fell. The "fall" for Kaufman occurs with the aquisition of those capacities which make historicity possible. Still, he wants to argue that the fall is not a necessary consequence of the human capacity

for history. Human beings "might have developed in the direction of seeing all creation in relation to the transcendent will in which it is grounded," he argues. But on this he wavers: "With genuine freedom emerging it was also possible--perhaps even likely--for the movement toward self-centred autonomy to occur" (1968a:360).

Kaufman wavers because, in fact, he needs to make two contradictory statements. He needs to say that of themselves, the earliest human beings could have chosen to look at all of creation from the point of view of "the transcendent will." This would place the responsibility of a destructive history squarely on the shoulders of humankind and justify God redeeming act. At the same time he must deny a primal innocence because the idea is so outrageous. But if humankind never really had a choice about the matter, then God must be responsible and this is theologically unacceptable since it makes God into a villain. On the other hand, perhaps human history is not really so thoroughly sinful and destructive as it has been make out to be, that while there was never a period of innocence, it does not really matter. But this is unacceptable because it makes Christ's redemption largely superfluous. It seems then that Kaufman's historicist perspective has no fewer problems than does the classical, his own counter claims notwithstanding (cf. 1956c:166f.).

Kaufman attempts to deal with this dilemma by pointing to the cumulative effect of sin in history in what amounts to a historicistic doctrine of original sin. Because decisions were made and actions performed without reference to God's intention in making humankind free, hatred, guilt, fear, anxiety, and suspicion resulted and affected the lives of others. And these, in turn, could not but be influenced and corrupted by hatred, guilt, etc. The result of this was not only misery and death but also a serious diminution of freedom. Indeed, while modern secularism purports to value freedom highly, Kaufman argues that it actually represents a retreat from freedom because it has divorced itself from the God who created human beings free and who can provide us with a knowledge of how that freedom is to be used. Instead, traditions of hatred and fear have shaped generations. Contemporaries act toward one another in hatred, fear, and guilt; individuals make decisions that reflect the existence of these distortions in human life.

Nevertheless, it follows from Kaufman's premise that humankind is worse off later in history than it was earlier in history, though Kaufman does not say as much. He does say that through a sinful history, humankind became thoroughly enslaved to its own selfishness. And this meant that "the appropriate solution to this problem would be the entrance into history of a new impulse, a community of

reconciliation and love which could provide a context for freedom without anxiety" (1968a:364). This was provided in Christ.

Thus, as intriguing as this historicistic account of sin is, it asks too much of its readers. It asks them to believe that history before Christ was an ever deeper descent into the abyss of secularity and corruption. Kaufman's emphasis on the actual historical nature of the fall leaves no doubt about this. In light of the fact that religion was far from dead at the time of God's revelation in Christ, Kaufman is further forced to interpret all religions as expressions of the rebellion of humankind against God: "Man, not God, invented morality and religion" (362). Religion, ironically, becomes an expression of secularity in Kaufman's system. Furthermore, despite the ambiguous nature of life in the modern era (i.e., despite the experience of goodness, fulfilment, and happiness as well as of evil, emptiness, and alienation), Kaufman uncharacteristically unequivocally argues that "The continuously increasing secularism of the modern world . . . may be understood as one of the final historical consequences of the movement into autonomy beginning with the fall" (373).

2.6 Revelation and Historicism

Kaufman's christology creates problems of a similar nature. Quite rightly, Kaufman links the salvation that comes through Christ with God's original intention for humankind (383ff.). Because the fall alienated humankind from its true ground in God and his purposes, and because (as stated earlier) it became so mired in a corrupted history, God had to act to make it possible for humankind to see once again (or for the first time?) the kind of life originally envisaged for it. This was accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this person and in the community established by him, God entered into history as "an active and effective force" (386) and thereby decisively altered the ontological character of history (cf. 273ff., 284). Moreover (and at this point we see the incorporation of a unique Mennonite-Anabaptist emphasis at the same time that it betrays the neo-orthodox concern with Christ as revelation of God), it is the actual historical life of Jesus, his self-giving (385), his free obedience (384), and nonresistance (219ff.) that is the revelation of God to humankind. Because of the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ, people could see that the ultimate truth of their very beings was love, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and freedom (387; cf. 1961a:43)./16/

Kaufman's christology clearly integrates ethics with christology and this in itself is an achievement. /17/ It has the strength of a definitive revelation of God embodied in the life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. But precisely this strength becomes a liability when the question of non-western traditions is brought up. Kaufman has no way of thinking that God could have been (is?) at work in other cultures and societies outside of the influence of a concrete, historical Christian community. Unwittingly, his historicistic interpretation of Christ easily becomes the basis for a religious imperialism.

For all that, there is something very appealing about Kaufman's interpretation of the doctrines we have looked at. His emphasis on the social character of human life serves to bring the individualism of modern life into question. Despite what we are always being told by the media, we are very much social creatures; our lives are thoroughly enmeshed in the lives of others. Furthermore, Kaufman's emphasis on the social nature of sin brings into question those who would relegate sin completely to the private, spiritual realm. Sin is not merely separation from God in some nebulous sense. It is also the disruption and destruction of social relationships. And Kaufman's overriding concern to link freedom and creativity to the will of God is certainly justified. Kaufman clearly sees

that freedom without responsibility and creativity without a
sense of morality is a serious danger.

Still, annoying questions crop up. Does a
historicistic interpretation of Christian faith do justice
to the experience of Christian faith as it is lived by
Christians? Does it do justice to human life in general?
Does freedom adequately define human beings? Does defining
human beings in social and historical terms, in terms of
decision and action, surrender too much to a culture that
has "made a fetish out of action" (Merton, 1971:164)?

Whatever questions may have arisen in Kaufman's own
mind about his project, he was convinced of the essential
appropriateness of his historicism. Indeed, the historicism
becomes even more pronounced as we will see in the following
chapters.

3. THE PROBLEM OF THEOLOGICAL MEANING

3.1 Introduction

A necessary presupposition of writing a systematic theology is the intelligibility to one's readers of the terms, categories, and images made use of and reflected upon. In the case of Kaufman, this would seem to be of no particular concern. The categories of God, Christ, Spirit, church, creation, etc. have been employed in Christian churches for centuries. Their use requires no justification. They are a part of the consciousness of Christians everywhere. Of course, non-believers might find them meaningless. But then, this is not surprising: Christianity is a faith to be confessed, not a proposition to be proven by argument. Theology presupposes faith (1968a:21ff.); it cannot produce it.

While Kaufman can be found to be affirming this

position in a number of his essays (1956a:28f.; 1957b:238),
there is also evidence that he was never quite comfortable
with it. As early as his Ph.D. thesis, he takes time to
criticize H. Richard Niebuhr for suggesting that Christian
faith can only be confessed. Kaufman points out that
Niebuhr himself makes every attempt "to present the idea of
revelation, and even of 'confessional theology,' as
intelligible and not unreasonable ideas" (1955:58n.;
1960:10n.). He concludes his criticism with the argument
that human beings can never be satisfied with parochial
views because they are the kind of beings who look for
universality in truth (10n.). 18 Whatever the validity of
his concluding argument 19. we have already seen that
Kaufman takes this seriously. As we saw in the last
chapter, his systematic effort is an expression of that
seriousness. What Kaufman does not seem to have
anticipated, however, is the question of whether the terms
and vocabulary of Christian theology could communicate
anything at all anymore. To what, after all, do words like
"God" and "transcendence" refer? About 1965, however, the
significance of this question is acknowledged by him.

3.2 The Crisis of Neo-orthodoxy

Kaufman never relates precisely how it was that his
renewed concern with the intelligibility of Christian faith

was born.   No doubt it had something to do with the times.
The decade of the sixties was a tumultuous one. not least of
all for theology.   The death of God had been proclaimed, and
for some this was taken to heart as they embraced the more
promising "theology" of secularism. Kaufman was not one of
those, though his move to Harvard in 1963 probably made his
awareness of this option more acute.   Whatever the reason,
the almost innocent optimism of Kaufman's earlier years gave
way about 1965 to a more sober assessment of the possibility
of making Christian faith understandable and persuasive to a
sceptical   culture.   In   "Christian   Education   Without
Theological Foundations?" 20. that assessment receives its
first expression from him.

        In that paper, Kaufman quietly admits that Christian
theology and faith have a serious problem with which to
contend.   It is a problem which, he says, has been concealed
for many years by the neo-orthodox theological consensus.
He describes that problem as follows:

> For a time the revival of traditional Christian
> language   and   perspectives   in   so-called
> neo-orthodoxy, coming as it did at a time of
> serious crisis in Western civilization, obscured
> from us the incompatibility of traditional faith
> with contemporary existence. But now this problem
> is bursting into the open again for all to see,
> and the question whether Christian faith can
> survive in the modern world as a meaningful
> orientation of human existence is the central
> problem facing the church . . . (Christian and
> Wittig, 1967:106f.)

Even more to the point is Kaufman's "Theological

Historicism as an Experiment in Thought" (1966d). Here Kaufman asks the crucial questions, "What do we mean by 'God'? Is this notion intelligible at all to 'modern man' . . . " (269). And "If absolutely nothing within our experience can be directly identified as that to which the term 'God' properly refers, what meaning does or can the word have?" (270) To these questions Kaufman, in the mid-1960's, turns his attention.

3.3 Models and Theological Meaning

The first published essay in which Kaufman deliberately addressed the question of the meaning of the word "God" was "Two Models of Transcendence: An Inquiry into the Problem of Theological Meaning" (1965c).

The paper is essentially an attempt to deal with what Kaufman regards as one of the primary intellectual sources of theological scepticism, viz., logical positivism. Admitting that there are problems and criticisms that can be levelled against a logical positivistic criterion of meaning, Kaufman nonetheless seems to agree with "the positive point being made" which is that "meaning always involves reference to concrete experience, and unless the experiential referent can be located, the meaning of a term or sentence cannot be demonstrated; it is an empty abstraction" (1965c:183). The problem that immediately

arises for theologians is that the term "God" by definition refers to something that completely transcends the ordinary, empirical world and human experience. Kaufman addresses the problem in the following way.

While God is not an object of experience and is by definition beyond the realm of human experience, still, he is conceived of in terms of analogies with one of two kinds of human experience. The first kind is the experience of the self as agent, as one who is able to choose a goal and able to direct its efforts toward the realization of that goal in the future. For a theology whose fundamental metaphor is God as a self, the key category is revelation. For our knowledge of other persons depends largely upon "their acts of revealing or unveiling themselves to us when they communicate with us" (189; Kaufman's emphases). Thus, our concept of a personal reality that transcends us has a root in our concrete interpersonal experience./21/

A second historical model of transcendence has been the experience of a self with the power to act, suggests Kaufman. The goal which one sets transcends one in that it drives one beyond satisfaction or complacency with the present and the already existing (191). When God is conceived of as the telos toward which all striving is to be directed, one's theology becomes a theology of being; anthropomorphisms are accordingly avoided as much as

possible. "All finite reality will be viewed as necessarily grounded in this ultimate reality, and as, in turn, striving toward it" (192).

All this is to suggest that there is a sense in which theological meaning fulfills the positivist's criterion of meaning. While God is not an object of experience, s/he is invariably conceived of in terms of some model derived from empirical experience. There is, therefore, a connection between empirical reality and God. Talk of God, Kaufman implies, need not be abandoned.

There is a certain exaggeration in the attention Kaufman pays to the positivist's criterion of meaning. And the conclusion to which he tries to lead us, viz., that since our ideas of God are shaped by empirical experience they are at least intelligible, is equally exaggerated. He supplies us with no reason for believing that a God modelled on some empirical reality should be anymore meaningful or less illusory than one completely imaginative (if that is possible). A logically constructed illusion is still an illusion.

3.4 Experience and Theological Meaning

But even when Kaufman is willing to admit that he has taken the empiricist definition of truth too seriously (as he does in a footnote to a revised version of this essay

[1972a:72n.]), the assumption remains that by isolating some experience or empirically-derived model that guides the construction of a concept of God, the intelligibility of that concept will have been established. "On the Meaning of 'God': Transcendence Without Mythology" (1966a; 1972a:41-71) is a case in point.

Arguing that moderns can no longer accept the idea of a knowable, transcendent other world which Christianity has so long preached, Kaufman sets out to show "how it is possible and why it is significant to speak not only of this world but of 'God'" (1972a:44). His argument takes him into a phenomenological description of the situations in which "God-language" has been understood to be appropriately and meaningfully used.

Speech about God, he argues, "appears within the context of man's sense of limitation, finitude, guilt, and sin, on the one hand, and his question about the meaning or value or significance of himself, his life, and his world, on the other" (46).

In much the same way as he does in "Two Models of Transcendence," Kaufman argues that the notion or idea of an ultimate limit understood as "God" is one that is derivative of, or an abstraction from, concrete experience, in this case experiences of limit. Specifically, Kaufman lists physical, organic, personal, and normative limits

experienced by individuals in the natural course of life.

The movement from such particular experiences of limitedness to a notion of an Ultimate Limit involves a number of stages. First, a general concept of limitation emerges by means of reflection and abstraction. A profound sense of personal limitation, involving perhaps such emotions as "terror, despair, revulsion, anxiety" (53), may follow. And this, in turn, may be followed by the question, What is it that so confines the self? Finally, this "what" may then be conceived of in terms of one of the four kinds of limits (physical, organic, personal, normative).

