THE POWER OF RELIGIOUS NATURALISM IN KARL PETERS'S *DANCING WITH THE SACRED*

by Charley D. Hardwick

Abstract. This essay is an appreciative engagement with Karl Peters's *Dancing with the Sacred* (2002). Peters achieves a naturalistic theology of great power. Two themes are covered here. The first is how Peters gives ontological footing for a naturalistic conception of God conceived as the process of creativity in nature. Peters achieves this by conceiving creativity in terms of Darwinian random variation and natural selection combined with the notion of nonequilibrium thermodynamics. He gives ontological reference for a conception of God similar to Henry Nelson Wieman's idea of creative transformation. The second theme is how Peters succeeds in translating this nonpersonal conception of God into a powerful view of naturalistic religion that can shape a religious form of life. The key is that Peters's God can be understood as present in experience. Peters provides naturalistic interpretations of grace and the cruciform structure of creativity; the latter addresses the problem of evil in a nuanced fashion. I conclude with three critical comments about Peters's environmental ethics, his use of the notion of mystery, and his failure to have a robust conception of human fault or sin.

Keywords: creative transformation; creativity; cruciform structure; Darwinian structure; evolutionary theory; existentialist interpretation; experience; God; "God"; grace; humanism; Gordon Kaufman; materialism; mystery; naturalism; naturalistic theology; nonequilibrium thermodynamics; ontology; personal God; physicalism; pragmatism; purpose; random variation; serendipitous creativity; sin; valuational theism; Henry Nelson Wieman.

Karl Peters's *Dancing with the Sacred* is a lovely, indeed elegant, book. It is also an important book, because it contributes powerfully to the need for a

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naturalistic theology. Despite the revival of fundamentalist forms of religion throughout the world in recent decades, many today hunger for a way to understand themselves religiously that is fully consistent with the scientific view of the world that otherwise completely defines modern cultures. This is true not only of persons with no religious affiliation but also of many who still identify with their religious traditions, with various degrees of comfort or discomfort. This educated but nontechnical audience is the one *Dancing with the Sacred* effectively addresses.

Yet its nontechnical, easily accessible presentation belies the significant contribution the book makes to philosophical naturalism. "Naturalism" refers to philosophical positions that attempt to describe the view of the world implicit in natural science.[1] *Dancing with the Sacred* is a kind of naturalistic systematic theology, because Peters takes this worldview as both the problem he addresses and the standard against which his conception of religion must be measured. Naturalistic philosophies have been notoriously indifferent or even hostile to religion. Those that are sympathetic have suffered from two kinds of shortcomings. The very attempt to include religion too often leads to a less than fully rigorous naturalism, while a rigorous naturalism leads to a thin account of religion. *Dancing with the Sacred* suffers from neither of these shortcomings: a robust interpretation of religion (that can motivate religious practice) is developed in alliance with a rigorous conception of naturalism.

Peters's achievement has a personal note for me. In my *Events of Grace* (Hardwick 1996b) and other writings (Hardwick 1987; 1989; 1993; 1996a, c; 1998; 2003) I too have attempted to develop a naturalistic view of religion that avoids these shortcomings. *Dancing with the Sacred* is both illuminating and challenging to me, not only because Peters adopts different strategies from mine but also because some of his strategies, with which he is wonderfully successful, are ones that I avoided, thinking they could not succeed on naturalist terms. I highlight some of these differences to show why Peters is successful and why his proposals are so robust.

I analyze Peters's argument in terms of the two legs upon which it stands. These are, first, his account of the scientific view of the world (that is, his naturalism), and, second, his demonstration of how such a worldview can support strong religious attitudes and beliefs. This division is not as neat as it might appear, because his account of the scientific worldview already contains elements that ground its religious appeal. This interweaving is part of what makes the book such a striking achievement.

