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## Hedley, LIVING FORMS OF THE IMAGINATION

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praise or blame. This is not to suggest that no trace of what contemporary writers think of as libertarianism is to be found in Anselm. There is, for example, very little in his writings of the distinctively compatibilist theme Rogers finds rife in Augustine, that our choices always follow our strongest desire. Perhaps, then, Anselm inclined to something like present day libertarianism when it comes to worldly causes. But it is difficult to believe he took creaturely freedom as in any way diminishing God's role as primary cause, or his complete sovereignty over all creation.

One could also express misgivings over Rogers's determination to read Anselm as much as possible in terms of contemporary concepts having to do with freedom. I am disposed to think, however, that therein lies the book's greatest contribution. It is difficult to retrofit contemporary ideas to those of the past, and I would not claim that Rogers's effort to do so always succeeds. In the long run, however, the enterprise of studying past thought against the backdrop of contemporary views can only increase our understanding of both, and Rogers's treatment of Anselm on freedom greatly advances that endeavor.

*Living Forms of the Imagination*, by Douglas Hedley. London and New York: T & T Clark, 2008. Pp. x + 308. ISBN 978056702959 (paper).

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"Dichterisch wohnet der Mensch" —we live poetically. Heidegger wrote this, and Douglas Hedley quotes it with full approval as an aphoristic summary of the central position of this delightful and often beautiful book. That position is, to make a complicated matter too simple, that it is proper to human beings to make a constant imaginative contribution to the bounds and structure of the world we inhabit, thus forging the world's given elements into a whole that is neither fanciful or fictional, but instead (when things go well) profoundly realistic, resonant with, and responsive to the most fundamental order of things. Imagination, for Hedley, is cognitively indispensable as well as affectively essential: without it, it is not possible for us to learn to inhabit a world, not possible to come to know how that world most fundamentally is, and not possible to engage our emotions with the order of things. Hedley also thinks that the Christian life cannot properly be lived nor Christian truth known without the imagination: what the imagination shows us is a cosmos beautiful in its created nature, and ourselves as quivering in reverie, responsive to that cosmos and to its maker. Christians ought therefore to be imaginative defenders of the imagination, Hedley thinks: both liturgy and theology require it.

Hedley's book is devoted to explicating and defending many aspects of this central thesis against its most influential opponents, who include: reductive naturalists in philosophy, for whom the imagination is cognitively

useless at best and essentially fictive at worst; excessively apophatic and iconoclastic theologians, for whom the image-conjuring faculty we have can have nothing whatever to do with God; those who have no place for the imagination as a distinct faculty, and typically wish to construe all human experience as either perceptual, affective, or conative; and those for whom the poets and defenders of the imagination are largely pagan, and the impulse to cultivate the imagination also, therefore, largely pagan.

Hedley's method is divertingly anthological. This is a long book (the typeface is small and the margins narrow), and an unusually high proportion of its words are quoted from others, often in long extracts of distracting beauty. The English romantics figure largely here, but so do their precursors, the Cambridge Platonists, and some of their non-Anglophone successors (Hölderlin, Heidegger). There is also considerable quotation from some premoderns (Eckhart, Augustine, Plato, [Pseudo]-Dionysius). The book sometimes approaches the condition of being a florilegium: some of Hedley's extracts are left to speak for themselves, usually as supportive illustrations of points he has been making in his own words, but sometimes in ways that are less than clear. Nevertheless, because he has an eye for beauty, his extracts are often arrestingly lovely or otherwise provocative, and require lingering over. They often divert the reader (this reader, anyway) from the book's central argument and into associative reverie. I suspect Hedley would be pleased at that.