This last step involves the imaginative construction of an Ultimate Limit, a construction whose building blocks must necessarily be models and images derived directly from experience. In the west, argues Kaufman, God has primarily been conceived of in terms of personal images. And just as persons are more than our experiences of them, God can analogously be thought of as more than simply our experience of him/her through our experience of limitation. On the basis of our experience with other selves, we can imaginatively construct a divine person whom we "experience" through limitation. And naturally, the notion of revelation will have a prominent place in such a construction: "We know the transcendent reality of other selves only as they act toward and communicate with us, as they reveal to us

their reality and character and purposes, in word and deed"
(66).

The implication that Kaufman draws from this sketch of
the experiential root of the word "God" is that to speak of
God, of his/her action, and of his/her revealing is "not
necessarily to make a mythological statement presupposing an
unjustified and unjustifiable metaphysical-cosmological
dualism; such . . . speech [is] necessary if and whenever a
personal limiter is taken as the model for grasping the
ultimate Limit" (67). The "experience" at the root of the
word God is that of limitation. The image in whose terms
the experience is understood is that of a person. No
"knowledge" of a reality beyond the world need therefore be
posited in order to make sense of talk about God. The image
of a person provides the internal logic of such talk. The
experience of limitation provides its experiential warrant.

That the image of a person has provided the general
logical framework for talk about God in the west is probably
more or less true. It is far less obvious that the
experience of limitation has been the constitutive
experience underlying the word "God." A logical implication
of Kaufman's argument is that only those willing or somehow
predisposed to make the leap from particular experiences of
limitedness to a general concept of limitation that is
believed to be an object of experience and requiring

conceptualization in terms of some model or image could find talk about God meaningful. This is misleading not only because some people find talk of God warranted by quite different experiences (of oneness or wholeness for example [cf. Richardson, 55f.]), but because for some people the simple sense of purpose and meaningfulness that thinking of their life in terms of God provides is sufficient reason to engage in talk about God. For such people, there is no particular or generalized experience properly speaking underlying the word "God" (cf. 1972a:68). Thus, Kaufman's own suggestion that talk about God appears within the context of our questions about the meaning of life (46) would seem to be a more adequate starting point from which to launch into a discussion of the meaningfulness of theology. Such talk of God attempts first and foremost to supply answers to questions of this sort. Theology is perhaps better understood as a urselves means of relating ourselves to what is ultimately real. 22/

Moreover, Kaufman's attempt to locate some experience that could even analogically serve as an empirical referent for the term "God" exposes him to criticism from the very people whose concerns he has been at pains to address. There is, from a positivist point of view, no justification for supposing that our experiences of limit point to any other realities than those which Kaufman has specified as

physical, organic, personal and normative /23/ There is
nothing that would lead people to suppose that "limitation"
is anything but an abstraction. There is a fortiori nothing
that requires them to think of an "ultimate Limit" much less
of such a limit in terms of an empirically-derived model.

But the principle that guides Kaufman to take on the
positivists is a sound one. And it can be found implicitly
in the form of his historicist theology and explicitly in
Relativism: thought and concrete historical existence are
intricately bound up with one another. While Kaufman never
really loses sight of this principle even in his discussion
with the positivists, he soon reaffirms that "concrete
historical existence" does not imply the relative primacy of
empirical experience as he seemed to assume in the essays
discussed above. Our experience is itself shaped by
cultural existence and a world of imaginative creations.
This reaffirmation puts Kaufman well on the path to the
theological method he later develops for it leads him to
think in terms of culture as the presupposition of all
meaningful experience and less of empirical experience as
its primary root. In "God as Symbol" (1972a:82-115), we see
Kaufman completing an important leg of the journey. /24/

The thesis of "God as Symbol" is that God is
essentially an imaginatively constructed symbol which serves
certain functions vital to human life. A number of

proposals are contained here. Let us look at the most significant ones.

3.5   God as Imaginatively Constructed

Forever true to his historicism, Kaufman develops an analogy between God and a historical figure like George Washington.   Neither is visible or accessible by means of the senses as are, for example, physical objects or living persons.   Knowledge about someone like George Washington is acquired by means of reports, records, letters, etc.   As those reports and records are read, an image of George Washington emerges, an image constructed on the basis of available documents by the historical imagination/25/   Of course, Washington was much more than the image that can be constructed of him; but since we are wholly dependent upon historical evidence, this is the only Washington we can know.

What this means is that there is a sense in which we have two Washingtons: a Washington that is "available" to us through the historical evidence and a "real" Washington who forever remains unknown.   The "real" Washington functions as a limiting idea for us, reminding us of the limitations to which our knowledge of him is subject.   But beyond this only the "available" Washington is of any real consequence to us.   In Kaufman's words, only the

imaginatively constructed Washington "can in any way affect
our attitudes, action, or thinking; thus only [he] can be of
real significance or importance to us" (1972a:84).

God, suggests Kaufman, is known like Washington is
known. Although God is taken to "exist" in some sense and
to be present (at least by believers), nonetheless,
knowledge of him/her also involves an imaginative
construction because s/he is never accessible by means of
direct contact, observation or dialogue. And since the
"real" God, i.e., God as s/he is experienced by God, is not
accessible to us, practically speaking, s/he is of no
consequence to us. It is rather

> the "available God" whom we have in mind when we
> worship or pray; it is the available referent that
> gives content and specificity to any sense of
> moral obligation or duty to obey God's "will"; it
> is the available God in terms of which we speak
> and think whenever we use the word "God."
> (1972a:85f.)

"In this sense," Kaufman continues, "'God' denotes for all
practical purposes what is essentially a mental or
imaginative construct" (85).

Continuing with the analogy, from what documents or
historical evidence is the symbol of God constructed? In
the case of God, Kaufman argues that "documents" and
"historical evidence" must be understood in a much broader
way than in the case of a George Washington. The available
God to whom we (in the West) have access is a cultural

possession; s/he is the God of the Judeo-Christian
tradition, appropriated and interpreted today in a variety
of ways. The source material from which individuals
construct an image of God comes first and foremost from that
tradition.

Complicating things for Kaufman is the fact that the
source material itself is imaginatively constructed so that
the imaginative construct one builds is itself dependent
upon other imaginative constructs which rely on still other
imaginative constructs.   This precipitates two questions:
1. What sustains such a thoroughly imaginative construct as
"God"? and 2. What guides the imaginative process in its
creation and recreation of that image or construct? These
two questions are clearly related as we will see.

3.6 "God" and Human Life

The question of what it is that leads people to keep
such a construct alive is, for Kaufman, the question of the
function of that concept for the culture in which it is in
fact sustained.   The concept of God, he argues, performs a
vital cultural function; it "defines and orients a whole way
of life and understanding of the world" (1972a:89). Why
such definition and orientation are even necessary is a
question Kaufman deals with by adverting to the nature of
human beings. Referring readers to Relativism for a more

thorough   treatment of   the idea   (89), Kaufman   argues that
human beings are profoundly cultural animals who experience,
understand,   reason,   act   and   speak   in terms, categories,
values   and language   they appropriate   from culture.   Every
culture, moreover, is constituted by a structure of meaning,
a   system of   symbols and   myths in   light of   which life is
ordered.   "In Western   culture the   symbol with the deepest
significance   and greatest   power to   legitimate and sustain
others is God" (1972a:90).   The doctrines of God as creator
of the universe,   as Lord,   as Father,   etc. have   not only
served to shape Western   attitudes to the world, to communal
life, and to   fellow human   beings but   have served   as the
ultimate reference points   for shaping   all of   life.   As a
cultural animals,   they cannot avoid the   task of conceiving
and imagining their lives within a larger context, a context
which brings their significance and that of their activities
into relief.   What   sustains such   a thoroughly imaginative
construct as God through   the ages is   the fact that it has
fulfilled   the need   of (western)   people to perceive
themselves from a transcendent point of view.

3.7   "God" and Human Life Again

The fact that this imaginative   activity is never
brought to a halt testifies to a certain incompleteness in
every   particular   construction   of   an   image or concept or

symbol of God; it testifies to a continuing critical examination of all constructs of God. This brings us to the question of what it is that guides such construction and reconstruction. Since, like Washington, God is not an empirical reality, one cannot "compare" a description of God to God as s he "really" is and thereby determine the accuracy of the description. Our earlier discussion of the function of the symbol of God implies at least one criterion, viz., that the construct be able to define and orient a way of life that promotes the well-being of the culture. This means that it must exert a significant influence on the people that make up the culture; it must be persuasive and able to interpret life in a convincing way.

There is a notable sense in which the concrete experience of life guides the construction of concepts of God. This is because activity has a certain priority over thought. In this observation Kaufman relies, according to his own admission, on Kant's critique of practical reason (1972a:101n. 21). "Man is most fundamentally a practical or active being," argues Kaufman. "In this respect moral questions (What ought I to do? How ought I to comport myself?) are _prior_ to questions of truth and being (What is the world really like? What is man?) and cannot be suspended until the latter are answered" (1972a:100; Kaufman's emphases). Hence, the capacity of a construct

like God to promote the moral life in culture becomes a way of measuring its appropriateness.

3.8 Conclusion

Summing up what Kaufman has proposed in this paper, what the concept of God denotes is, and always has been, imaginatively constructed, much as an historical figure is reconstructed by the historical imagination.   There is no direct, unmediated access the "real God." We have access to the "available God" only by virtue of being a part of a culture in which the word "God" is assumed to have meaning, a culture in which the structures of social, political, economic and religious life have been erected upon the presupposition of the meaningfulness of this imaginative construct.   Historical and phenomenological studies also give us access to the available God presupposed by much of Western culture. Furthermore, God exists as a construct at all because westerners' need to order and orient their cultural life has led them to imaginatively create him/her. And since cultural life is the only life human beings know, some construct analogous to God is always, in every culture, constructed.   This means that the "truth" of a particular construct is impossible to answer and, in some sense, even irrelevant.   Only about its appropriateness, judged on its capacity to meaningfully orient human action, can relevant

questions be asked. For "man is fundamentally a practical
or active being" and any construct that lends support and
meaning to his activity is appropriate for him/her to
embrace.

It follows from this understanding that Christian faith
is appropriate to the extent that it promotes the
transcendence and order required by cultural life. But in
"God as Symbol," there is a certain hedging on Kaufman's
part on making the promotion of culture a criterion of
theological work. The logical implication of this is a
degree of freedom for the theologian that he was quite
unwilling to grant, for example, in his Systematic Theology
where the community of faith, the Bible, and one's personal
conviction of truth needed to be involved in any legitimate
theological construction (1968a:67-71). In "God as Symbol,"
however, he is willing to use "the criteria based on the
image of that helpless, nonresistant suffering figure dying
on a cross" in deciding the appropriateness of using
specific traditional and/or biblical images in contemporary
theological construction. But he chooses these criteria not
because they are "true" in some metaphysical sense but
because they tend to support moral life: "Only such a
radical loving, forgiving, suffering God can metaphysically
sustain and further enhance our moral sensitivity in face of
the terrifying evils in today's world" (1972a:112n.).

Hence,   the   distinction   between   theological   and anthropological criteria becomes increasingly blurred in this essay.   And Kaufman is well on his way to the theological method of his Essay on Theological Method.

Before we move on to the next chapter, it should be noted, that in each of the three papers discussed in this chapter (as well as in others)/26/ Kaufman consistently tries to argue that God is best understood on the model of a person/agent.   This he does because he regards it as biblically based (cf. . 1972a:119f.), because it undergirds practical, moral life (cf. 69, 105ff.), and most obviously because it allows us to think of God as historical. Carefully analyzing the linguistic structure of such terms as "person" and "agent," Kaufman tries to demonstrate how such ideas as purpose, action, and goal can be meaningfully applied to God, the "cosmic Agent" (181). His efforts are very illuminating and, to those who believe in a biblical God but who cannot, believe in supernatural acts, they would likely be persuasive as well.   I mention these efforts because they illustrate the thoroughgoing nature of Kaufman's theological historicism.   They illustrate Kaufman's determination to understand every major Christian doctrine either in terms of history (i.e., time understood as linearly, purposively ordered) or in those terms presupposed by history (e.g., freedom, action, purpose,

intention, creation and community and culture).   As we will
see   in the next   chapter, this historicism,   bereft to some
extent of its theological interpretation, frames Kaufman's
understanding of the nature of theology. Theology itself
will be understood in terms of freedom and as an act of
creation.

4. NEW FOUNDATIONS: THE THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

In the preface to An Essay On Theological Method (hereinafter, Essay) Kaufman remarks that the understanding of the theological task which he develops in that book

> emerged gradually in my mind over a number of years. The breakdown of the neo-orthodox consensus in protestant [sic] theology, which had made so much of the authority of "God's revelation" as the ultimate court of appeal, forced me, like others of my generation, to attempt to think through afresh the task of theology and to search for new and more adequate foundations. (1979a:x)

We have already seen what this "breakdown" meant for Kaufman's own reflections. It took Kaufman to attempts to locate the roots of religious ideas such as God in the concrete historical experience of individuals in order to defend the meaningfulness of these ideas. I have noted some of the problems involved in such attempts. Kaufman's relative silence on these attempts to justify the theological enterprise may be taken as a judgement in

Kaufman's own mind of their persuasiveness./27/

4.1   Theology and Language

Kaufman's Essay contains what he regards as a much more convincing account of theology. It presupposes neither the appropriateness of simply confessing a position nor that there are certain human experiences which in some way demand a theological interpretation.   Instead, following the lines set out in "God as Symbol," Kaufman begins with a description of the essentially cultural nature of human beings, of the cultural significance of religion, and of the cultural roots of theology. Indeed, Kaufman now argues that it is specifically in the language of a culture that theology has its roots.   Neither revelation nor experience can be adequately developed into a basis for theologizing since both presuppose theology.

