

# A REPLY TO ANNE KULL, EDUARDO CRUZ, AND MICHAEL DELASHMUTT

by *Bronislaw Szerszynski*

*Abstract.* In my reply to the essays by Anne Kull, Eduardo Cruz, and Michael DeLashmutt, I turn first to Cruz's charge that my use of "the sacred" is at odds with a growing religious studies mainstream that understands religion in secular terms. I suggest that this latter approach has its own problems, deriving partly from its neglect of the political, constructed nature of the category of "religion." Second, in relation to Cruz's suggestion that my lack of attention to explanation compromises my claim to be social scientific, I defend a broader understanding of the human sciences and explore the relationships between understanding, critique, and history, and between sociology and theology. Third, reflecting on DeLashmutt's suggestion that I neglect the way that technical invention provides a glimpse of divine creativity, and the myth making that goes on around technology in vehicles such as science fiction, I argue that such issues have to be approached in a radically historical way. I conclude by identifying three challenges: to explore more deeply how technological objects form part of human being-in-the-world, to show how my approach might offer practical resources for assessing technological and environmental developments, and to expand my analysis to include non-Western religious traditions.

*Keywords:* Eduardo Cruz; Michael DeLashmutt; explanation, understanding, and critique in the human sciences; history and the human; Anne Kull; religious studies; the sacred; science, technology, and religion; technology and creativity.

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I am extremely appreciative of the seriousness with which Anne Kull, Eduardo Cruz, and Michael DeLashmutt have critically engaged with my book *Nature, Technology and the Sacred* (2005) (hereafter *NTS*) and of their intellectual generosity in suggesting various promising new lines of development. Kull (2006) gives us a very clear and accurate summary of the main

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argument of the book and offers some thought-provoking reflections of her own. Cruz (2006) and DeLashmutt (2006), while also praising many of the book's achievements, also offer some substantial points of criticism.

I readily agree with them that there are many points where the book could have been improved—where literatures go unmentioned, concepts remain unembellished, arguments go unstated, and so on. My interlocutors have pointed out some of which I was well aware and others of which I was not, and for these I am grateful.

However, in some ways the latter surprise me only a little more than the former. Early on in writing *NTS* I realized that the scale of its ambition was at least as important as its execution—that it was important for someone to write a book that sought to carve out a new agenda for the critical study of the technological domination of nature, one in which “religious” ideas are seen not merely as some kind of alternative discourse to those of modern science and technology but as constitutive of them. The implications of moving the debate around environment and technology into this new theoretical framing seemed to me to be of huge potential significance for social science and humanities approaches to these topics. For example, no longer would the sociology of technology and of the environment rely on what I was seeing increasingly as frustratingly narrow ontological assumptions. And no longer would theological debate and concerns have to seek to affect technological developments from the outside; instead, technology critique would involve exposing and engaging with the theological roots at the very heart of modern science and technology.

But this revisioning of the debate about technology and nature seemed to me to be far too great a task to achieve in one book and in the time I had allotted myself to write it. So I had to content myself with writing a book that would at least *describe* this new space, a space to be explored more thoroughly in the future by myself and others. Inevitably, to describe a landscape is to shape it; each explorer creates paths and clearings to be mapped, explored, and extended by others, and equally inevitably only some of these will prove to be fruitful, while others will be less so. Once the goal of the book had become clear to me, I quickly realized that the book I could write could never be the last word but only the first (*pace* Jacques Ellul, Carl Mitcham, and others)—not the whole journey but more like the first few steps, which I trust have been taken resolutely and firmly enough so as clearly to indicate the new direction I had in mind.

#### THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND “THE SACRED”

Nevertheless, I must not shirk my responsibility to engage substantively with the critical points made by my interlocutors. The best place to start may be with what I take to be the most serious charge—that made by Cruz of imperfect scholarship: that I have neglected some crucial literatures (for example, the work of Karl Löwith, Hans Blumenberg, Peter Berger, and

H. Paul Santmire) and also have neglected debates in religious studies and the establishment of an antisubstantialist “mainstream” in that discipline, with the result that my key concept, that of the sacred, is “cryptotheological,” “Eurocentric,” and “ill-defined” (Cruz 2006, 795), thus weakening my book’s whole argument. Perhaps I can start my deflection of this double-barreled volley with a rather compressed and selective intellectual biography. The main objective of this is to address the relationship between my own intellectual project and the discipline of religious studies, but on the way I address the question of various “missing” literatures.