Hedley's tutelary deity with respect to the question of what the imagination is and how it works is Coleridge; and it is certainly true that Coleridge's thought on this matter is more subtle and suggestive than anyone else's in the Anglophone tradition. Hedley's treatment of Coleridge, scattered throughout the book, is superb and creative: Coleridge is expounded, yes, but also developed, and it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that Hedley's contribution to the theoretical understanding of the imagination is the most significant in English since Coleridge's. For Hedley, the imagination is a faculty or system within the mind, which may be rooted in the physiology of the brain (he discusses empirical evidence suggesting this to be so). This faculty is mimetic, operating at the hinge of the inner and the outer. Facing inward it is the *speculum animae*, the soul's mirror; facing outward it is a "form of mediation between the intelligible and the sensible—the isthmus or meeting point of the noetic and empirical" (244). There is, on Hedley's view, a deep harmony between the inner and the outer, between the order of being and the order of knowing. And so when the inner order is imaginatively bodied forth, in words or images or sounds, that embodiment harmonizes with and shows the structure of the outer order. Hedley does not intend this as any kind of noncognitivist or merely expressivist theory of the imagination. What is bodied forth is real because it participates in the order of things; and so, as R. G. Collingwood—perhaps Hedley's most-cited philosopher of art—puts it, the artist (the imager supreme) does not merely express his sentiments or his experience; rather, he expresses, gives form to, a vision that can be entered

into by anyone who contemplates what he has made, and thereby transformed in the direction of the truth. This is possible because imagination is “the index of humanity made in the image of God” (77).

Hedley’s view, as I’ve expounded it so far, comports well with most varieties of Platonism. He would agree, and would take this to be a good thing. But he wants more than that. He wants the view to comport well with, and even to be required by, Christianity, and he tries in his seventh chapter to show this to be the case by offering a construal of the apocalyptic dimension of Christianity (by which he means the dramatical and usually eschatological representation of Christ’s victory over the principalities and the powers), and of the eucharist, as modes of interaction with and depictions of the world that are themselves deeply imaginative, and that require the cultivation of the imagination if they are to be apprehended and used. To put the matter crassly and directly: you can be a Christian, for Hedley, only if your imagination is sufficiently cultivated that you can apprehend, imaginatively, the drama of Christianity. To expunge the imagination from Christianity, whether in the name of the Lord’s inaccessibility to it, or in the name of a rationalism concerned only with the conceptual content of the faith, is to make Christianity impossible. The counterview, the one that makes Christianity possible, is the “faith that we can rise from the visible to the invisible and that the imagination, as the immediate source of our images, is a dim mirror and index of the boundless plenitude of the infinite I AM” (142).

So far, and much too briefly, Hedley’s view. It’s a winsome and beguiling one, and he is certainly right that vastly too little attention has been paid to the imagination by contemporary philosophers of religion. His work is a major corrective to that lack, though I suspect one that will be found frustrating by many philosophers formed in the broadly analytic tradition—and precisely because of the virtues I have sketched above.

I would like to raise three difficulties. I do so tentatively, because addressing topics within the realm of speculative thought demands that what we say should be properly modest. The first is a suggestion that Hedley’s elevated understanding of the importance of the imagination disposes him toward a deeply inadequate characterization of Christianity, one that sits too loose to the particularity of God’s action in the world. The second is a comment on the almost complete absence of the category of habit (and therefore of virtue and vice, each being a kind of habit) from Hedley’s philosophical anthropology, and a concomitant overvaluation of subjective awareness, of the flood of *qualia*. And the third is a question about art, and especially about the difference between iconic art and the art of the sublime, as a way to call into question the importance of the imagination while maintaining (against the iconoclasts) the importance of the image.

On the first difficulty. Hedley’s Christianity is Platonist. That is no bad thing: almost all Christianity is Platonist, and rightly so. But there are Platonisms and Platonisms, as Augustine (no mean Platonist himself) effectively argued long ago. A Christian Platonism must hold together a

doctrinal emphasis on God's transcendence rendered through the twin concepts of participation (in the order of being) and analogy (in the order of predication) with proper attention to the fundamental doctrines of election (of the people of Israel over all others), and incarnation (of the Lord as a first-century Jew). Hedley loses the election and the incarnation. Indeed, it is part of his critique of Barth, or at least Barthianism, to say that these doctrines are in some way improper, or at least unnecessary to Christianity. But it is not so: the twin claims of election and incarnation are constitutive elements of the grammar of Christianity, and to dissolve them in the universalisms of a romanticized Platonism is to lose something essential. That Hedley approaches this loss can be seen in the apparent insouciance with which he reads the eucharist through the lens of Hölderlin's "Patmos." This poem is not, by any stretch of the imagination, the work of a man whose thought is formed in Christian patterns, and any reading of the eucharist through him will be pagan. The assimilation in Hölderlin of Christ to Hercules and Dionysus shows this at once. Hedley acknowledges the deeply syncretistic nature of Hölderlin's thought, but does not find there a difficulty. That is *prima facie* evidence of his insufficient attention to the particularism of Christianity, and therefore also of his bondage to an improperly universalist kind of Platonism.