Kaufman is quite right to argue that revelation is not a neutral, descriptive category.   It is fundamentally a religious, theological category which cannot be extracted from its context in the Christian vocabulary and its relation to other theological terms. To speak of theology as reflection upon "revelation" is to speak from within Christian faith and in that context it is not inappropriate. But Kaufman is here trying to establish in anthropological terms wherein theology has its roots. His concern is to set

theology on a foundation that has a more general validity,
and permits discussion and debate with those who may not
consider themselves part of the Christian fold.

Language, however, does not seem to me to be a broad
enough foundation upon which to set theology. Unless
Kaufman wants to include anything that is expressive of
meaning as language (as he did in Relativism [1960:60; see
also pp. 10f. of this paper]) he excludes a whole range of
cultural expression from serving as a basis for theological
reflection. Perhaps most neglected are the visual and
musical arts./28/

It soon becomes clear, however, that language in the
narrower sense of words, terms and "complexes of terms" (8)
is the foundation Kaufman has in mind. More specifically,
he suggests that ordinary language is the basis for
theology: "All special and technical meanings are
variations or developments of the ordinary language,
building upon it, refining it, transforming it" (8). And if
this is granted, then theology "has public, not private or
parochial, foundations" (8). By attending to certain key
terms in ordinary language (e.g., "holy," "divine,"
"sacred," "transcendent," etc. [8]) and then critically
reflecting upon them and refining their use, these terms
become specifically theological terms.

But Kaufman goes even further to suggest that what

makes theological discourse theological is the special status it accords to the term "God": "All other terms of the theological vocabulary in one way or another qualify, explain or interpret what is meant by 'God,' or indicate ways in which God is related—to or involved in human experience and the human world. In this sense they are all derivative from or secondary to 'God'" (9). While those "other terms" are indeed crucial (since without them the meaning of "God" would never be perceived), still, the centrality of that term wins for it special treatment.

This insistence on maintaining God as the central theological category is one of the few ties to neo-orthodoxy that Kaufman perserves. As we will see presently, theology no longer has the interpretation of the content of this category as its task but its reconstruction. Why people should have any kind of inclination to involve themselves in thinking, writing, and talking about ideas like "God" is Kaufman's concern in chapter two of his Essay.

4.2 God as Imaginative Construct.

The two theses that Kaufman tries here to establish are those for which he argued in "God as Symbol": (1) that the concept of God is an imaginative construct and (2) that this concept has an indispensable role to play in promoting the transcendence which is a condition of culture. But

Kaufman's tone here is more emphatic than in the earlier essay.

That God is an imaginative construct through and through has long been obscured by the fact that the model in terms of which God has been understood and constructed is that of a person, or so Kaufman argues. God was thought of, in Kaufman's words, as "the sort of reality that ordinarily comes to be known in some relatively direct quasi-experiential way" (21). When understood in this way, consistency dictated that theology be understood as the business of describing this divine person in much the same way one would describe a person empirically present. And since knowledge could be ascribed to this divine person, one could also conceive of this knowledge as something God could reveal. Theology therefore also took on the task of specifying the nature of this knowledge and its significance for human beings (22f.).

The reflections of Kant, however, brought this understanding of the concept of God radically into question, argues Kaufman. They therefore also demand a redefinition of the theological task. In Kaufman's words,

> Kant saw that ideas like "God" and "world"
> performed a different kind of function in our
> thinking than concepts like "tree" or "man."
> While the latter are used to organize and classify
> elements of experience directly, thus helping to
> make possible experience itself and serving as the
> vehicles through which experience is cognized, the
> former "regulative ideas" function at a remove

>from direct perception or experience: they are
>used for ordering and organizing our conceptions
>or knowledge. The "world," for example, is never
>an object of direct perception: it is, rather, a
>concept with which we hold together in a unified
>totality all of our experience and knowledge of
>objects—everything having its own proper place
>"within" the world . . . The concept of world is a
>construct of the mind, a heuristic device by means
>of which the mind orders its own contents but the
>objective referent for which we have no way of
>discovering. (24)

The concept of "God" functions analogously to the
concept of "world" but connotes something even broader.
Again in Kaufman's words, "It functions, on the one hand, as
the ultimate unifier of all experience and concepts both
subjective and objective ('world' unifies only the concepts
of 'objects'), and, on the other, as the most fundamental
postulate of the moral life, that which makes moral
experience intelligible by rendering the world in which we
act a moral universe" (24). And, like the concept of world,
the concept of God is an imaginative construct "created by
the mind for certain intra-mental functions . . . " (25).

Once this is understood, it comes as no surprise that
no one has ever been able to substantiate the claim that
they have experienced God directly, as one would experience
a physical object; there is no percept that corresponds
directly to a concept of God (25, 40n. 3).

Upon closer reflection, however, it is not quite so
obvious that the claim Kaufman makes for Kant's insight and
against "traditional theology" (25) is self-evident. As

regards the supposed objectivity of God in traditional theology (cf. 1981a:93f.), one must be careful not to interpret this anachronistically. Kaufman comes close to doing this when he implies that "objectivity" was always equated with empirical reality as it is today. In The Theological Imagination, for example, he repeatedly insists that "God is not a reality immediately available in our experience for observation, inspection, and description" (1981a:21; cf. 23, 47, 70ff., 77, 82, 243f., 257). And this does a disservice to theologians of earlier eras. It is not at all obvious that they understood themselves to be merely describing some kind of object. The dogmatism with which Kaufman associates traditional theology is certainly partly due to some sort of objectivism (cf. Dewart, 1970:62). But it is also true that people took theology with much more seriousness in earlier eras, a seriousness that seems strange to a culture which, for good and bad reasons, has privatized religious beliefs. That traditional theologians were unaware that some kind of imaginative construction was going on as they theologized cannot be easily substantiated.

As the revolutionary character of Kant's reflections (as understood by Kaufman) on the nature of the concept of God is not self-evident, neither are the implications of those reflections for theology. While Kaufman suggests that a fundamental redefinition of theology is thereby implied,

one might well ask, What actually changes? If, in spite of
what theologians believed they were doing, they were always
engaged in imaginative construction (cf. 1981a:273), what
difference does it make to become aware of this? Kaufman
would likely reply that it provides us with a critical lever
(1981a:76).   Earlier, one could appeal to the faithfulness
of one's theology to scripture and tradition as a guarantee
of its soundness (1981a:183), regardless of the kind of
morality and values it promoted (1979a:57).   When the
imaginative character of all theologies is kept in mind,
scriptural and traditional warrants have only a limited
validity./29/ If a theology promotes dehumanizing values, it
can be rejected even if it claims a fundamental continuity
with tradition. If a radically new theology promotes the
humanization of cultural life but has no easily recognizable
association with tradition and scripture, one may still
judge it appropriate to embrace (1981a:277).

4.3 Theology and Aseity

    Whether, in fact, continuity with tradition and appeal
to scripture were ever the principal criteria by which
theologies were judged, for Kaufman, the freedom implied in
the definition of theology as essentially a constructive,
creative task gains a whole new importance.

    What Kaufman actually does in freeing theologians from

the bonds of tradition and scripture is extend his theological anthropology to theology itself. His theological anthropology is the context of his understanding of theology as imaginative construction.. The freedom that defines human beings, i.e., their aseity, extends as well to the human activity of theologizing. Indeed, "The theologian's task is to construct a conception or picture of the world . . . as pervaded by and purveying a particular kind of (humane) meaning and significance . . . In this respect the theologian is essentially an artist . . . " (1979a:32)./30/ Moreover, one could correctly deduce that, for Kaufman, theology is another activity through which human beings gain control over and create themselves.

It is precisely at this point that I find myself uneasy. Assuming that theology is essentially an active, constructive enterprise, it is a simple step to reduce God to a construct whose fundamental character we decide according to the requirements that we perceive. And this places the theologian in the position of judge and executioner over the constructs of God that are put forward, the criteria for which theologians cannot agree upon./31/

That Kaufman courts this danger is everywhere evident. Since the concept of God is an imaginative construct which plays the essential role of promoting transcendence, morality and unity, theologians must construct and

reconstruct this concept. with as much self-consciousness
about the uses and abuses to which their concepts might be
put. Their concepts "must be assessed and reconstructed in
consideration of the kinds of activity and forms of
experience they make possible . . . " (32). Questions such
as "What forms of life do these conceptions . . .
facilitate? which forms inhibit? What possibilities do they
open up for men and women? which do they close off?" (32)
must therefore be asked and answered as one theologizes.

What is disturbing about this is not that Kaufman wants
to promote a consciousness of the sort of life a theology
promotes. This seems to me a legitimate concern, though I
seriously wonder to what extent one can be aware of the
practical· implications of a theological constuction before
it is actually embraced by people. What concerns me is that
the theologian is placed in the position of being a creator
of human possibilities, with "God" being one's primary tool.
Moreover. it seems that unaccustomed as theologians are to
consciously creating human possibilities they will turn to
the wider culture to set the theological agenda. Kaufman
himself already tends in this direction. Such issues as
sexism, the system of nation-states, third world problems,
and the nuclear threat have recently been prominent in
Kaufman's reflections (1978a:xx; 1979a:xii; 1981a:15f.;
1983a). And this is fine as far as it goes. But only with

the issue of violent revolution does Kaufman bring an
independent theological concern to a current issue
(1981a:152). 32   Whether there are any dimensions of the
human which a "parochial" religious tradition could unveil
is a question to which Kaufman devotes little time. 33
Furthermore, it is not clear to me that this is a simple
oversight. It is only logical that having defined the human
in terms of freedom, autonomy, and history he should look to
contemporary culture (which itself defines the human in this
way) for guidance in formulating the theological agenda.

4.4 The Moments of Theological Construction

Kaufman's understanding of the actual steps involved in
constructing a theology are helpful, though as he develops
these steps many of the problems mentioned above are
evident.

As Garrett Green has noted (1983:220), Kaufman's
principal metaphor in describing the nature of theology is
that of building. (Is it perhaps that the waters of
Kaufman's Protestant work ethic run deep?) Quite consistent
with this metaphor is Kaufman's description of the three
basic steps that are involved in any theological endeavour:

> The first step is the imaginative move beyond the
> items and objects of experience itself to
> construct a notion of the context within which all
> experience falls, a concept of the world; the
> second step is the further constructive leap which
> limits and relativizes this concept of the world
> through generation of the concept of God; finally,

there is the third imaginative move which returns
again to experience and the world, thoroughly
reconceiving them now in the light of this concept
of God, i.e., grasping them theologically. (46)

The details of this three-step construction are quite
instructive. The construction of a concept of world
involves the description of the sort of world people
actually experience. The purpose of this is to establish a
common base between the people of a culture and the
theologian. Kaufman understands this basically as a
metaphysical task (48). The construction of a concept of
God is the construction of a transcendent point of reference
from which one looks at the world and in terms of which one
judges it. Formally, it must be able to relativize the
world; materially, such a construct must be able to present
the ultimate reality as one for which humaneness and
humanity are key components. Some sort of anthropomorphic
model is apparently unavoidable, argues Kaufman, because the
only reality we know that is capable of placing a value on
humaneness is another human being. (55). Finally, the
construction of a theological world involves redescribing
the world as it would look from the point of view of the
concept of God. This reinterpretation necessitates finding
"bridge-categories" between those of the world and those of
the existing theological vocabulary. One attempts here to
develop new possibilities for human being in the world.

This description of how a theology is produced is quite

persuasive to me. (The one reservation I have will be expressed later in my critique.) I should perhaps only point out that Kaufman is not suggesting that this is a literal description of what goes on in theologizing. The process is highly dialectical; conceptions of God invariably affect our "phenomenological" description of the world, assessments of the world affect how we conceive of God, and so on. But it is striking that in spite of Kaufman's insistence on the constructive nature of theologizing, when he specifies the details of how theologizing ought to be done he takes it for granted that theologians have a good knowledge of the Christian tradition and of philosophy, that they have read widely and have some sort of acquaintance with the arts. Yet Kaufman says nothing to suggest that essential to the constructive theological task is a passive, responsive posture which permits the reception of the material from which one does one's constructing.

Indeed, in his most recent book, The Theological Imagination, Kaufman argues that "theology is not to be understood as primarily or chiefly exposition or interpretation of the several creeds of the church or of the ideas of the Bible" (1981a:265; cf. 266). This is because it suggests theologians' dependence on something objective which would only serve to reinforce the notion that they are involved in the description of the "object" of their study.

In my next chapter I will try to show why I believe it is proper and necessary to think of theology as having to do with an objective dimension to which theologians must open themselves. Suffice it to say here that Kaufman seems so enthralled by the essential freedom of theologians vis-a-vis tradition and scripture that he seems to take lightly their potential for stimulating the theological imagination, for opening up new worlds of meaning and new human possibilities.