THE NATURALISTIC VIEW OF THE WORLD IN *DANCING WITH THE SACRED*

Too many religious naturalists, I argue in *Events of Grace*, fail because of an insufficiently demanding view of naturalism. They seem to believe that in order to make religious views compatible with naturalism, the naturalism itself must be qualified. These qualifications too often involve a nostalgia for elements from the theistic tradition. I argue, therefore, that any naturalism that is sympathetic to religion must begin with a sufficiently austere conception of naturalism and that its account of religion must feel itself constantly constrained by this austerity. Four metaphysical traits and three theological implications serve to identify this austerity. The metaphysical traits are: (1) only the world of nature is real; (2) nature is necessary, in the sense of requiring no sufficient reason beyond itself to account either for its origin or its ontological ground; (3) nature as a whole must be understood without appeal to any kind of intelligence or purposive agency; and (4) all causes are natural causes, so that every event is a product solely of other natural events.[2] The three theological implications follow from these traits: (1) a naturalistically conceived God cannot be personal; (2) there can be no cosmic (or otherwise grounding) teleology; and (3) there is no cosmically available conservation of value (Hardwick 1996b, 7–16). Taken together, these traits and these denials constitute what I mean by the austerity of a rigorous naturalism.

Such a worldview seems inhospitable to religion, at least at first blush. Such a world is without purpose and indifferent to human aspiration and value. Conceived in terms of evolutionary theory, it seems a world of heartless competition, red in tooth and claw. In astrophysical scale, our place in the cosmos is so minuscule as to make human projects and their value seem inconsequential and futile. This is the world that led Bertrand Russell to comment that "on [us] and all [our] race" and upon all that we may hope and dream, "slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark" (Russell 1981, 61). How, many have asked, can anything matter if matter does not?

Actually, it is not terribly difficult to show that despair and meaninglessness do not automatically follow from this naturalistic view of things (see Hardwick 1996b, 254–65; Post 1987, 317–26), but it does seem bleak in its promise for religious value. It was this difficulty that led me in *Events of Grace* to break religious value apart from a foundation in the nature of things (in ontology) and to defend a valuational but not ontological theism. I argued that human existence may be understood as "gifted" to itself in "events of grace" whereby a religious self-understanding can be developed through the method of existentialist interpretation.[3] The price I pay for this procedure is to detach religion from any direct footing in the cosmos. In effect, I argue that the cosmos does not support the typical aspirations of human religion and that therefore naturalism requires rethinking the nature of religion itself (Hardwick 1996b, 179–90). Peters's achievement is impressive because he directly faces the difficulties I avoided and nevertheless succeeds in rooting religious value in ontology, in things entire.

Peters and I share a common influence in the thought of Henry Nelson Wieman, especially Wieman's concept of creativity or "creative transformation." When I first read *Dancing with the Sacred*, I was struck by how

"Wiemanian" it was. Peters does note the influence of Wieman, but in my opinion the influence is deeper and more pervasive than he acknowledges. Perhaps he does not make more of this influence because his appropriation of Wieman is so innovative, and innovative precisely in extending Wieman's notion of creativity into ontology.

Creativity for Wieman was simply the power in nature that produces novelty, and he identified this creativity with God. Though Wieman's creativity was entirely naturalistic (and Wieman was comfortable with an austere conception of naturalism), he was an insistent empiricist and was therefore reluctant to attempt any kind of metaphysical account of creativity. It was enough for him to identify creative processes empirically, especially in terms of the richness and growth of human experience, and to comment that these could be understood as God because they do for us what we cannot do for ourselves (Wieman [1946] 2003, 74–78).[4] It was this empiricist, metaphysically skeptical account of creative transformation (as God) that led me to see that there could be a link between existentialist interpretation and an entirely naturalistic account of grace.[5] By seeing all religious terms as expressions for modes of human existing, I saw that one could extend an account of creative transformation as God's gracious action into a full account of classical Christian theology and thereby have a naturalist theology. But this comes at the cost of the break with ontology. In contrast, and significantly, Peters finds a way to root Wieman's creativity in the very deep-down bottom of things.