My disciplinary trajectory has been sufficiently wide-ranging to afford me a familiarity with various attempts to define how research should be carried out within a given discipline, without my feeling excessively constrained by such attempts. But my undergraduate education at Lancaster did include what Cruz describes as “mainstream” religious studies, for which he holds up the *Guide to the Study of Religion* (Braun and McCutcheon 2000) as a prime example. The religious studies department at Lancaster had been established in 1967 by Ninian Smart with such a model, one in which patterns of religious belief and practice are to be described and analyzed “scientifically,” without engaging in questions of truth, falseness, or normativity (though in Braun and McCutcheon’s more robust formulation, with a commitment to explanation in secular terms, falseness does indeed often seem to be implied). As an undergraduate eager to take advantage of the interdisciplinary opportunities at Lancaster I was also introduced to the history of philosophy, and to history itself—particularly the history of early modern religion, both elite and popular, and its complex relationship with popular culture and politics (as taught by Michael Mullett and Lee Beier) and with natural philosophy and science (John Hedley Brooke, Stephen Pumfrey). But much of my undergraduate study, for example in philosophy of religion (John Paul Clayton) and anthropology (Paul Heelas), was within a broadly mainstream religious studies frame—and increasingly focused on the relationship between religion and the environment. I stumbled across Hugh Montefiore’s *Man and Nature* (1975) in a second-hand book shop, and the die was cast; the rest of my dissertation-based Independent Studies Bachelors would be devoted to exploring the relationship between religion and the environmental *problematique*. I greedily fell on the existing literature, especially collections by Ian Barbour (1972), David and Eileen Spring (1974), Eugene Hargrove (1986), and monographs by Clarence Glacken (1967), Jürgen Moltmann (1985, among others), and H. Paul Santmire, especially the latter’s *Travail of Nature* (1985). This literature is not prominently referenced in *NTS* for the same reason that philosophical and theological reasoning is kept to a minimum: I imagined (however inaccurately) that this book’s primary audience would be my colleagues and peers in the sociology of environment and of technology, in respect of whom the main task would be to persuade them that

religious discourses are anything but a marginal possible object of (secular) study.

During my undergraduate studies, however, there also were dissenters against the mainstream religious studies approach at Lancaster, John Milbank chief among them, who argued that the discipline's critical potential in relation to contemporary cultural and political developments was being severely limited by this framing. Indeed, the internal contradictions within the "mainstream" approach to the study of religion are even evident—and acknowledged as such—within the very *Guide* that Cruz cites and quotes. Cruz, quoting Willi Braun, one of the editors and contributors, rightly suggests that the latter thinks that "the model for a good scholar of religion . . . is the one who works with 'entirely nonreligious concepts of religion'" (2006, 794). The *Guide* is indeed dominated by a secular agenda; Braun insists "that people make their gods who they then revere and fear" (Braun 2000, 13). The contributor William Arnal (2000, 26) quotes approvingly Clifford Geertz's (1966, 4) famous five-part definition of religion—without commenting on either its strangely cosmogonic character or its equal applicability to scientific modernity as to any nonsecular meaning system. Here, certainly, there is an ontological commitment that goes beyond the mere bracketing of *epoché* but asserts the primacy of the secular.

However, in the very passage from which Cruz quotes, Braun is in fact referring to Sam Gill's contribution to the *Guide*, which Braun cites as exploring the "ambiguities and conundrums" faced by a scholar taking such an approach (Braun 2000, 17). Arnal, in his article "Definition" in the *Guide*, is more explicit about the aporias within the mainstream religious studies approach, pointing out that the more resolutely an approach rejects substantialism—the definition of religion by reference to its distinctive internal features and its (supernatural) objects of reference—the harder it becomes to stabilize "religion" as an object of study. He thus draws attention to the curiously complementary nature of the weaknesses exhibited by substantive definitions of religion such as those of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade on the one hand (that they are vague and question-begging) and those of cultural functional definitions with their resolutely secular forms of explanation on the other (that they apply equally to phenomena that we would not call religious). He suggests that, "ironically, it is the *absence* of the very feature whose (indefinable and question-begging) *presence* is ruinous for substantivist definitions that turns out to be the central weakness of culturalist or functionalist definitions" (Arnal 2000, 28).