4.5 Theology and Truth

There is one more problem that Kaufman's theological method seems to me to encounter. That problem is that it is not a very theological method. This point can best be made via a discussion of the understanding of truth that Kaufman presupposes in his method. In the short epilogue to his Essay, Kaufman argues that for theological constructs, "only criteria of coherence and pragmatic usefulness to human life are relevant and applicable" (75). While "usefulness to human life" is understood here "in the broadest and fullest and most comprehensive sense possible" (76), the idea is so formal that it seems to be of little practical use to theologians.

Indeed, to the extent that it focusses attention on the practical uses to which a theology might be put it seems to

me to obstruct theologians in what I consider their primary

aim, the search for truth. I would argue that theologies

become   humanizing   forces   in   a   culture   not   because

theologians   deliberately   and   self-consciously   seek   to

develop humanizing theologies but because they strive after

truthfulness.   Kaufman does theology a disservice when he

equates truth with whatever produces the greatest human

possibilities in a culture, all the more because today's

culture does not even   seem to know theology exists.

Theologians are diligent seekers after truth, the best of

them at least.   Whatever "truth" might mean here, it

certainly does not mean they are searching first and

foremost for a theology that will humanize culture. Kaufman

reduces   the meaning   of theology   to an activity of

socio-cultural significance and thereby effectively excludes

as irrevelant whatever theologians might understand

themselves to be doing. At times, Kaufman makes it sound as

though this was just a matter of proper theological

technique, of finding the right metaphors and models, or of

following a formula for constructing the idea of God (cf.

1981a:34-46).

4.6 Theology in the Nuclear Age

Kaufman's writings subsequent to his Essay further

elucidate his basic theses and only confirm the critical

observations I have made. I have already made numerous
references to The Theological Imagination (1981a)./34/ Let
us look just briefly at his latest paper which also happens
to be his presidential address to the American Academy of
Religion. The paper is largely a call to academics to take
seriously the threat of nuclear annihilation by facing
questions of value and norms and, hence, taking on a
"'theological' role in human life . . . a role which is
quite properly theirs" (1983a:12).

Yet Kaufman's address is not without significance for
theologians. Indeed, Kaufman even goes on to criticize "the
artificial separation of theology from religious studies"
(13). He argues that the contemporary world is crucially
different from the worlds that preceded it. The difference
is not that we can today conceive of the world coming to an
end in our lifetimes; the ancient prophets foresaw such an
end themselves. It is rather that today human beings have
the capability to bring all human life to an end whereas
only God could be conceived to have such power prior to
contemporary times. What this means theologically is that
all the old concepts of divine sovereignty and providence
are brought into serious question (1983a:8). Indeed, even
the personalistic image of God which has been so dear to
Kaufman he now says "seems less and less defensible in face
of the issues humanity today confronts . . . " (9). The new

historical situation calls for, "indeed, force[s] upon us,

changes in our religious symbolism and in the 'frame of

reference within which we make our value judgments and moral

choices . . . " (9). Accordingly, theologians "must be

prepared to enter into the most radical kind of

deconstruction and reconstruction of the traditions [they]

have inherited, including especially their most central and

precious symbols, God and Jesus Christ and Torah" (13). And

it is here that the work of theologians and that of scholars

of religion converge: "Theology and the study of religion

must together move forward into one discipline which draws

on the deepest religious resources and reflection in human

life as it tries, in face of a thoroughly threatening future

to provide orientation and guidance for our contemporary

human existence" (13).

I do not believe that Kaufman is calling for the

creation of new religions, though it is not clear to me how

a Christian theologian could abandon such central notions as

God's sovereignty and providence and still come up with a

recognizably Christian theology.   He is calling for their

deconstruction and reconstruction so that they can better

fulfil their proper (cultural) function which is their

primary significance. The question of truth appears beside

the point. It may even distract us from the primary task at

hand   which   has   already been   defined by a broader,

humanistic, cultural movement.

It should be made clear, of course, that Kaufman's own ethical concerns have roots in his religious (Anabaptist-Mennonite) heritage and that while he appears to be simply accepting a humanistic/activist agenda, its appropriateness is judged on religious grounds. Unfortunately, Kaufman gives no indication that he believes a question of truth is involved beyond the fact that were a nuclear holocaust to occur, it would be the end of culture and human life. Only in terms of the criterion of humanization does he articulate his concern: i.e., a nuclear holocaust would wipe out cultural and human life./35/

Furthermore, Kaufman's call for deconstruction and reconstruction, which itself can be viewed as an expression of the prophetic orientation of his understanding of theology, again reveals Kaufman's view of human beings as essentially free and essentially active, pragmatic beings; beings for whom questions of truth are largely secondary and questions of action, primary. While Kaufman is not nearly as iconoclastic as his paper might suggest (he himself has, as yet, done none of the radical deconstruction and reconstruction for which he calls), it does seem inappropriate to advocate such a program in light of the iconoclasm and pragmatism that already characterizes

contemporary culture.   It could, indeed, be argued that
precisely this iconoclastic posture has led to the erosion
of a sense of transcendence in our culture. On this note,
let us move on to the last part of my paper.

5. KAUFMAN'S METHOD: A CRITIQUE

5.1 Imagination vs. Revelation?

At the beginning of this paper I noted that Gordon Kaufman was finally receiving some of the recognition he has earned, that his work on theological method was being widely reviewed.   Allow me to deal briefly with two observations that are perhaps too easily made about Kaufman's methodological reflections, presented most ably by Garrett Green (1983)./36/ Green argues that Kaufman's understanding of theology as essentially an imaginative construction makes it impossible to distinguish idols from God since idols are precisely human-made images put in place of God.   Secondly, he suggests that Kaufman has actually replaced revelation with the theological imagination as the foundation of theology (cf.   Thiemann, 244).   And Green argues that this makes genuine criticism impossible since that in light of

which all human ideas and constructs should be criticized is itself a human construct. Having worked through not only Kaufman's method but his earlier writings as well, we are now in a position to assess these criticisms.

I believe that there is a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of Green of Kaufman's perspective and this misunderstanding is reflected in his critical remarks. It is assumed by him that Kaufman is attempting to develop a new theological foundation for theology rather than, as I believe, a philosophical foundation. Green's assumption is unjustified since Kaufman explicitly acknowledges that within the context of Christian faith, especially a Christian faith that conceives of God on the model of a person, it is quite appropriate to say that theology is based on God's revelation so that, theologically speaking, theology must begin with what God has revealed (1979a:67f.). Philosophically, however, especially in epistemological and psychological terms, such a claim cannot be made since it assumes what, from a philosophical point of view, needs to be justified. We do not meet an empirical reality named God who hands us either eternal truths or eternally valid symbols and images of him/herself. From a philosophical-anthropological point of view, the fact that we must speak of God and of revelation must itself be understood in terms that philosophy and anthropology supply.

Moreover, understanding God as an imaginative construct is not a particularly shocking idea if it is remembered that all of our knowledge is constructed imaginatively (cf. Thiemann, 254-258).

In regard to the first criticism (i.e., that if God is an imaginative construct, he must be an idol) it must be pointed out that the definition of an idol as a human-made image is not Kaufman's but Green's. For Kaufman, an idol is any finite authority that claims itself worthy of complete or ultimate allegiance. In this definition Kaufman is largely following H. Richard Niebuhr (cf. Niebuhr, 1943:passim). Idolatry is distinguished by its self-justifying function whereas what makes God God is his capacity to encourage self-criticism and transcendence. Thus, there are not "human-made images" and "revealed images" which fall out of the sky, but idolatrous, self-justifying constructions and self-critical constructions that promote transcendence. Bestowing the status of "revealed" upon certain images in no way guarantees that they indeed function in a transcendental way.

As to the second criticism (i.e., that Kaufman no longer believes in revelation as the basis of theology) some comments have already been made. If this criticism is to suggest that Kaufman no longer believes that one can

theologically conceive of God's revelation as the basis of
theology, it is patently false. But this criticism can be
understood in another way. Granted that 'Green is aware of
Kaufman's philosophical perspective, what he may be saying
is that Kaufman has abandoned theology for anthropology and
some kind of philosophy of religion. Understood in this
way, we have a much more serious criticism to contend with,
one that is more difficult to refute.

A principal   concern of this paper   has been to
demonstrate that   throughout the development of Kaufman's
thought a central dynamic is the dialectical relation of
theology and culture.   Since there is, sociologically, no
rigid separation of Christian faith and culture in general
(1979a:3),   Christians   and non-Christians   acquire an
essentially   similar, consciousness   (1960:72).   The
categories of thinking we acquire via cultural existence
cannot   but influence our   theological thinking.   This
conviction was expressed by Kaufman as early as his Ph. D.
thesis (1955) in which he dealt with the secular principle
of relativity in terms of the theological category of
finitude, effectively reinterpreting both Christian theology
and secular anthropology./37/

A parallel can, I believe, be observed in Kaufman's
treatment of religion and theology within his "theological
anthropology." Following the intellectual currents of the
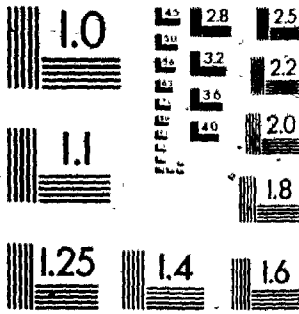
day, Kaufman places his understanding of religion and theology within an anthropology. However it may resemble a purely secular account of human life. Kaufman does not see any substantial difference between that historicistic account and the one presupposed by the biblical writers whose words have shaped the Christian tradition. The crucial difference, of course, is that a secular anthropology does not necessarily suppose the meaningfulness of human evolution while Kaufman's theological anthropology interprets it as being under God's guidance and as moving toward the fulfilment of God's intention. Though Kaufman's position as it currently stands may well be described as a "practical atheism" (Jung, 1983:190), he nevertheless maintains the conviction that human life has a special status in the natural, order, that human life is defined historico-culturally and, hence, by freedom, that, in view of the global crisis we face, reconciliation has never been a stronger imperative, and that our historical existence has an ultimate goal, the complete humanization of humankind. And these emphases can easily be translated into theological terms and categories, however influenced by some kind of humanism they might be.

It is within the context of this theological anthropology that Kaufman thinks about religion and theology and develops his theological method. To the extent that

this   anthropology   is   indeed   a   theologically-based
anthropology it seems to me that\ Kaufman cannot be accused
of abandoning theology or of giving it a basis' alien to
itself. From Kaufman's point of view, the understanding of
human beings that grounds his theoretical work is, in its
basic points, thoroughly Christian, however consonant it may
be with a modern relativistic-historical understanding.

5.2 George Grant and James Reimer

While there is little doubt that Kaufman regards his
anthropology as essentially Christian, there is an important
question that ' can be raised in regard to his appropriation
of secular insights into the nature of our existence. The
question is, Does interpreting human existence in terms of
an   anthropology   so   harmonious   with   the   modern
self-understanding short-circuit the capacity of theology to
be critical of the modern age?

The   only   critic of Kaufman to my knowledge who has
raised the question expressed above is James Reimer, himself
influenced by Canadian political philosopher, George Grant.
It is particularly   Grant's critique of the liberal
philosophy   of   the   Enlightenment   (which,   he suggests,
dominates the modern world) that Reimer sees as applicable
both to Kaufman's theology and his method./38/ Before
proceeding to evaluate Reimer's critique let us look first

at Grant's.

The fundamental assumption of liberalism is that human beings have freedom as their essence, suggests Grant (1969:114n. 3). And this assumption goes hand in hand with an understanding of human beings as historical. Freedom means freedom from chance, from all naturally or humanly imposed necessity and, hence, freedom to have a history. Furthermore, it is from this freedom that technology arises, both as the logical consequence of the assumption of freedom and as the means of overcoming the contradiction to human freedom that the empirical world presents. The assumption that human essence is its freedom, time understood as history, and technology as a conclusion of freedom and a basic method of approaching reality, dialectically interact to form the myth that dominates western culture. The myth is that we can accomplish our own "redemption" by shaping nature, the course of events, society and even ourselves as we see fit.

But the results of two centuries of liberalism are at best ambiguous, suggests Grant. Among the regrettable developments are the devastation of the natural world by pollution and exploitation of all kinds, the homogenization of Western culture (in direct contradiction to the liberal advocacy of pluralism) and the concomitant loss of the appreciation of tradition, the reduction of politics to a

(scientific) kind of administration, the obliteration of the ideal of virtue in favour of a relativistic notion of "values," and the loss of the sense of a transcendent end as indicated by the humanistic idea that human beings are the measure of all things. Grant bases his critique on his understanding of the classical world and its more humble view of human beings as ones who participate by their very being in a realm of eternal values such as beauty, goodness, truth, justice rather than as ones who create values as they see fit for purposes they deem worthy. Thus, Grant's sense of history and profound understanding of the ancient western tradition allows him to make a critique of modern assumptions.