How does Peters do this? He does it by linking the structure of Darwin's evolutionary theory with the notion of nonequilibrium thermodynamics drawn from contemporary physics. The structure of Darwinian evolution combines two cross-cutting processes: random variation and natural selection. Peters plays on this twofold process (continuous emergence of novelty leading to new patterns of stability) in many different ways that go far beyond its original home in biology. Nonequilibrium thermodynamics permits him to read it into the deepest orders of the cosmos. Nonequilibrium thermodynamics describes temporal processes (processes that are linear and irreversible) in open systems by which "more complex and stable states arise out of less complex states, according to random fluctuations and inherent laws" (Peters 2002, 53). Random fluctuations in open systems do not remain random. Eventually patterns emerge governed by regularities that may not be evident (or may not even have existed) until the patterns themselves arise. It turns out that in open, irreversible systems, hidden variables arise within and then govern random fluctuations. These may be called laws, but at this level of generality the word *law* is just a metaphor to describe the stability. *Information* is increasingly used to name the same thing. At its widest generality, the universe consists of random fluctuations and information. Such processes occur in many systems, both microcosmic and macrocosmic, and account for the emergence of more complex and stable states at the very beginning of the cosmos. In this fashion, nonequilibrium thermodynamics is the widest, and deepest, expression of Peters's basic metaphor of random variation and natural selection.

These two processes, Darwinian random variation and natural selection and nonequilibrium thermodynamics, provide ontological reference for Peters's notion of creativity. Both have wide generality, but they are not quite the same. The structure of nonequilibrium thermodynamics allows Peters to root creativity in the physics of the entire cosmos, including the origin of the universe as we presently find it. Nonequilibrium thermodynamics also applies to many microcosmic processes that produce novelty, and in many instances it overlaps with the structure of Darwinian evolution, especially since it is one way to account for Darwinian random variation at the physical level. But the Darwinian structure need not always be reduced to instances of nonequilibrium thermodynamics. The Darwinian cross-cutting processes, random variation (by which new possibilities emerge biologically) and natural selection (by which some variations establish new stabilities within ecological niches), offer a metaphor for creative change that goes far beyond biology. It would be inappropriate to apply the physics of nonequilibrium thermodynamics to some of these expressions of creativity, such as in sociological, cultural (including religious), personal, and psychological changes. In both structures, the occurrence of novelty is linked to the establishment of new stabilities.

These two types of process provide Peters with an ontological footing for creativity that amounts to an ontological grounding of Wieman's philosophy of religion. Peters places this idea of creativity at the center of his theological construction, and its robustness is what gives power to his naturalistic construal of religion.

Before I turn to this topic, I want to make a final comment about the ontological character of this conception of creativity. Peters makes rather a lot of his commitment to pragmatism (Peters 2002, 2, 38f.), and he is certainly correct when it comes to his method of interpreting religious ideas. Metaphysically and ontologically, however, Peters is not a pragmatist at all, and I take this to be one of the strongest features of his book. Pragmatism is a form of empiricism. It insists that ideas be defined by their terminations in experience. As in the empiricist tradition generally, most pragmatists are metaphysical and ontological agnostics, if not skeptics. This was certainly true of Wieman, who was a follower of John Dewey. But Peters's metaphysics of creativity is realist, not pragmatic. Furthermore, his ontology is basically materialist (or, in contemporary nomenclature, "physicalist"). Implicit in his account of creativity is that the ultimate constituents of reality are physical objects (as these are defined by the best physics of any time) and space and time (or space-time), such that everything that happens is ultimately a result of interactions among these objects across space and in time. This materialism and its related realism are already implicit in the nonequilibrium thermodynamics (and to a lesser extent in the Darwinian structure) by which he grounds his account of creativity.[6] Peters admits as much when, defining naturalism, he states: "Naturalism means that everything is energy-matter and the information according to which energy-matter is organized. It also means that the causes of things are not personal, mental, and intentional" (2002, 9).

In an informal book, there is no reason why Peters should engage the deep and controversial issues surrounding whether the ultimate expression of naturalism must be materialist, and nothing in his account of religion, even the ontological reference of creativity, rides on this. But, for two reasons, I believe it is important to call attention to the effectively materialist character of his position. One is to correct the perhaps misleading nature of his own pragmatism. The second concerns the fact that many, perhaps most, versions of contemporary naturalism either elide the issue entirely or deny materialism.[7] In my opinion, only a forthright attempt to work out one's naturalism within a materialist ontology will produce the austerity implicit in naturalism. This is nowhere more important than in a naturalistic account of religion, because anything short of the austerity imposed by materialism is likely to qualify the naturalistic character of its account of religion. So, it is important explicitly to recognize the commitment to materialism implicit in Peters account and to applaud him for it.