Ambiguities and conundrums indeed. It is a mistake to think that the religious can easily be stabilized and captured as an object of study through forms of secular explanation. But to say this is not to mark out the religious or sacral as something unique or privileged, or to claim the "reality" of the supernatural referents of religious statements; it is rather because of

the odd, oppositional semantic relationship between the concepts of the religious and the secular. The concept of religion, like that of “life” as analyzed by Ivan Illich (1992), emerged as the result of an extraordinary piece of cultural labor, a gathering together of a huge range of phenomena, ideas, and practices. And, similar to the grand biopolitical convening anatomized by Illich, this was a political event: “religion” was an immense othering performed by the emerging secular modernity, as Arnal (2000, 24) acknowledges. The very vagueness of the concept of religion does not point to the truth or even utility of a secular ontology. Instead, it should alert us to the fact that an act of power has taken place whereby, not for the first time, the world has been turned inside out; what was once a profane space within the world has become its circumference, and the vast and incommensurate panoply of beings, ontologies, and practices that once existed *outside* that space have been herded into the space called religion.

To be more precise in my terminology, I actually am far from unsympathetic to the idea that we need nonreligious concepts to understand religion—if we use that latter term in the classic sense to refer to the “Axial” world religions. I am more than happy to try to understand religion in that sense as a historically specific phenomenon, one best understood by reference to something more fundamental. However, this is not the same as saying that we need to, ought to, or can understand or explain religion by reference to merely secular realities, to some narrow understanding of “the facts of the world” (Steiner 2001, 16), because these secular facts are themselves dependent on atheological presuppositions. This is why I sought to represent religion as a particular constellation within what I called the transformations of “the sacred.” At the time I wrote the book I thought that this word was not much more than a placeholder, standing in for conceptualities to be worked through more thoroughly at some future date, which would allow me to do the more substantive work that I wanted to do in the book. DeLashmutt (2006, 803) is right to recall Foucault here—my orderings of the sacred are rather like the latter’s epistemes, but less focused on knowledge; similarly, they are like *Weltanschauungen*, or world-views, but without the scopic metaphor; like “cosmos” or “world,” but without the assumption of self-containedness. As I tried to make clear in the book, my use of “sacred” is thus different from the way it is used by Emile Durkheim and by most of the other theorists of the sacred discussed by Veikko Anttonen (2000). My “sacred” is not even really like that of Otto, either, pace Cruz: far from “assuming Otto’s notion of the sacred without any distancing” (Cruz 2006, 795), I treat the latter’s notion of *das heilige* as a specific religious figure with a very particular location in Western religious history. If anything, my “sacred” is more like that of Eliade in its inclusiveness and inescapability. But, whereas Eliade is indeed “cryptotheological” in a narrow sense, in that he smuggles a particular account of the sacred into his general model, for me there is no ahistorical *homo religiosus*

and no ahistorical transcendent reality of which we can have an apprehension, because of the intrinsically historical nature of human being-in-the-world.<sup>1</sup>

#### EXPLANATION, UNDERSTANDING, AND CRITIQUE

This last point can perhaps best be elucidated through a return to my biographical narrative in order to further explain my relationship with what Cruz describes as “mainstream” religious studies. A powerful current at Lancaster in the late 1980s and early 1990s was that of European social theory and culture critique. This became increasingly influential for me, partly because of the move to sociology to commence my Ph.D., which introduced me to European social theory, initially through the work of Jürgen Habermas, and partly because of the lively interdisciplinary discussion taking place at Lancaster under the aegis of the Centre for the Study of Cultural Values (CSCV). CSCV was a prominent feature of the intellectual life of Lancaster University at that time, with key animating figures including Scott Lash, John Urry, Paul Heelas, Paul Morris, Russell Keat, Nick Abercrombie, and Richard Roberts. The intellectual current which this conversation sustained and developed was broadly post-Marxist in its orientation and combined an engagement with key cultural, political, and ethical issues, particularly those raised by the neo-liberal revolution that was then sweeping the country, with a long and theoretically informed view on social and cultural change.