The significance that Reimer sees in this for Kaufman's theology and his theological method is that despite Kaufman's concern to develop a method that ensures theology's capacity to be truly critical, it falls short of being able to criticize the Enlightenment assumptions that ground his method and theology. Since Kaufman has accepted the liberal assumption that we have freedom as our essence/39/ he implicitly underscores the very tendencies that have led to the dangers peculiar to our age, the greatest of these being the annihilation of human life by a nuclear war. In Reimer's words, "We have come to this point exactly because we have taken things into our own hands,

because we have perceived ourselves arrogantly as free, as the shapers and managers of the world . . . " (1983a:9). Kaufman's insistence on the freedom of theologians from tradition and scripture is utterly consistent with this fundamental modern assumption, suggests Reimer (1983a:8). And the "sense of a transcendent God to whom we are accountable individually and corporately" (1983a:9), a sense of a limit to our freedom, is consequently undercut in Kaufman's theology as it is in modern theology generally (1983a:9).

Reimer's own methodological proposal has not yet been systematically articulated. But he has clearly expressed his conviction that a critical recovery of the classical, trinitarian theological tradition provides the best hope of recovering a sense of a transcendent God to whom we must give an account of ourselves (1983a:8ff., 11; 1983b:54; 1984:69f.). For Reimer this means neither uncritically rejecting the Enlightenment nor uncritically and anachronistically embracing the classical theological formulations. In his words, "What I am suggesting is that we recognize the poverty of the modern horizon and re-examine, seriously listen to and engage ourselves with the classical Christian doctrines from within the modern horizon" (1983a:12). In view of the many problems such a "Neo-classicist"/40/ must face from the outset, it will be

interesting to see how Reimer develops his ideas and his own constructive theology in future writings. /41/

What confuses matters somewhat is the fact that both Reimer's trinitarian critique of Kaufman and Grant's classicistic critique of liberalism presuppose the Enlightenment. Grant is only able to stand outside of modernity from the position of another historical era because of the tools of historical criticism made available by those inspired by the spirit of the Enlightenment. As Ernst Cassirer argues, while it was the Romantic movement that perfected those tools and with them developed the concept of historical cultures, this was accomplished "only as a result of the effectiveness of those presuppositions, that is to say, as a result of the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment" (Cassirer, 1951:197). And Reimer justifies his trinitarianism on the basis that it does greater justice to human experience than does historicism and is capable of providing an effective limit to the freedom by which moderns define themselves. In Reimer's words, a trinitarian perspective "provides us with a model critical of all theological and anthropological reductionism, truncation, one-sidedness and heresy, dangers so apparent in modern historicism" (Reimer, 1983a:9). And this, it seems to me, is nothing but an anthropological justification of his position./42/ Both of these observations indicate that

however much one might want to find a basis from which to challenge the spirit of the Enlightenment that continues to inform our self-understanding, the final justification can only be made in terms which themselves must be justified through the Enlightenment. It is this fact to which, I believe, Reimer himself points when he suggests that any criticism of Enlightenment assumptions must be made via "the prism of the Enlightenment" (1983b:34).

What this means in regard to Kaufman is that he is to be held responsible less for accepting Enlightenment assumptions than for doing so uncritically. Like Reimer, Kaufman seems to be motivated by a stong ethical concern. And in making "humanization" the criterion by which all theological concepts and constructions are judged, he shows himself to be both thoroughly modern and thoroughly Anabaptist-Mennonite./43/ But serious problems arise when Kaufman accepts the notion of our complete autonomy that attends the modern preoccupation with history, ethics, and politics./44/ In short, while Kaufman, like the rest of us, cannot be faulted for being a person of his time, he must be held responsible for failing to be adequately critical of the assumptions of his time. That Kaufman has not sufficiently scrutinized the tenets upon which the modern myth of history as progress rests, however, requires some further argument.

5.3 Kaufman and Modernity

The following three points should adequately serve to reinforce the judgement that Kaufman has too easily accepted the modern assumption of our complete autonomy. Each point constitutes a criticism by itself. But as I hope to show, each is a manifestation of a more general problem traceable to a 'modern view' of human beings as essentially their own creators. /45/

The first point is that there is a sense in which Kaufman's theological method presupposes what it sets out to prove. Kaufman begins with the assertion that theology is concerned first and foremost with grasping the ultimate point of reference specifically as God (1979a:15). This in itself indicates a "radical monotheistic" bias. Theology can also conceivably be thought of as beginning with, and as reflection upon, the Bible, the creeds, liturgy, or Jesus Christ.

This "radical monotheistic" emphasis is intelligible, however, when we consider one of its primary virtues. As indicated by H. Richard Niebuhr in his Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (1943), monotheism is a profoundly ethical understanding of God in which "idols" of every kind are exposed and "dethroned." By positing a single utterly transcendent standard, radical monotheism makes possible a radical criticism of all human endeavours. In light of

Kaufman's stated ethical concern and his view of theology as an, essentially critical enterprise (1981a:94), his limitation of theology to a specific centering on God (i.e., God understood in the even narrower sense of radical monotheism) seems to be based upon this prior ethical commitment which has already determined the (critical) value of a monotheistically conceived God. Of course there is nothing wrong with having ethical concerns, and other theological approaches certainly carry with them ethical implications. But theology can be understood as based upon constructs broader than a radically monotheistic God. The whole biblical myth and Christian symbol system can ground theological reflection./46/ Kaufman's three-moment schema of theological construction is shaped, at least as it stands in An Essay, in such a way that only a radically monotheistic God could legitimately be constructed.

What this means, other than that Kaufman obviously has a deep ethical concern that permeates his thinking, is that there is a dimension to all thought, theological or other, for which Kaufman's method does not adequately account. There is a sense in which only a Protestant/47/ could have proposed such a method since only a Protestant heavily influenced or informed by neo-orthodoxy would be as concerned as is Kaufman about the capacity of the concept of God to serve as a critical principle. Only a liberal would

identify human culture so specifically as the locus of God's
fulfilment of history.   And while there is no doubt that
North American culture has historically been predominantly a
Protestant culture (and thus one can see how Kaufman might
be persuaded that there is something more-universal about
the concerns from which his method emerges), still, a
radical monotheism is not the only theism that qualifies as
Christian.   Here it seems to me that a more profound
awareness on Kaufman's part of the tradition which has
shaped his theological views ought to be incorporated
somehow into the method he outlines. /48/ Every theologian
comes out of a tradition of some kind and one of the things
that a methodology ought to do is bring influences that
might prejudice the outcome of an investigation to the fore
so that even if they continue to influence, one can at least
be conscious to some degree of how they might have slanted
one's position.

Kaufman's failure to take tradition more seriously in
his method would be a moot point were it not for the fact
that he not only fails to take it seriously in other
contexts but explicitly denounces any kind of reliance on
tradition or even scripture that suggests a heteronomous
relation between it and theology. By "heteronomy" Kaufman
seems to mean the imposition of ideas, notions, or
constructs fundamentally alien to the mode of thought that

is predominant in a culture and threatening to the freedom
that   defines   human beings. 49 As it turns out. Kaufman
seems to see almost any kind of reliance on tradition as
heteronomous in character.

5.4 Kaufman and Modernity (2).

Related to this problem is a second point, the question
of   theology to religion in Kaufman's thinking.   One
frequently gets the impression from Kaufman that not only is
it the theologian's business to critically reflect upon the
concepts, images and symbols already given in the religious
tradition as it stands, but it is up to him/her to create
concepts, images, and symbols as well.   The word, "create"
must be stressed here for it is the one Kaufman uses over
and over. As we have seen, he justifies its use on the
basis of the thoroughly imaginative-constructive nature of
all theological concepts.

But surely one cannot suppose, as Kaufman seems to,
that the absence of a percept corresponding to the concept
of God means that the historical experience of a community
of people is only of negligible importance to the symbols
and images of deity that arise as significant. Here it
seems to me that Kaufman's earlier understanding of how
historical events can be revelatory would appropriately
chasten the idea that men and women are somehow in a

position to create meaningful theological symbols out of
their imaginations alone. As Tillich has shown us, symbols
participate in that to which they point. And while no doubt
there are symbols that are such only—for individuals, the
social nature of religious symbols means that the symbols
are born in a social, public context and, given the
historical nature of all self-understanding, in public
events. Thus, all significant meaning occurs, as a kind of
event. When we apprehend meaning we apprehend something
that is objective to us. We experience it as something that
happens to us rather than as something that we make
happen./50/ No doubt this meaning is constructed in some
sense and is dependent upon the imaginatively constructed
consciousness of those who appropriate it, but there is no
sense in which the experience of that original meaning can
be said to have involved a deliberate, self-conscious
activity on the part of a subject. It is always a surprise
in some way, an event that happens to one.

    In religion, we perhaps have what Paul Ricoeur would
call the first naiveté./51/ The symbols and images are
inseparable from their meaning, from that to which they
point. They are appropriated uncritically. But it is at
this pre-reflective level that theological meanings take
hold of consciousness, give it decisive shape and constitute
it in some way. This says nothing about the degree of

consistency in an individual's thought; contradictions invariably arise. But it is because those meanings have already taken hold of a community or culture that critical reflection upon them takes place and attempts are made to reconcile contradictions and to reconstruct the concepts, images, or symbols which embody those meanings. Existing meanings and formulations have an inevitable priority over reflective thought that seeks to reconstruct them. /52/

Again, these critical remarks do not seem unappropriable by Kaufman. His _An Essay_ explicitly states that theology must begin with the concept of God as it is found in Western culture and carried in the languages whose histories were touched by the Judeo-Christian tradition. Kaufman even seems to anticipate this criticism when he says

> It should not be supposed that the theologian creates the order into which he or she fits the multifarious features and dimensions of life simply _ex nihilo_. Such an arbitrarily constructed world would have little plausibility or significance and could hardly provide a context for ongoing human life or for active religious worship or devotion. The theologian's task of constructing a meaningful and humane world is in part the task of articulating and explicitating a world already in certain respects defined in and by the culture in its religious traditions, its (conscious and unconscious) myths, its rituals and taboos, its linguistic classifications;(9) that is, it is always based on the prior human constructive activity which produced and shaped the culture. Insofar as the theologian is drawing upon what is already explicit in tradition and what is implicit in accepted myth and ritual, he or she is engaged more in discovering something given in the culture than in creating something new. (1979a:33)

Yet he   continues to insist that   the theologian is involved

or should be involved in the creation of symbols:

> But to the extent that the theologian's
> articulation involves making sharp and clear what
> had previously not been consciously recognized and
> expressed and defined, thus drawing lines and
> boundaries for consciousness and reflection and
> action which had not existed before, his or her
> activity clearly involves the creation or
> construction of new concepts of God, and of the
> world as "under God." (1979a:33)

At the very least, this seems to be an inappropriate use of

the term, "creation." But its use is quite consistent with

the historico-cultural anthropology that grounds Kaufman's

understanding of theology.

5.5 Cultural and Individual Imagination

And thirdly, there is the question of whether there are

any distinctions to be made in the concept of the

imagination itself. Garrett Green has suggested that even

in Kant the imagination has a passive-receptive dimension to

it as well as an active-constructive one (Green: 221). But

even Kaufman's discussion in Relativism of the place of the

imagination in the development of consciousness presupposes

that the imagination must receive something it does not

itself produce. The imagination certainly transforms what

it receives so that one's perceptions, for example, are

never unmediated by an imaginatively constructed gestalt of

some kind. But it cannot transform what it does not first

receive.   Again,   Kaufman's   earlier   understanding of
revelation as   an event which illuminates and unifies human
experience   for   those   who   so   grasp   it, presupposes that
something objective to the   individual or community occurs,
something not   produced in any conscious sense by those who
experience it.   Green   is   quite   right   to   point out the
one-sidedness of Kaufman's understanding of the imagination.

Furthermore, the, related problem of the relation of the
individual   imagination to the   cultural imagination must be
pointed   out.   Considered historically and   in   terms of
centuries,   one cannot   help noticing   the sheer variety. and
novelty of   the   products of   the   human   imagination down
through the ages.   Literature, art, religion, philosophy,
and theology have, in different times, taken on such diverse
forms that one can certainly be sympathetic with someone who
supposed   that   discontinuity   rather   than   historical
continuity is the rule.   On a broad historical scale, human
culture   testifies   to   a   remarkable imaginative creativity
that   easily conveys the idea of freedom.   The difficulty
arises   when   one   moves   from   a   broad   historical view of
"man's" imaginative activity to a view of how individual men
and women   ought to go about a specific task like theology.
For all   the   apparent   freedom   of the generic "man," the
experience of individuals as they write, think, speak and
theologize   is   not   one   of   limitless   freedom   but one of

operating under the norms and canons of truth of the culture
in which they find themselves. Of course, even under the
weight of such norms, a tremendous creativity is
possible. 53 Indeed, it may well be asked whether anything
creative is possible outside of some sort of culturally
defined limits and structures. The point being made here,
however, is that the imaginative-constructive character of
theological concepts does not necessarily legitimate the
"radical" kind of reconstruction to which Kaufman is calling
theologians. Very real constraints are always at work in
theological construction and cannot be ignored without one's
theology suffering.