THE NATURALISTIC VIEW OF RELIGION IN *DANCING WITH THE SACRED*

Peters is wonderfully inventive in translating this scientific conception of the world into specific theological themes. There are far too many of these for me to cover in this space, so I concentrate on just two overarching elements that subsume most of his specific theological interpretations and conclude with three critical comments. The first theme concerns how Peters translates his philosophical notion of creativity theologically into what can properly be called a *naturalistic theism* (see Peters 2002, 27 for his use of this term). The second theme concerns his theological success in informing actual religious life.

Peters's pragmatism is most evident—and legitimately so—in eliciting the criteria for a successful theology. Referring to Charles Sanders Peirce, he notes that pragmatism has always insisted that "we should define ideas, even abstract ideas, by the experiences we could expect to have if such [ideas] were credible" (Peters 2002, 3). Religiously, this means that we can know what *God* means only if we can define God in terms of the experiences "God" permits us to have and to interpret.[8] Indeed, this is the very meaning of the "living God of history" that is so deeply imbedded in the biblical faiths, a God who is present and can be found everywhere (p. 2). Yet, as Peters notes, in modernity it has become exceedingly difficult to know how the God of traditional Western theism, the God of Judaism and Christianity, makes a difference in experience, especially for those whose view of the world is defined by natural science.[9]

The solution for Peters is to define God (and the sacred) "not as a being who creates the world but as the process of creation itself" (p. 1). This requires fundamental transformations in the way we think of God, and Peters is forthright in addressing them. God cannot be a being, in particular not a being existing somehow beyond the world who brings the world into existence and then intervenes in it to make it other than it would be simply by natural causes that require no appeal to God at all. God also cannot be personal. Peters is especially good at discussing this issue. He notes that personal metaphors or analogies can be used of "God" if we are talking about relations. Thus, a relationship to what is nonpersonal can be referred to in personal terms without difficulty, as, for instance, we might refer to our relationship to the natural world as like that of parent and child. But almost all traditional religions go beyond metaphors of relationship and attribute a direct personal inner life to divine being or beings, and this is what creates the problem for anyone who thinks out of a scientific view of the world. Here is how Peters nicely puts this issue:

> [Such gods] have self-conscious intentionality. They can understand, plan, decide, and carry out their decisions analogous to the ways that humans understand, plan, decide, and carry out their decisions. Humans, therefore, can converse and commune with them in the same way that we converse and commune with other humans. . . . However, when I take a scientific perspective, I cannot believe that the forces and processes of nature are personal in any human sense. For this reason, many of the ancient ways of thinking about the sacred seem incredible to me and others whose minds are shaped by scientific ways of thinking. (p. 33)

Peters's alternative is to think of God not as a being but as a process of creativity. We can relate directly to this process in every concrete moment of life, just as we can think about it in reference to every reality, from the most microscopic to the full extent of the cosmos. In each of these senses, "God as a process" provides a fully objective notion of God. It is therefore appropriate to term Peters's "sacred" a naturalistic *theism*.

This process, identified now as the divine everywhere present in experience, has its most significant character in the Darwinian structure discussed earlier (random variation leading to new orders of stability). Translated by its religious relevance to experience, this is a structure of death and transfiguration. The process of creativity, that is, is a process by which what is given or past is transformed into something new by instances of novelty that fundamentally alter what was given.

Here we begin to see how Peters's naturalistic theology can successfully inform religious life with real interior depth (my second theme). Religiously, participation in and identification with such processes of creativity can be understood as "grace," or, as Peters puts it, "'God' as the 'grace-type event'" in which something good happens to us beyond our control (p. 3).

Understanding "God" as creative process in this sense permits the "naturalistic believer" to find and experience God everywhere, from the slightest events of everyday life to the full developmental unfolding of the cosmos.

Two examples of this "divine presence" are especially worth mentioning. First, religious diversity, indeed human diversity generally (both geographically and historically), can be understood as the work of a creative God and therefore not as a problem but as an opportunity by which one may religiously affirm and participate in God's activity (pp. 25–29). A second example is how nicely this structure of creativity conforms to the cruciform structure of Christianity and thus contains the seeds of a full-blown Christology (pp. 109–25).[10] By cruciform structure I mean the defining character Jesus' death on the cross gives to Christian life and thought. Both God's action and God's presence are understood in terms of God's full participation in an event of suffering and death, from which a new, transfigured possibility of redemptive life emerges. Though Peters's book is not specifically Christian, the cruciform structure of creativity shows how easily it opens toward the Christian theological tradition and thus shows the possibility of a full naturalistic rendering of the Christian faith.[11]