The concept of “modernity” was central to CSCV debates—not in the transient, indexical sense of up-to-dateness but as referencing a distinctive form of society and culture, and one that may be in the process of passing, or at least of entering a new phase. For some of us, questions of secularization and sacralization were central to those debates. Very much on the agenda, for example, were Löwith’s (1949) argument that modernity’s key cultural tropes such as linear, progressive time have Judeo-Christian roots and Blumenberg’s (1983) Nietzschean repost, in which the birth of the modern age represents a genuine philosophical rupture, if one that is obscured by a process of “reoccupation,” where the central metaphysical questions from one era survive illegitimately into the next and prompt people (wrongly) to seek answers to them in the latter era’s own terms. My own argument in *NTS*, of course, is closer to that of Löwith; but Blumenberg’s more sophisticated understanding of the sense in which concepts *can* be handed on from one era to another has made its mark on my thinking. As for Berger, he was a thinker who was even more influential on Lancaster debates, but I must admit that so far I have engaged with his work only in a cursory way.

The Lancastrian preoccupation with social theory provided me with an entry point into the dominant philosophical traditions of continental Europe, into a style of philosophical thought and writing that is less like the

problem-oriented approach favored by analytical philosophers (and it might be said by much social science)—the temporary setting up of camp around a specific intellectual problem in order to find the optimal solution—and more like an ongoing conversation about human being-in-the-world, which has no terminus because it alters its object, and in which to engage with any specific text is to engage with a whole emergent intertextual canon.<sup>2</sup> At the risk of oversimplification, it could be said that these two contrasting intellectual styles correspond to contrasting images of the human person. The first pictures the person as a self-contained subject of experience and cognition, more or less knowledgeable, with greater or lesser cognitive powers, but otherwise interchangeable; the other emphasizes the radically historical nature of human being, of identity and meaning—not just that we are *thrown* into history, that one's identity and understanding is shaped by the particular cultural context in which one finds oneself, but also that we *live* in history. "History" here is not just mere succession, a chronologically ordered collection of events, but the very mode of human existence. We are not just *constrained* by history; in history, in the receiving and the passing on of meaning, we find what it is to be human (see for example Gadamer 1975).

I am not alone in regarding G. W. F. Hegel as a central figure around whom I warily circle here, even more warily than I do Habermas. One could say that Hegel's insight was not only that thought is historical but also that history is in some sense thoughtful—that criticism is not the operation of a transcendent subject but a restless force within history itself. And one does not need to buy into Hegel's own ideas about the directionality—and the specific direction—of history to see the power and force of his insight. Cruz (2006, 796) criticizes me for overemphasizing understanding at the expense of explanation and thus compromising my claim to be social scientific. Whether one would label my work scientific depends on how narrowly one defines science. But remember that in Habermas's (1971) account, there are not just one or even two but *three* knowledge-constituting interests—explanation (in the nomothetic sense of discovering causal laws), understanding (in the sense of the hermeneutic exploration of meaning), and critique—and three corresponding forms of inquiry or science (in the broad, German sense of *Wissenschaften*). Certainly, insofar as my own work is social scientific, it is scientific more in the latter two senses of the word—and not solely because of the close relationship between the first, explanatory, form of inquiry and a technological world-relation interested solely in prediction and control. The task of critically discerning the sweep of history, of being open to its possibilities in the way that Kull (2006, 788) advocates, yet sensitive to its tensions and aporias, its potentials and dangers, the choices made and the paths not taken—this task, only ever provisionally and partially achieved, is at least as important at this time as causal, technical explanation. However, in one

sense I agree with Cruz that a neglect of causal relations can compromise genuine understanding of a phenomenon: A disdain for causal explanation can mask an unwillingness to engage with questions of ontology, agency, and critique. I would be unhappy for this to be thought of me, so perhaps I should indeed think more about the relationship between history and transformations in the sacred.