Again, I must note that Kaufman would probably not
hesitate to agree with the formal point I am making which is
that all thinkers operate out of a cultural-intellectual
context and that their imaginative activity cannot but
operate under certain constraints. And Kaufman's own
systematic efforts since the formulation of his method (as
found primarily in The Theological Imagination) seem
implicitly to acknowledge the simple necessity of relying on
what has already been thought and said (cf. 1981a:127). But
particularly in "Nuclear Eschatology" (1983a), this
necessary respect for the theological traditions of the past
seems to wane and the call for "the most radical kind of
deconstruction and reconstruction of the traditions we have

inherited" (1983a:13) is loudly proclaimed. Of course, it is the possibility of imminent human annihilation that seems to inspire Kaufman's call more than a distaste for tradition. Hence, there is likely a rhetorical motivation for his use of the term "radical." Yet, knowing how careful a writer Kaufman is, one cannot too easily dismiss the seriousness with which he uses the word. Neither can one be sure that the rhetoric will not tip the balance between the neo-orthodox concern for integrity and the liberal concern for the intelligibility of Christian faith that Kaufman has attempted to maintain. Only Kaufman's future writings will tell us whether or not this will occur.

These observations should suffice to indicate the degree to which Kaufman has indeed accepted the modern tenet of our fundamental freedom. For Kaufman, this freedom extends even to our relation to the cultural and theological traditions in which we have been shaped. They may be deconstructed and reconstructed as we see fit. The only obligation under which we labour is that of promoting a more humane culture. Ironically, it may well be that understanding the essence of human beings as freedom is precisely what stands in the way of a more humane culture.

5.6 On Reimer and Autonomy

I have already expressed my basic agreement with

Reimer's criticism of Kaufman's theology. I must now express some hesitation, however, about following him into his Neo-classicist proposal. It seems to me that merely denying that freedom is what defines us as human and, alternatively, arguing on ethical grounds for the construction of a trinitarian God who limits our historical activity does not provide adequate grounds for bringing that definition into question. Indeed, one could argue that the only difference between Kaufman and Reimer are their readings of the modern situation. Kaufman argues that the dilemmas of the modern world are due to greed, envy, hatred, fear, and suspicion of individuals and peoples which have taken on institutional forms and structural dimensions in human societies everywhere. The "solution" he envisages involves coming to understand the very nature of the universe as essentially congruent with the noblest aspirations of human beings. For Kaufman this means arguing that Jesus Christ, and the suffering, loving, giving and forgiving God he reveals, also reveals the ontological character of being and as such is fundamentally supportive of our longing for a better world. This is the sort of God we must construct; this is the sort of world our theologies should seek to promote.

For Reimer, the dilemmas of the modern world that concern him are precisely those that concern Kaufman. He,

however, identifies their root cause as our belief in our
autonomy. Because we believe that freedom defines us we are
ready to sacrifice the environment to our whims, we are
ready to manipulate public opinion for our interests, we are
ready to sacrifice the unborn for our convenience. The
"solution" for Reimer is the construction of a God who is
not historically contingent and who places unconditional
demands upon us so as to limit what we believe it is our
right as free beings to do.

    That we must construct a God who more adequately
supports ethical reflection, however, implies our freedom to
construct a notion of God. The fact that Reimer wants to
recover the classical God should not obscure the fact that
such a recovery will inevitably involve him in a deliberate
construction of the sort that Kaufman advocates. Both
thinkers seem to want to construct or recover a concept of
God that will provide an adequate basis for ethics rather
than receiving a vision of "the new being" from which an
ethic would be derived. Thus, the very freedom that Reimer
wants to limit seems to be a prerequisite for the
theological project he has in mind.

    What Reimer's proposal seems to me to require is a
conception of the human that qualifies the "truth of human
freedom" (Grant, 1959:73) and yet is intelligible to
post-Enlightenment minds. In Paul Ricoeur's reflections on

the nature of human consciousness such a conception, I believe, is attempted.

5.7 Ricoeur on the Dependence of Consciousness

Unlike Kaufman, Ricoeur believes that the category of "revelation" is a philosophically useful one and that its heteronomous connotations need not be determinative in any employment of the term. Similarly, the concept of truth as an intellectual proposition that usually accompanies the use of the term "revelation" is not the only viable conception. For Ricoeur, human beings are capable of receiving insights into the nature of reality, of receiving "truth" about the reality that envelops them. This occurs on a number of levels. It can happen in reading a novel in which reality is redescribed in such a way that readers believe they have been exposed to a significant new truth about the world which actually transforms the way they perceive the world (Ricoeur, 1980:101f.) Or it can happen in reading or hearing a religious text, leading hearers to a confrontation with "the truth" of reality, of being. When this happens, written discourse functions poetically and "manifests" a dimension of reality that transcends one's ordinary experience of the world, and one's own individual being.

Even more to the point, Ricoeur argues that all self-understanding is derived from historical encounters

with meanings that are objective to the individual so that
there is an unavoidable "dependence" upon external meanings
without there necessarily being a heteronomy of those
meanings. Human beings come into a world already defined by
meanings.   Although their appropriation of those meanings
may be unique (and, hence, each generation is never simply
an identical reproduction of the previous) still, there
would be no meaning at all, no culture, nothing in terms of
which self-understanding could be achieved, if there were no
meanings that preceded them. The implication Ricoeur draws
from this fact is that human consciousness does not create
meaning or its self-understanding in and from itself and in
isolation from all historical contingency but that it does
so only insofar as it encounters meanings that it does not
itself create.

The idea of the inherent dependence of consciousness on
meanings "external" to it is developed by Ricoeur through
what he calls (following Jean Nabert; cf. Ricoeur,
1980:119,   153) a hermeneutics of testimony. Both
individually and corporately, human beings come to define
themselves through the things over which they have no
control, through   historical   events   and   testimonies
originating from such different sources as symbols, texts
and human beings.   There is, therefore, an imperative
experienced by consciousness   to interpret   events or

testimonies, to determine their meaning.   While event and
meaning are indistinguishable to those who originally
experience the event, time divorces the two making necessary
a "trial" of testimony.   In other words, criticism of the
various historical "predicates of the divine" (Ricoeur,
1980:114) that lay a claim on the self-definition of
conscious is demanded by their simple objective presence and
the contradictory nature of those claims. The purpose of
criticism is the determination of what predicates most
adequately express the nature of the transcendent reality
that informs the self-understanding of consciousness. Our
ideas of what is worthy, or of what justice or goodness mean
are formed as we critically examine the multifarious claims
or testimonies that confront us in history./54/ Finally, the
historical presence of individuals who surrender themselves
completely to a meaning or faith even to the point of
martyrdom suggests to consciousness naivete of believing
that it creates its own significance.   Reflection can
intellectually re-enact the events in terms of which it
understands itself. It can re-enact the process of
criticism, the "sifting" of the predicates by which we come
to form a certain idea of the divine.   But it cannot
re-enact the surrender of itself to those predicates. In
Ricoeur's words,

> Philosophy must internalize what is   said in the
> Gospel: "Who would save his life must lose it."
> Transposed into the realm of reflection, this
> means,   "Whoever   would   posit   himself as a
> constituting consciousness will miss his destiny."
> But reflection cannot produce this renouncing of
> the sovereign consciousness out of itself. It may
> only do so by confessing its total dependence on
> the historical   manifestations of the divine.
> (1980:115).

In effect, Ricoeur argues that the authentic life is a

surrendering to a transcendent meaning, not a self-creating

which is inevitably self-justifying.

It would take a real stretch of the imagination to

suggest that Kaufman, who would argue that as a theologian

he is in the "business" of creating theological meaning,

fails in his writings to promote a transcendent,

self-critical point of reference from which to view the

whole of. life. What I have argued is that he has a

deficient view of human beings and that this deficiency

exposes him to the danger of lending support to the movement

that has brought humanity perilously close to its own

annihilation. In Ricoeur I find reflections upon human

consciousness that bring the assumption of our autonomy

sufficiently into question so as to warrant a reformulation

of our self-definition. Our essence is our capacity to hear

and respond to the claims made upon us by meanings not of

our own making. No heteronomy need be implied by this

definition. The claims we perceive in historical

testimonies and symbols are perceived with our imaginations

not our wills (Ricoeur, 1980:117).

　　While Kaufman opposes the notion of an objective body
of meaning which it is the theologian's job simply to
reinterpret I do not believe that Kaufman's earliest thought
would have been unamenable to the insights into the nature
of our self-understanding put forward by Ricoeur. No doubt
the reader will have noticed that the emphasis upon the
historical nature of the self-definition of consciousness in
Ricoeur meshes well with Kaufman's discussion of the
historical nature of the bases of our knowledge and of
Christology in Relativism. The very categories with which
we think are acquired as we acquire language. And it will
be recalled that for Kaufman, Christology points to the
"fact" that every system of meaning has its centred upon
some historical event believed to unveil the meaning of the
whole of life and history./55/ Thus, the meanings by which
human beings live have a certain objective character but
without being heteronomous, i.e., without being essentially
unintelligible to one's consciousness. At least, one could
draw such a conclusion without doing violence to Kaufman's
earliest thought. Kaufman even approvingly refers to
Dilthey's concept of "objective spirit" in his discussion of
the nature of human consciousness (1960:61). The categories
of thought are acquired by a person through language which,
of course, exists prior to the person. Hence, Ricoeur's

insistence that we must appropriate something that we cannot ourselves produce in order to think and understand ourselves is quite consistent with what Kaufman could have understood to be the case in Relativism.

5.8   Theology and Nonviolent Appeal

Given that consciousness is inevitably and naturally reliant upon something objective to it, what are the implications of this for Kaufman's method? As I understand it, admitting that the way we come to an idea of the divine is dependent upon historical events or testimonies or purely imaginative constructs that precede us, means that theologians too are dependent upon the testimonies of the words and actions that exist independent of them. And what this means for a theological "method" is primarily a difference in posture from that which Kaufman suggests. It means that the busy constructiveness of theologians is not finally what succeeds in discovering new depths of meaning in human life. It is rather the capacities of theologians to surrender themselves to testimonies, to stories, to images, to imaginative creations that allow them to view new possibilities of being in the world.

Here I would agree with Kaufman that theologians are artists. And as artists, the technical skill needed to produce a work of art is only a small, albeit indispensable,

part of theologizing. Theologians have perhaps been too enamored with the "method" of science which dictates that one keep one's emotions and feelings at bay. But inasmuch as feelings are perceptions of the deeper dimensions of living/56/ theologians should be paying attention to their intuitions, emotions, and feelings, to those parts of themselves that they cannot consciously control. In no way is this meant to imply that theologians take their work with less seriousness, that they should not be so concerned with scholarliness. Technical skill is still important to an artist and s/he could hardly make a serious contribution if s/he did not seek excellence on that level. It is merely to say that if theologians are in the "business" (a poor metaphor) of discovering and uncovering truer, and deeper dimensions of life, they will have to open themselves up to those dimensions and they cannot count on their busy construction to do it for them. Indeed our imaginations must be educated (Frye, 1963); our appropriation of biblical and traditional ideas and images must take account of the results of modern criticism. We should be rigorous in our evaluations of our own and others' work. Yet we should affirm the "essential playfulness" of theology as Ted Jennings puts it (1976:176).

The following quote from Ricoeur seems fitting in light of the exaggerated concern Kaufman expresses about the

dangers of objectivist thinking in theology:

> Why . . . is it so difficult for us to conceive of
> a dependence without heteronomy? Is it not
> because we too often and too quickly think of a
> will that submits and not enough of an imagination
> that opens itself . . . ? For what are the poem
> of the Exodus and the poem of the resurrection . .
> . addressed to if not to our imagination rather
> than our obedience? And what is the historical
> testimony that our reflection would like to
> internalize addressed to if not to our
> imagination? If to understand oneself is to
> understand oneself in front of the text, must we
> not say that the reader's understanding is
> suspended, derealized, made potential just as the
> world itself is metamorphosized by the poem? If
> this is true, we must say that the imagination is
> that part of ourselves that responds to the text
> as a Poem, and that alone can encounter revelation
> no longer as an unacceptable pretension, but a
> nonviolent appeal. (Ricoeur, 1980:117)

Taking Ricoeur's insights to heart would entail a
fundamental change in emphasis in the theoretical framework
of Kaufman's theological method. We are not only
constructive beings; we are receptive beings. We are not
utterly free; our freedom is qualified by a natural
dependence upon something that we cannot ourselves produce.
Theology, therefore, involves first a receptiveness, a
willingness to listen to the many words, or perceive the
many images, that lay a claim on our self-understanding. It
similarly involves a readiness critically to examine those
words and images to determine which, given what we presently
understand, best correspond to our understanding of what is
worthy of the divine. Finally, it involves a certain
abandonment of the theologian to the meanings that have

proved worthy; it involves the surrender of the imagination to what it has encountered. And as it seeks to give expression to that by which it has been grasped, it constructs, just as Kaufman suggests. But it constructs only because it has first been confronted and provided with both the material and the impetus for construction. 57.

It appears, then, that I must acknowledge the validity of a criticism I earlier tried to refute. Kaufman's philosophical perspective does not exempt him from the criticism that he no longer gives revelation a place in his theological method. Of course by "revelation" I mean what Ricoeur means by it, viz., a philosophical understanding derived from the dependence of consciousness upon objective meanings, rather than a religious meaning as Green presupposes. Only a repudiation of the idea that human beings are completely autonomous and able to render their lives meaningful by sheer effort and action would allow theology to be the truly critical discipline that Kaufman (rightly, I believe) wants theology to be.