Of course, to say that something good emerges from the death of the old by no means implies that every product of creative transformation can be identified with "goodness," as Peters well knows (p. 106). Enormous egoism, brutality, suffering, and waste reside in natural processes. In theological terms, this is the classical problem of evil. The cruciform structure of creativity amounts to Peters's answer to this deep, age-old theological issue. Let us recognize that there is simply no answer to this issue within the confines of classical theism, however much it is addressed in that tradition.[12] Let us also recognize that the way the problem appears in classical theism fails utterly to conform to the biblical, especially the New Testament, tradition, which is shot through with a cruciform structure.

Peters's approach to this issue of how goodness arises from the death of the old is nuanced and subtle. He addresses it first at the objective, macrocosmic, and ontological level. Traditionally, value is divided between the intrinsic and the instrumental. Peters supplements these with a third, larger, systemic, and dynamic kind of value that he terms productive or creative value (pp. 106–11).[13] The very condition that there are any values at all, especially the intrinsic values that we find threatened by evil, is the underlying process that Peters identifies with creativity. Religiously, this means that the problem of evil is transformed. Of course there is loss, suffering, and death of the values we treasure. But, now using the language of Wieman, we can say that simply to rest on the finality or ultimacy of any created good is profoundly irreligious, a form of idolatry (see Wieman [1946] 2003, 23–26; Hardwick 1996b, 30f.). To focus on the divine or to worship God is to direct ourselves to the process of creativity itself (Wieman's "source of human good"). In the ultimate sense, it is this process that is good, not the goods it produces. We find and experience God in the processes that inform nature in its widest sense, not in the specific products of those processes. This is the objective side to Peters's approach to the problem of evil, and it has a cruciform and deeply biblical structure.

The full power of Peters's position arises, however, from its subjective side—the way that his naturalistic theism informs an interior religious life. Using an experience of death, suffering, and loss from his own life (the death of his wife), Peters shows how new possibilities for living can arise from such terrible experiences (pp. 113–18). This makes sense only if we first acknowledge that such situations are fraught with potential "for further diminishment of our personalities, of our relationships with each other—a loss of the spiritual as well as the physical—a second kind of death" (p. 116). "Worshiping God" here means trying to open ourselves to transformative possibilities even in the depths of loss and despair.[14] To find such possibilities is to experience God's grace and to come to understand what the tradition has called the love of God. Here Peters can appropriate the notion of resurrection and attach it to the implicit Christology contained in the cruciform structure of his conception of creativity (pp. 115f.). The important point is to see how this powerful conception of an interior religious life is rooted in the ontology by which God is a process of creativity that is related to every moment of experience.

CONCLUSION

I want to make three critical comments about a book I much admire. The first of these concerns the ecological focus Peters gives to the religious life. It will come as no surprise that the major way Peters tries to link his ontology of creativity to the possibility of a religious life is by trying to motivate ecological responsibility. There is nothing wrong with this in itself, and Peters is effective in showing how understanding the divine as a process of creativity can inform and motivate a way of life devoted to such responsibility. A great deal of this book is devoted to arguments supporting this position, and they are well integrated with the religious structure of the book. Taken together they are quite powerful. My criticism is that these positions cannot themselves ground the book's religious stance. In traditional terms, they amount to Peters's theological ethics. But such an ethics must itself be grounded in a wider theology.

I have tried to show that Peters does have such a wider theology and that it is clearly evident in the book. The issue here is one of theological structure. For this reason, I am much more impressed with how Peters is able to ground the possibility of an interior religious life in his ontology, in his theism, than I am with his environmental ethics.