A subsidiary point on this matter. Hedley deploys romanticized Platonism, with considerable rhetorical vigor, against, for example, Denys Turner's apophaticism, which is an instance of a broadly Thomist apophaticism. He is not worried about universalism and syncretism; he is worried about the ban on the image suggested by (his reading of) Turner's work. But in his critique of apophaticism, Hedley shows little awareness of, and therefore almost no engagement with, the conceptual grammar of participation and analogy, which I've already alluded to. This is standard-issue Thomism (see qq. 1–13 of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*), but its materials are ready to hand in Augustine and [Pseudo]-Dionysius as well, as they already are *in nuce* in Plato himself. These conceptual devices have provided western Christianity with its principal mode of being apophatic without being iconoclast. They need to be engaged if Hedley's appropriation of the romantic version of Platonism is to succeed.

As to the second difficulty, about the absence from Hedley's anthropology of the category of habit, and thereby of vice and virtue. These categories, it seems to me, are essential to Christian thought about what makes particular actions and particular patterns of action good or bad, as well as about what makes particular people more or less good. Hedley is disposed not to think in these terms because, I think, to do so would stand in considerable tension with his affirmation of the importance of the inner life, and especially of image-laden reverie before the imagined sublime. There is an issue here to be worked out: a radical view, one I'm inclined to entertain, is that Christianity has no interest whatever in the inner life, in the flood of *qualia*, in the formation of and response to images—and that it has no interest in these things because what the triune Lord wants

of you is to return his love, which means becoming a person with certain very particular (largely liturgical) habits. That is no doubt too extreme as a formulation. It may nevertheless serve to point out the difficulty here. Does Hedley's version of Christianity really mean that we should forget about the virtues? If not, why not?

And on the third and final difficulty, about kinds of image. Hold in your mind's eye a high-sublime image like almost any painting by Caspar David Friedrich (a painter of whom Hedley approves). Contemplate it for a while. You'll feel the shiver: the wild gorges, the setting suns, the small human figures in a vast natural background, the crags, the ruins (think of Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," then as now a ruin, as you contemplate). Now contemplate your favorite icon, perhaps Rublev's Trinity, or even El Greco's early Byzantine work. These are static, ordered, beautiful. Contemplating them gives rise to no frisson, no prickling of the neck-hair. Their saturated beauty serves instead to assimilate those who contemplate them to the Lord in whom they participate. They are sacramental and therefore beautiful, not sublime. Now, the point of such a thought-experiment (an experiment in vision) is not to argue the superiority of one over another. It is rather to suggest that the Christian tradition contains a long, pre-Romantic tradition of thought and argument (not to mention violent and bloody disagreement, as between the iconoclasts and their opponents) about the image and the human possibility of response to it, a tradition very largely absent from Hedley's book. Its presence shows that use of and response to the image comes in many kinds, and that the kind so elegantly addressed and argued for by Hedley in this book is only one of them.

Hedley's is a brilliant and beautiful book. I think most of its conclusions wrong, but I have nothing but admiration for his achievement in writing it, and have been greatly instructed by reading it.

*Is God a Delusion? A Reply to Religion's Cultured Despisers*, by Eric Reitan. Walden, MA: Riley-Blackwell, 2009. Pp. 256. \$89.95 (hardcover); \$24.95 (paperback).

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The main purpose of this book is to refute claims of New Atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris. While the book is successful in showing that the New Atheists have only the most superficial understanding of what religion is really about, this is not what is most valuable in it, or even its main point. Most relevant about this book is the vision of authentic religion it presents, as well as the discussion it provides of why morally committed rational agents might choose to believe in God. Reitan shows that the only argumentative force behind the claims of the New Atheists is based on a fundamental equivocation. They