With regard to Reimer's Neo-classicist proposal, Ricoeur's insights allow us to speak of both tradition and scripture as potential sources of revelation. Of course they do not provide a warrant for speaking of Christian tradition and scripture as normative in the sense of supplying critical standards, themselves subject to none.

Our appropriation of tradition can only be done in a
critical manner.   The Neo-classicist model of theology must
justify itself like any other.   But Ricoeur's insights do
seem to me at least to bring criticism of the modern tenet
of our autonomy into the realm of the intelligible and hence
provide us with a basis from which to launch into a
discussion of specifically religious claims and of Christian
revelation.   This seems to me to be a most valuable
contribution to any attempt to retrieve the significance of
older theological traditions by passing through "the prism
of the Enlightenment."

A CONCLUDING REFLECTION

It should be clear by now that I have reservations about Kaufman's methodological proposal for theology. To be more precise, I am not prepared to assert that human beings are essentially free to create their own meaning or that theology is in the business of creating meaning. At this point, what I am willing to say is that theology is about discovering meaning and discovering new ways of understanding the reality(ies) that transcend(s) us.

The difference between "creating" and "discovering" may at first appear negligible. Both seem to involve the expenditure of effort by the subject. But I think we could agree that in the case of "creating," that which is being created is usually thought of as passive and dependent upon its creator. God as creator comes to mind and his/her creation ex nihilo. In the case of "discovering" (let us use the example of Columbus discovering Ameria), that which

is discovered has its own reality quite independent of the discoverer even while it is passive. Moreover, the discoverer's intentions and purposes have little effect on that which is discovered.   Indeed, one may be required to change in some way, to respond to the discovered as Columbus did when he found that it was a new world he had discovered and not India at all. A creator has intentions and purposes to which s. he wants to give expression in the created and thus it is the raw creation that must respond, change and be shaped while the creator remains unchanged.

Of course, the creation-discovery dichotomy I have drawn is far too simple.   While God may have remained essentially unchanged by his/her act of creation, it is not unlikely that human beings, when they "create" a work of art, for example, are changed by their creation in some way. And it is quite obvious _in the case of Columbus that the land of America has gone through significant changes as a result of its discovery. So the analogies break down as they inevitably do.

But let me go on to another point, the point I have made earlier with much help from Grant and Reimer.   It seems to become clearer and clearer to me that the world of which I am a part has become far too ready to see itself in the position of a creator.   It has become thoroughly "practical" in the sense that Kaufman has used the term. And lest I be

accused of ingratitude or even hypocrisy, let me say that there have been innumerable times when I was profoundly thankful for the many benefits I have been privileged to enjoy because of the practical orientation of our society. The word-processor I was able to use in writing this thesis saved me days, perhaps weeks of time, time I was able to spend on unpractical matters.

For all that, I am still concerned that the success of the practical "creator-posture" of our society will slowly suffocate the questions of truth which no society can long live without asking. The danger of the creator orientation is that it assumes it already knows everything it needs to know about the world it wants to create. And so it goes ahead, oblivious to the consequences that may result from its actions. oblivious even to the fact that it is guided by an orientation. And while this description is itself a caricature, our history is not without examples of times when human action has fallen to such levels. The "first naivete" which our culture seems to have in regard to itself only increases the likelihood of such degeneration.

It is for this reason that I have objected to the idea that theology is essentially constructive. This idea seems only to underscore the naivete of our culture with regard to itself. We must come to a place where we can ask whether there are certain problems, issues, or areas of human life

for which a practical, technological, scientific approach is inadequate.

As an alternative approach to existence, I find Ricoeur's reflections suggestive. Thomas Merton, I think, would be of great help here as well. He could help us find the significance of being unpractical, of "contemplation in a world of action" (1971). His own response to the question of how contemplation relates to action is that "He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his own self-understanding, freedom, integrity and capacity to love, will not have anything to give others" (1971:164).

The posture of a discoverer, it seems to me, is a needed corrective to a culture that is too busy with its building and creating. A theology that takes this posture will indeed be the prophetic theology that Kaufman envisions (1981a:17).

What this means, then, in relation to Kaufman's method is nothing and everything. I cannot think of any steps at the actual constructive stage of theologizing that I would include in addition to those he has suggested. But as far as general orientation goes, it would mean a significant change. We have yet to see what Kaufman will do differently now that he believes he is involved in theological creation. From his methodological proposal I can only guess that he

will become more iconoclastic in regard to the tradition of
Christian faith.

But what he has done up until. now suggests that he is
an excellent illustration of one who has opened up his
imagination to a certain vision and attempted to see more
clearly the world that has emerged before him. No other
explanation for why he has so long and so consistently
maintained a historicist perspective seems to be adequate
than that his imagination has been captured by it. And
while I have reservations about his perspective, in his
rigour as a theologian and scholar, and in his capacity to
open himself up to the possibilities of that perspective, I
should dearly like to count him as a mentor.

ENDNOTES

Chapter One

/1/ Most of Collingwood's writings are concerned with some
aspect of human historicity.   For his account of the
implications of historicity for philosophy see especially
his Essay on Metaphysics (1940). Essay on Philosophical
Method (1933), and Speculum Mentis (1924).   The reader
familiar with Collingwood's writings will see that Kaufman's
historicistic   perspective   is   deeply   influenced   by
Collingwood's thought. Because this is so, it has proven
unfeasible to document the dependence in great detail. For
those more interested in the relation between the two
thinkers, Kaufman's Ph.D. thesis (1955) fully documents both
Kaufman's agreement and disagreement Collingwood.

/2/ Cf. Leslie Dewart's discussion of Bernard Lonergan's
reticence about adopting a philosophy more consistent with
the fact of the historical nature of knowing in Religion,
Language and Truth (1970:146-168).

/3/ Cf. Emil Fackenheim's discussion in Metaphysics and
Historicity (1961).

/4/ Since there is no substantial difference in the argument
of the two writings, all references in this section will be
to the more accessible Relativism, Knowledge and Faith,
hereinafter referred to as Relativism.

/5/   See   Kaufman's   discussion   of the inevitably
anthropomorphic character of all our knowledge (1960:34-38).
He suggests that "our knowledge of the object is guided or
influenced in certain important respects by our fuller
knowledge of the subject, and we interpret the 'objects' we
encounter in the world in terms of analogies with our
self-experience" (34). The difficulty with this suggestion
is that it assumes an unmediated (im-mediate) knowledge of
ourselves.   Kaufman fails here to see that even our
self-knowledge is mediated by symbols, images, and
categories which are given to us in culture. One could just
as well argue that our knowledge of the subject is guided by
our knowledge of the "objects" we encounter in the world. I
mention Kaufman's understanding of the anthropomorphic
character of our knowledge because he uses it later in his
dialogue with the positivists. In this paper, see ch. 3.

/6/ It is perhaps a Western, linguistic bias that leads us
to hold that thought precedes action rather than the other
way around.   Modern ritual studies may well help us to
recognize this as a bias and not a self-evident truth.   On
this, see Ronald Grimes' Beginnings in Ritual Studies
(1982). For Grimes, "theology consists of reflection on the
symbolic utterances and practices of those who search . . .
" (267; my emphases).

/7/ Specifically Christian theology is Kaufman's concern
here.   He is making no claims about the "theologies" of
other religious traditions.

/8/ The term "neo-orthodox" as it is used here is understood
as the concern to maintain the vocabulary which has
historically characterized Christian theology against the
tendency to reduce that vocabulary to terms and categories
of contemporary thought.   The latter exposes theology to the
danger of rendering superfluous all talk of God and, hence,
of the eclipse of 'theology by modern categories of thought.
Of course neo-orthodoxy courts a different danger, that of
being unable to relate the meaning of theological categories
and doctrines to contemporary thought and life.   Theodore
Jennings argues that both tendencies are a perpetual danger
for theologians and that both the neo-orthodox concerns for
integrity and the "liberal" concerns for the contemporary
relevance of faith must be held in tension (Jennings,
1976:88-107, esp. 105f.).

/9/ For those raised on some form of monotheism, religious
or philosophical, Kaufman's arguments would probably be
quite persuasive. For those critical of western monotheism,
Kaufman's talk of a final unification of consciousness,
about the self as essentially a unifier, and about there
being a single historical moment or event which illuminates
the whole of history will recognize this as but another
expression of that monotheism.   I am indebted to Prof.
Grimes for his observation of the monotheistic bias that
pervades Kaufman's philosophical reflections.   See David
Miller's The New Polytheism (1974) for an interesting
discussion of the relation of monotheism to thinking and
theology (15-30).

/10/ Cf. Kaufman's own comments on Barth's objection to an
anthropological basis for theology: "It might be argued, à
la Karl Barth, that thus basing one's understanding of
theology in an anthropology threatens the autonomy of
theology and involves subordination of the divine revelation
to human knowledge, i.e., denies its character as
revelation. I do not think this argument is as conclusive
as might first appear.   Barth himself quite emphatically

takes the position that theology cannot claim to be anything
more than a 'human effort after a definite object of
knowledge.'(3) As such, of course, it is an appropriate
object of investigation by one trying to understand the
human being seeking knowledge. The fact that man
theologizes is an anthropological fact which must and can be
understood anthropologically. While revelation, perhaps,
cannot be comprehended through strictly anthropological
categories, theology as a human activity can and must be"
(1960:xf.).

Chapter Two

/11/ Just a note on sexist language. In Kaufman's earlier
writings, in fact in all of his writings prior to 1975, he
uses "man" and "he" as generic terms and for the sake of
faithful reproduction, wherever I quote him I reproduce
these as they occur. Where I myself am making an
observation or interpretation I attempt to use "humankind"
or "human beings." The term "God" presented a problem,
however, especially when a pronoun or possessive pronoun had
to be used. I sincerely hope that someone can come up with
something better than "s/he" and "her/his." Until they do,
our language will suffer. I think it is a mistake to think
that making a change in the way we write will make a change
in the way we speak. We need a generic term and generic
pronouns that sound right as well as express the right
ideas. I have used the "s/he," "her/his" format.

/12/ See Tillich's The Protestant Era (1957), especially
"Historical and Nonhistorical Interpretations of History: A
Comparison" (16-31). Here he lists the Hebrew categories of
time and distinguishes them from the Greek.

/13/ For Kaufman's more detailed argument against Tillich's
desertion of what Kaufman regards as a more promising
historicist position, see "Can a Man Serve Two Masters?"
(1958b).

/14/ Kaufman is aware that Karl Barth used the same analogy
but he states that he uses it in a different albeit similar
way: "As far as I can see, Barth means by this essentially
the fact that man is social, that he exists as a person only
in social relations to other persons, and this is on analogy
with the distinction and relation of persons in the godhead.
But to say that man is social is not enough; it is necessary
to say that man is historical, and this includes within
itself the fact that he is social" (1956c:168n. 9).

/15/ I am including Kaufman's Systematic Theology in this
period (1955-1965) because, while it was published after
1965, it represents in my view the climax of his systematic
interest evident already, as we have seen, in his earliest
writings.   Furthermore, Kaufman himself tells us that the
first draft of much of his Systematic Theology was done in
the years 1961-2 (1968a:xvi).

/16/ The ethical emphasis implied here is intentional.
Kaufman wrote a number of essays during the 1955-1965 period
that deal with questions of ethics. These include
"Nonresistance and Responsibility" (1958c), "The Issues are
Peace and Human Rights" (1964) as well as The Context of
Decision (1961a), a book primarily addressed to Mennonites
in which Jesus' nonresistant posture is explored and used as
a model for Christian ethics.   Though addressed to
Mennonites, Kaufman takes Jesus as a model for ethics in his
Systematic Theology as well. For a review of Context from a
Mennonite perspective, see Yoder, 1963.   For Mennonite
reviews of "Nonresistance and Responsibility," see Habegger,
1959 and Meyer, 1958.

/17/ Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Yoder have suggested that
all too often ethics have been derived from some source
other than a christology.   Cf. Hauerwas, 1981:37ff. and
Yoder, 1972:15-19.

                        Chapter Three

/18/ A comparison of the positions of Niebuhr and Kaufman
would likely yield interesting results.   But such a
comparison falls outside the scope of the present study. It
might be noted, however that Kaufman's Systematic Theology
is judged by Douglas Ottati to be the closest "comprehensive
statement of Christian doctrine in accordance with
[Ottati's] understanding of [Niebuhr's theological] content
and method" (Ottati, 1982:183, 201n. 25).

/19/ See David Miller's discussion in The New Polytheism
(1974).

/20/   1965b.   Reprinted   in   Christian   and   Wittig,
1967:105-112.   References will be to the latter.

/21/ For a critical examination of this personal model, see
McLain, 1969.   For Kaufman's response, see 1972a:xiii-xviii.

/22/ On how speech establishes relations between things, see
Dewart, 1970:96ff. and Rosenstock-Huessy, 1970:115-133.

/23/ Thus, Kai Nielsen's refutation of Kaufman's arguments
on positivistic grounds is quite appropriate. See Nielsen,
1973:73-84. Don Wiebe refutes the same idea on theological
grounds. See Wiebe. 1974.

/24/ Kaufman himself later , suggests (1981a:12) that "God as
Symbol" "forshadowed .to some extent" the method worked out
in his Essay on Theological' Method. My interpretation of
Kaufman's development toward that position should confirm
Kaufman's observation.