Is my project in some broad sense “cryptotheological”? If so, the encryption involved is certainly not very hard to break. Surely, since attempts to analyze religion in secular terms can do so only by hiding their theological assumptions, as Cruz himself muses, this charge must apply more accurately to *them*. There is no neutral observer, no innocent bystander in the interpretation and critique of culture. Therefore, to debate about the religious and its relation to “this” world is, like it or not, to enter into and take up positions within the grand, shifting conversation about human being that is in some sense intrinsic to human being. Braun, McCutcheon, and Arnal approvingly quote Jonathan Z. Smith’s insistence that the student of religion must be self-conscious in his or her concept formation. This finds an echo in my own work in the necessity I feel to be theological and sociological at the same time—so, for example, to speak of being, yet also to recognize that all specific locutions are mundane and historical, are conditioned by and reproduce this world. I recognize that there is an extraordinary tension between these two modes of thought. But the fault line between the two, between the finite and the infinite, is exactly the spot on which human being stands. So there is no alternative but to think within and through this tension rather than shirking it or seeking to overcome it.<sup>3</sup> It is only here that we have any chance of finding the “authentic” relation with nature and technology that DeLashmutt quotes me as calling for.

#### TECHNICS, CREATIVITY, AND HUMANITY

In his contribution to the book symposium, DeLashmutt makes some very interesting observations about the way that I approach technology in *NTS*. First, he suggests that I neglect the “power of the technological imagination” (2006, 806), arguing that technology holds a fascination for because in technical invention we get “a brief glimpse of divine creativity” (p. 806). Second, he suggests that I neglect the myth making that goes on around technology, citing science fiction in particular as a vehicle that society uses to reflect on the technological condition.

In relation to his first point, DeLashmutt cites the work of Friedrich Dessauer (1881–1963). Dessauer is certainly a fascinating figure, and I am grateful to DeLashmutt for reminding me of his work. In his *Philosophie der Technik* (1927) Dessauer sought to extend the Kantian framework with a fourth critique, a critique of technical objects based on ascertaining their transcendental preconditions (for a useful summary, see Mitcham 1994,



29–33). For Dessauer, the working out of a solution to a technical problem involves an encounter with technical things-in-themselves. The fact that technical objects work means that they are not simply dreamed up by the inventor but have some kind of necessity; they preexist their invention as noumenal entities in the mind of God.

I agree with Dessauer and DeLashmutt that any analysis of technology has to acknowledge the extraordinary power of modern technology to shape the world and that the phenomenon of modern technology breaches the epistemological divide that Kant erected between phenomena and noumena. Technological invention—and, I would say, the scientific form of knowing that is its twin—is indeed a religious experience, a divine calling. Dessauer’s extraordinary analysis nevertheless falls short, and does so in a way that makes him as much a datum to be placed by thinking as a resource to assist us in that thinking. Dessauer universalizes this particular understanding of human craft rather than recognizing its historical specificity.

Dessauer’s close relationship with Kant’s intellectual project is revealing. The Kantian revolution was a key hinge in Western ontology, the final working through of ideas developed by Duns Scotus in the fourteenth century. Duns Scotus’ rejection of Aquinas’ doctrine of analogy had profound implications: It made “being” prior to, rather than dependent on, God, and so put God on the same ontological plane as creation; but at the same time it made the epistemological gulf between them absolutely unbridgeable. We can see the final outworking of this move in Kant’s unknowable thing-in-itself and in his conception of God as so infinitely remote as to be irrelevant (Hyman 2001, 34–38). We also see the same potential divinization of human subjectivity that we see intensified in Dessauer. DeLashmutt is right to remind us of what Mitcham and Robert Mackey (1972, 4–5) call the anthropological approach to technology, in which an inquiry into the nature of technics is simultaneously an inquiry into the nature of the human. But we need to attend to the way that particular renderings of the human-technics relationship—and thus of the human—are situated in deeper, shifting patternings of ideas and practices in history.