To support this I call attention to two elements of religious life that I have not yet mentioned. The first concerns Peters's metaphor of "dancing with the sacred." Though taken from an activity in which one person leads, Peters points out that the full metaphor (as in "the dance of life") implies a process in which no one is leading; it is simply the to and fro of the dance itself that is the point (p. 46). Peters associates this kind of dancing with the Buddhist notion of mindfulness. Mindfulness is simply to be fully present to the ever-changing moments of experience. Dancing with the sacred in this sense is implicit in the conception of the divine as that creativity underlying every moment of experience. Furthermore, this dancing transforms the notion of purpose. One classical objection to religious naturalism is that naturalism leaves life without purpose or meaning. Peters astutely points out—contrary to the theistic tradition—that the very nature of creativity *requires* that there be no overall purpose (pp. 46f.). Translated religiously, this means that dancing with the sacred cannot be conceived in terms of projected purposes. Given the nature of our relation to God, our interests and purposes must often be transformed, and we must be receptive to such transformation. The purpose, or payoff, to dancing with the sacred is simply "participating fully in every moment of life" (p. 50). Such a dance is zestful life and may be appropriately termed "life in grace." It is in such conceptions as these, I believe, rather than in his environmental ethics, that Peters should look for the relationship between his theology and religious life, even though his ethics is entirely compatible with a religious form of life.

Second, I take exception to Peters's appeal to mystery. Peters writes of mystery in the first of the three chapters in which he develops his conception of creativity. In the first, titled "Creative Mystery" (pp. 30–37), he argues against personal conceptions of divinity that are common in the history of religions. In the second he presents the Darwinian structure and in the third the notion of nonequilibrium thermodynamics. Significantly, in these latter two chapters, where he develops his substantive account of the divine as creative process, he does not appeal to mystery at all. He introduces the notion of mystery as a way of talking about the great variety of ways human beings have tried to "comprehend the mystery that has created the world," and he notes that "ancient ways of thinking have . . . understood that the source of all existence . . . is more than humans can comprehend. It is a mystery" (p. 30). There is nothing wrong with Peters's use of the category of mystery to describe these efforts in the history of religion. Unfortunately, he continues to use the category as he develops his own position in the rest of this chapter. In this immediate context and pointing to many precedents in the history of religions (pp. 34f.), he asks whether there are nonpersonal metaphors for referring to the divine that would be acceptable in a scientific age. Here he appropriates Gordon Kaufman's notion of "serendipitous creativity" as a nonpersonal metaphor for God (p. 35). This chapter is really only about acceptable nonpersonal metaphors for God, but he concludes by suggesting that the notion of mystery is a central criterion for his substantive position: "Even as we recognize that all human descriptions, all metaphors, are acts of . . . imagination that in the end fall short of allowing us to understand creative mystery, we still seek partial ways to comprehend the mother of all things" (p. 36).

Kaufman does make mystery central to his notion of serendipitous creativity. But Kaufman is not a naturalist (he specifically rejects naturalism; see Kaufman 1993, 254–63), and he is a proponent of historicism, a philosophical position naturalists should avoid. Moreover, Peters does not need the category of mystery, and in fact he never employs it substantively. It seems more a rhetorical device that helps him make the transition to his own position.

I make this point because I believe that naturalists should avoid appeals to mystery. The reasons are many. Too often "mystery" serves in theology to justify "mystery mongering," to excuse slipshod thinking, or to support precisely those positions that the scientific worldview has made implausible for contemporary believers. One should always ask what real theological *work* "mystery" is doing when appeal is made to it. In almost all cases it quickly becomes evident that, apart from mystery mongering or shoring up an incoherent position, it is doing no work at all and, indeed, could not do any.[15] To adopt this position is not to assert some arrogance about what we know or could know. There are mysteries aplenty, but whenever we deal with a subject matter to which this term applies, it would be better simply to say that it is something we do not know and then to spell out the consequences of our inability to know. Appeal to mystery does no theological work except to obfuscate.

Peters does not need to appeal to mystery. He notes that despite mystery we must, after all, talk about the source of all existence in some way, as has always been the case among all who have ever discussed the sacred, including mystery mongers. He then introduces his proposal that "this [mysterious, serendipitous] creativity can be thought of as a two-part process: one part gives rise to new variations in the cosmos, in life, and in human society; the other part selects and continues some of these new variations, which in turn contribute to further creation" (p. 37). There is nothing mysterious about this claim at all. It is an ambitious claim about the appropriate way to conceive of the divine for persons persuaded by the scientific view of the world. Peters may be incorrect; there may be better ways for naturalists to conceive of the divine; or there may be flaws in Peters's conception that invalidate it as a way of thinking of the divine. But it is not mysterious, and Peters does himself a disservice by appealing to this shabby theological device.[16]

My third objection is the most substantive. It is problematic, I believe, that Peters has no conception of human fault, or sin. It is true that he deals with questions about human shortsightedness and motivation in relation to his ecological concerns. He also develops an informed conception of human ambivalence in the context of explaining "dancing with the sacred" and "mindfulness." But none of this amounts to a very deep conception of human sin. More than at any other point, Peters is here similar to other naturalist philosophers who have been sympathetic to religion, and like them his "religion" is a form of humanism.