/25/ Cf. Collingwood's notion of the historical imagination
in The Idea of History (1948:231-249). It should become
clear in the course of this paper that to a certain extent
the "theological imagination" as Kaufman conceives of it is
derived from Collingwood's "historical imagination." For
both the theologian and the historian. the "object" of their
study is not an empirical thing to be described. There is
not even "evidence" properly speaking for the historian
because all the sources s/he has must be critically
scrutinized and reconstructed so as- to create a coherent
picture of "what actually happened" (1948:231ff.). While
Kaufman disagrees with Collingwood in his Systematic
Theology (1968a:69) that there are no authorities. for
historians properly speaking, he seems to come around to say
precisely that about the theologian, even arguing that s/he
is primarily in the business of reconstructing the concept
of God. Cf. below.

/26/ Cf. 1968b, 1968c, 1972a: chps. 6, 7, 8.

Chapter Four

/27/ God the Problem is not quite the last we read of them,
however.   In Kaufman's Theological Imagination (1981a) he
discusses the place of the "ontological anxiety" produced by
our relations to others in the development of a person's
"attachment to God" (58-79).   It is significant, though,
that more emphasis is placed on the imaginative nature of
constructs of God and their. cultural significance (cf.
70ff.).   It is just this dimension that was missing from
earlier accounts of the meaning of "God-talk," as short as
this may fall of an adequate understanding of its meaning.

/28/ Kaufman is not alone in neglecting these arts as
potentially fertile grounds for theological reflection. But
John Dixon insists that music too can be theological and
states that "Bach was one of the major Christian
theologians" (1979:193).

29   Kaufman   limits   their   validity   pragmatically.
Theologians must take account of the fact that the modern
consciousness has been shaped by the Christian tradition
among others. Furthermore, using biblical and traditional
theological concepts, images, and symbols may add to the
rhetorical effectiveness of a theology.   Cf. Kaufman's
comments in his preface to Nonresistance and Responsibility
(1979b:10).

30. Kaufman goes on to qualify the analogy he draws between
the theologian and the artist: "The finished product of the
theologian's constructive work is not, like many works of
art, essentially something external to the artist, · an
optional object available in the public arena to be viewed
or heard.   Rather this work of art is to be lived in: it is
the very form and meaning of human life which is here being
constructed and reconstructed.   Theological work must have a
universality   and   comprehensiveness   which   does   not
necessarily obtain for the artist . . . " (1979a:33).   For a
critical analysis of this distinction, see G. Gunn, 1982.
For a more general discussion of Kaufman's suggestion that
theology is like art, see A.J. Martin, Jr., 1982 and Walter
Capps, 1982.

31 Kaufman does develop a criterion, that of
"humanization." This is first discussed in some detail in
"Evil and Salvation: An Anthropological Approach"
(1981a:157-171).   But even there it remains so formal that
it does not seem clear just how this would help theologians
decide what to do.   And this could well work against
Kaufman's intention: instead of drawing theologians into a
place where different forms of human life might be
appreciated   for what   they are,   a vague   notion of
"humanization" could lead to a simplistic Manichean-type
dualism between what is a proper human way of life and what
is inhuman, one's own form of life tending to be the norm.
This tendency to oversimplify matters may well be the fate
of every single criterion.   I am not sure yet myself with
what I would replace it.

32 Kaufman brings his Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition's
emphasis on nonresistance and nonviolence to bear on this
problem.   It is annoying to me however that even on this
question he accepts the prevalent emphasis on efficacious
action in shaping his suggestion.   The sacrifice of Jesus is
put forward as "a model of the sort of creative action
required to transform human situations of hostility,
alienation, and evil" (1981a:152; my emphases).   I am amazed
at how easily the nonresistant posture of Jesus can be
transformed into a "creative action."   It could only have
been an "action" had Jesus crucified himself and then with

the purpose of "transforming human situations," etc. But
even on this point Kaufman is consistent: he refers to
Jesus' crucifixion as "Jesus' self-sacrifice" (152).

/33/ Cf. David Tracy's remarks on Kaufman's Essay on
Theological Method in The Analogical Imagination (1981:92n.
77).

/34/ See also Kaufman's preface to the 1978(a) edition of
his Systematic Theology. Kaufman makes some interesting
observations here about the flaws of the book. Though he
still finds the interpretation of Christian faith
convincing, he would change the "heavily objectivistic talk
of God found in this text . . . [which] gives the appearance
of much more detailed and intimate 'knowledge of God' than
can properly be claimed . . . " (xviii). He would also not
begin by assuming. the fundamental truth of the Christian
faith but instead try to show how it relates to human life
in general, how it might be able to serve to sustain a
culture (xix).

/35/ For a helpful and illuminating comparison of Kaufman's
view of the implications of a nuclear holocaust with that of
Stanley Hauerwas, see Shanon Jung's "Nuclear Eschatology"
(1983). It might be noted in passing that Jung too remarks
that for Kaufman, "culture sets the agenda" (193).

Chapter Five

/36/ For other criticisms, see Kevin Sharpe's "Theological
Method and Gordon Kaufman" (1979) and Ronald Thiemann's
"Revelation and Imaginative Construction" (1981). Joseph
Runzo gives a short review of Kaufman's Essay (1976).

/37/ Kaufman does the same in "The Idea of Relativity and
the Ideal of God" (1981a:80-95). The argument here is
strikingly similar to that of his Relativism.

/38/ To a significant degree, my whole critical historical
survey has been informed by Grant's and Reimer's critique as
should become clear from the rest of my paper.

/39/ It should be noted that Kaufman accepts this idea as
early as his Ph.D dissertation. In the appendix, "The
Problem of Man's Historical Nature," Kaufman observes that
"it does not follow, however, that man has no nature at all.
To such an assertion, it can always be replied that at least
one thing can be said about man's nature, namely, that it is

the structure of a being who is capable of having a history,
and it is this structure which makes history possible. This
involves the paradoxical idea that man has freedom as his
nature; he has the nature of not being bound to his given
nature but of being able to transcend it in many directions"
(1960:127; emphases are his).

40 The term is Reimer's (1984:69).

41. It seems to me that a fundamental stumbling block of
such a project is that classical theology concerned itself
essentially with the question of being or ontology whereas
the modern era, according to Reimer himself (1983b:52), has
history, ethics, and politics as the basic categories of its
thinking.   Since   Reimer   himself   admits   that   his
Neo-classicism has "come about not   as an escape from the
Anabaptist-Mennonite concern with ethics . . . [but] by way
of my ethical concerns" (1983a:12), one must wonder how
"classical" such a Neo-classical theology could really be.
Of course, a final judgement must await Reimer's systematic
elucidation of his method and, presuming he will write one,
his Neo-classical systematic theology. For a list of some
of the other questions that Reimer's proposal raises, see
Howard Loewen's "Response" in The Conrad Grebel Review
(Loewen, 1983:56-58).

42. Of course theological reductionism, truncation,
one-sidedness and "heresy" are not easily or directly
reducible to anthropological criteria. But it seems to me
that an anthropological consideration is invariably at work
when one judges a theological formulation reductionist or
heretical since one would hardly be concerned about such
"deviations" were it not for the conviction that human
beings would be worse off in some way for embracing them.
Reimer seems only to support this view when he says in
"Mennonite Systematic Theology and the Problem of
Comprehensiveness," "I view the central crisis of the modern
age to be the loss of accountability to a transcendent
reality" (Swartley,   ed., 1984:64). That this
"accountability" is understood primarily in ethical terms is
evident when in another paper, a critique of Kaufman's
theology, he argues that Kaufman's "starting point is not
adequately rigorous in saying 'NO' to the negativities of
the twentieth century. The horrors of Hiroshima, Nagasaki,
Auschwitz, and the distinct possibility of limited or even
total nuclear destruction of western civilization demand a
much more radical critique than what Kaufman's theology can
provide" ("The Ethical Implications of Gordon Kaufman's
Theology," unpublished paper: 29f.). This lends credence
to my argument that some sort of anthropological criteria,
some "criterion of -humanization" must be at work even in

"theological" criticisms.

43. This judgement is based on Reimer's "The Nature and
Possibility of a Mennonite Theology" (1983b) in which he
argues that there is a profound and dangerous harmony
between the modern theologies of such prominent Mennonite
thinkers as Harold S. Bender, Robert Friedmann, John H.
Yoder, and Gordon Kaufman and contemporary, post-modern
forms of thought. This harmony is not a perversion of some
"pure" Mennonitism but is a natural tendency within the
Mennonite tradition itself, he argues. Thus, despite the
criticisms levelled at Kaufman from other Mennonites (for
example, that Kaufman is a wolf in Anabaptist sheepskins;
reported by W. Unger, 1984:68), he is not unfaithful to his
own tradition.

44. On this preoccupation see Reimer's "The Nature and
Possibility of a Mennonite Theology" where he says, "to be
modern is to see time as history, as movement from past to
present to future, to see man as defined primarily in terms
of history, ethics, and politics rather than ontological
being" (1983b:52).

45. I am not persuaded that a critique of this idea must
necessarily be theological in nature, although I know of few
thinkers who are not Christians who make it. Heidegger is
one. See especially The Question Concerning Technology
(1977), p. 27 where he says: "Meanwhile man. . . . exalts
himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way
the impression comes to prevail that everything man
encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This
illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems
as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself
. . . In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today
any longer encounter himself, i.e., his essence . . . he
fails to see himself as the one spoken to, and hence also
fails in every way to hear in what respect he ek-sists, from
out of his essence, in the realm of an exhortation or
address, and thus can never encounter only himself."
Heidegger's "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" similarly
emphasizes that we live in response to a claim that comes
from beyond us (Existence and Being [New York: Harper &
Row, 1962]).

46. This is Ted Jenning's position, for example, in his
Introduction to Theology (1967).

47. Whatever Kaufman has appropriated from his
Anabaptist Mennonite tradition, which, according to Walter
Klaassen is Neither Catholic nor Protestant (1973), he is
clearly more Protestant than he is Catholic. The

"Protestant principle" (Tillich) looms too large in his thought to make any other judgement possible. For a summary of uniquely Protestant emphases, see Dillenberger and Welch, *Protestant Christianity* (1954:312-323).

48   Bernard Lonergan, for example, does just this in his *Method in Theology* (1972). In that book see especially his chapter on "Dialectic" in which the various problems that give rise to theological conflict are discussed (235-266).

49   Hence, Kaufman confesses in the preface to *Nonresistance and Responsibility* that "I now would not interpret the Christian life as founded so arbitrarily on an authoritarianism of revelation, as some of the chapters of this book written a good many years ago suggest, but would be inclined to argue the value of a posture of redemptive love as intrinsically right and good for humans . . . " (1979a:9; my emphases).

50   It is interesting that in his *Systematic Theology*, Kaufman uses similar terms: "The term 'revealed' has been used here deliberately: in no sense can we claim to have discovered or created or produced this meaning through our own initiative. On the contrary, this foundational structure of meaning in our existence happens to us; it comes to us from beyond the circle of our private existence; it is 'unveiled' to us" (1968a:29).

51   See Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967) where he introduces the notion of a second naiveté which, as opposed to a pre-critical "first" naiveté, takes seriously the whole range of modern criticisms of religious symbols and ideas yet is uncontent to dwell at the critical level of understanding.

52   Northrop Frye, for example, points out that there is a tenacity about biblical metaphors that allows them to resist and survive all attempts to interpret or reconstruct them (Frye, 1981:55). This tenacity attests to a certain objectivity and autonomy of existing meanings and metaphors vis-a-vis the interpreting, deconstructing and reconstructing self.

53   I think here particularly of St. Augustine whose theology is nothing if not a remarkable feat of the theological imagination but who took tradition and scripture with an unrivalled seriousness.

54   The criteria of criticism to which Ricoeur here alludes include those developed in the modern era by Kant, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Of course these are

primarily negative criteria, serving to alert us to possible perversions in our appropriation of religious testimonies and symbols. The matter of what constitutes appropriate symbols and testimonies is much more difficult but would presumably include considerations of the vitality and interpretive and reflective power they make available. This at least is what I take from Ricoeur's understanding of the wager he proffers: "I wager that I shall have a better understanding of man and of the bond between the being of man and the being of all beings if I follow the _indication_ of symbolic thought. That wager then becomes, the task of _verifying_ my wager and saturating it, so to speak, with intelligibility. In return, the task transforms my wager: in betting _on_ the significance of the symbolic world, I bet at the same time _that_ my wager will be restored to me in power of reflection, in the element of coherent discourse" (Ricoeur, 1967:355; emphases are his).

·55· I am not myself convinced that historical events are necessarily the bases for every human system of thought. I am only suggesting here that Kaufman's understanding of Christology in _Relativism_ potentially carries with it an understanding of the objective character of meaning similar to Ricoeur's.

·56· For a convincing elucidation of the idea that feelings are perceptions, see Herbert Richardson's _Toward an American Theology_, 1967:55ff.

·57· In Kaufman's case I would argue that the prophetic-eschatological emphasis of his theology warrants his alliance with Enlightenment assumptions (especially the view of history as some kind of progress) and informs his concern to make theology a public discipline of general cultural significance. Hence, the universalistic emphasis of his theology is the very ground from which his reflections upon theological method spring. It is in this sense that I would say that the imagination "constructs only because it has first been confronted [by a meaning external to it] and provided with both the material and the impetus for construction."

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