Among naturalists there will be dispute about whether this is a failing at all. In my view it is a failing because all along I have emphasized that Peters's work is significant theologically, as a naturalistic *theology*. Theologically, humanism is simply too superficial in its account of human fault and human evil to be taken seriously in a work of the theological scope that Peters otherwise achieves. Sources in contemporary theology such as Reinhold Niebuhr (1941) and Paul Tillich (1957) have powerfully demonstrated the inadequacies of humanism, and at this point of theological anthropology, their work is entirely compatible with naturalism (see Hardwick 1996b, 117–21, 144f.). Furthermore, resources are readily at hand for Peters in the work of one of his mentors, Wieman. Wieman, the naturalist, made some of the best criticisms of humanism in the contemporary theological literature,[17] and his distinction between created good and creative good provided him with the seeds of a deep, Pauline/Augustinian conception of human sinfulness (Hardwick 1996b, 28f.). The omission of a more adequate, indeed, full-blown, conception of sin is, in my opinion, a serious failing in a work otherwise of such significant theological accomplishment, but it only slightly tarnishes my admiration for Peters's book.

NOTES

1. More generally, "naturalistic" modifies philosophical positions whose underlying assumptions are naturalist even if these positions do not use the term or show any concern actually to articulate what those assumptions are. In this sense, almost all philosophy since the middle of the nineteenth century has been naturalistic. Actually, one can go back much further. Most modern philosophy (beginning, say, with Hobbes [1588–1679] and Descartes [1596–1650]), has attempted to give an account of the world in light of modern science. Still, with few exceptions, most thinkers in this period continued to take for granted some form of theism. Throughout this period God gets pushed increasingly to the margins until, after the mid-nineteenth century, God becomes irrelevant for most philosophy.

2. See Edwards 1972, 133–41. Edwards mentions two further traits: (5) natural science is the only sound method for establishing knowledge, and (6) value is based solely on the interests and projects of human beings. These, I argue, are more problematic and are in any case unnecessary for the metaphysical definition of naturalism (Hardwick 1996b, 5f.).

3. The notion of human existence as "gifted to itself" (*sich geschenkt werden*) is from the thought of Karl Jaspers (1962) and Fritz Buri (1956; 1978). The method of existentialist interpretation derives from Rudolf Bultmann (1984) and Buri.

4. Wieman's classical naturalist definition of God is in his first book, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* (1926, 9f.). In his mature thought, especially in *The Source of Human Good* ([1946] 2003), God is identified with creativity understood in terms of the way value grows in quality and qualitative meaning. The distinction between creative good and created good provided Wieman with the elements for a powerful conception of human sinfulness and a critique of idolatry ([1946] 2003, 16–26). Though Wieman came to emphasize the working of creativity in human experience through a fourfold creative event (pp. 54–68), throughout his early and middle periods (before 1946) he never left any doubt that creativity is an entirely nonpersonal,

nonintentional process rooted in nature as a whole. In *The Source of Human Good* he even has a section titled "Creative Event Biologically Interpreted" (pp. 70–74). It is no accident that throughout this period, and in opposition to most other "religious naturalists," his thought involved a powerful critique of humanism. That is why his thought, though fully naturalistic, was also thoroughly theistic. However, after *The Source of Human Good*, he increasingly concentrated on creativity in the fourfold creative event within human experience (especially human communicative interchange), and the critique of humanism became muted. With *Man's Ultimate Commitment* (1958), his last important book, his thought—unfortunately, in my estimation—became indistinguishable from humanism.

5. Others too have noted the remarkable linkage that is possible between Wieman's conception of creativity and the idea of grace. Indeed, it is striking that in 1995 and 1996, more than twenty years after Wieman's death, two books heavily influenced by him appeared, and both had "grace" in their titles (Shaw 1995; Hardwick 1996b). This same connection was made by John Cobb and Schubert Ogden in dissertations at the University of Chicago (Cobb 1949; Ogden 1954).

6. It is worth noting that Wieman never really grounds his notion of creativity but only describes it empirically. He does call its "source" God, but this can be understood simply as a stipulation for the "whence" of the empirical processes.

7. The issue is elided because most contemporary naturalisms have been based on positivism or pragmatism (which is itself very close to positivism in its philosophy of science). An example of eliding it may be seen in Donald Crosby (2002), who is, for a naturalist, also amazingly skeptical about natural science. An excellent presentation of naturalism that questions the necessity of materialism is made by Rem Edwards (1972, 138–41). David Chalmers (1996) rejects a fully materialist naturalism by a powerful argument concerning the impossibility of a materialist account of mental properties while insisting that their necessarily nonmaterial character is still compatible with a naturalist metaphysics. John Post (1987) makes an elegant defense of materialism/physicalism that gives a physicalist account of mental properties and is also sympathetic to religion.

8. I have articulated the same principle in *Events of Grace* by the criterion that all theological statements must derive their meaning from terminations in experience. This principle makes possible the intimate connection between Wieman and the method of existentialist interpretation (Hardwick 1996b, 76). The theological principle that links the very meaning of theological terms to experience has its modern origin in the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher.

9. The deepest problem of modern theology concerns how to give an account of God's action in the world, an account that shows how God makes a difference in how we find the world in everyday experience. The importance and the difficulty of this issue is well exhibited in Owen Thomas's collection of essays (1983). A major source of process philosophy's influence in contemporary theology is its claim to address this issue. But whatever success process thought has in addressing God's action generally, it utterly fails on the issue of God's particular action—traditionally, the question of God's providential action (see Hardwick 1996b, 132–38).

10. These same elements are in Wieman's provocative comments on Christology. See Wieman [1946] 2003, 48–52, 270–75; 1987, 33–80; Shaw 1981.

11. This is what I have attempted in *Events of Grace*. For the specific discussion of Christology within a naturalistic theology, see Hardwick 1996b, 209–53.

12. It is also not answered by process revisions to classical theism. In process thought, God simply becomes the source of evil, and there is enormous complacency among process thinkers about this issue.

13. Peters here relies on the work of Holmes Rolston, III (1999).

14. I have emphasized that the very possibility that we can embrace such potentially diminishing experiences with openness to God's creative possibilities of new life is itself a creative transformation. The very possibility of finding God's creative possibilities is not our own doing but a product of God's grace. In this sense, the notion of creative transformation can give a full and robust account of the Protestant principle of justification by faith. Peters does not go quite this far. See Hardwick 1987; 1996b, 151–57; 1996c; 2003.

15. This is the strategy I have adopted in responding to J. Harley Chapman (1996), who takes my neglect of the category as a failing. See Hardwick 1996a, 328–34.

16. Peters concludes this chapter with the following: "My ideas too are partial, only one way to think about God or the sacred for today. I recognize that I am gaining only a glimpse of the

mysterious creativity that pervades the universe" (2002, 37). This is confused. At the level of overall theological proposal, Peters's claim about the nature of creativity and its appropriateness for the divine is not partial at all, nor is it a glimpse. To say as much is to suggest that somehow in the future "God" might be revealed as quite other—say, as a personal being inhabiting a realm beyond space and time, or some other such. In contrast, Peters's claim is much stronger. It is a substantive claim about the nature of the divine and about the structure of natural processes that we understand quite well, and, importantly, it excludes other positions. Of course, there may be other and better ways for naturalists to conceive of the divine. But the category of mystery is irrelevant to this question. There is one way in which Peters is correct that his notion of creativity is only a glimpse into a mystery. In debates over this matter, I prefer to say that the only appropriate application of mystery is to the concrete, the particular. We understand well, for instance, what an electron is. But it is a deep and unfathomable mystery why just *this* electron is associated with just *this* atom and not some other. So it also is a mystery why serendipitous creativity should have thrown up just this variation rather than some other. But the nature of creativity itself, as a conceptual structure descriptive of nature, is not at all mysterious.

17. Ultimately, this was Wieman's whole point in speaking of the *source* of human good (see Wieman [1946] 2003).

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