Turning to DeLashmutt’s second challenge, I agree that I could have said much more in *NTS* about the way that, within what I call the post-modern sacred, traditionally religious questions are being pursued across the cultural landscape—in art, literature, music, popular science, and so on. And, certainly, science fiction literature, television, and film represent an important space in which questions about technology and human identity are being creatively explored, as DeLashmutt has shown in his own work. Yet I have a caveat about the way that DeLashmutt represents this, in terms of imagination as a human power. In the context of my narrative of the transformation of the sacred, the “imaginary” in this sense is a residual term created by the narrowing of reality into the secular, in a way

that parallels the creation of the category of “religion” described above. George Steiner, referenced by DeLashmutt, describes the darkness of the twentieth century, with its wars, genocides, and ecological destruction, as a loss of any sense of transcendence and hope, and explores the effect that this “eclipse of the messianic” (Steiner 2001, 7) is having on the “grammar” of experience. For millennia, language has provided a halo of tenses into which our experience and consciousness could expand from any simple brute facticity, with future tenses, subjunctives, optatives, and counterfactuals “circling in intricate fields of semantic force around a hidden centre or nucleus of possibility” (2001, 5). The world bristled with extra dimensions. (See, for example, Handelman 1991 on the way that ancient rabbis felt the ethical command pressing in on them from outside time, searched for the echoes of the pure language of the Torah in the world, and sought constellations of meaning between past, present, and future.)

But the contemporary eclipse of the messianic “presses on the future tense” (2001, 8), compressing it onto a time axis stripped of any such extra dimensions. In such a context, the nonempirical becomes merely a picture of a possible future, a representation without a referent, something fictional, imaginary. Indeed, Steiner argues, there is a sense in which it is the technological attitude that has reordered our understanding of time in this way, flattening out a sense of its creativity and openness. In the medieval world, it was the *world* that contained depths of meaning, was a text to be endlessly glossed; now, meaning is seen as created by the *subject*, putting emphasis on the power of the individual imaginer. In a world reduced to the mere empirical, everything else is imagination. One of the greatest science fiction writers of the twentieth century, Philip K. Dick, started to recognize this—that the reduction of his work to the category of “fiction” was in some sense an error; that his extended meditations on the idea that the world as experienced may be a grand deception may in some sense have been “true” (see Carrere 2005). Like religion as famously portrayed by Karl Marx, perhaps science fiction is only necessary, indeed only possible, because of our darkened condition. If we had not made the world we live in so small, we would not have thought it possible or necessary to create other ones alongside it.

#### FUTURE CHALLENGES

I close with three challenges that have increasingly struck me as important and promising since the publication of *NTS* and that have become clearer through engaging with the contributions from Kull, Cruz, and DeLashmutt.

The first challenge, more philosophical or ontological in character, concerns how we live with things, particularly those things that we make or with which we make things happen. In *NTSI* focus on a particular story about technology, one caught up with Western religious history and imagi-

naries. But DeLashmutt is right to point out that there is much more to say about the human relationship with technicity—stories that are far more general in their relevance to the nature of human being-in-the-world than the dreams of Western peoples to escape finitude and contingency. There are of course many resources to draw on here. Mitcham's work, which DeLashmutt rightly promotes, I have already mentioned; also crucial of course are the phenomenological approaches to technical mediation offered by Martin Heidegger (1967) and Don Ihde (1990), and the semiotic approaches to technical objects and the relationships between them developed by Jean Baudrillard (1996), Bruno Latour (1993), and others. In chapter 4 of *NTSI* I was able to do little more than scout out this general area. As Kull and DeLashmutt acknowledge, since then I have at least started to develop my thinking in relation to such questions (Szerszynski 2006), but there is far more that can be done to combine the insights offered by the philosophy of technology with a historical approach to the sacred in ways that address Kull's questions (2006, 789) about how we should exercise care and responsibility for our creations.

A second major challenge is that of being more practical. In the book I went some way in the direction of application, particularly in Part III, but this path could productively be taken much further, as DeLashmutt notes (2006, 804). This should not just involve a deeper appreciation of the historically constituted nature of any particular understanding of nature and/or technology but also offer resources for the making of judgments about technological and environmental developments. In terms of Habermas's three forms of inquiry mentioned above, here the analysis would move away from understanding toward critique, from the descriptive and interpretive to the normative—but in a way that was consistent with a historical approach, which interprets and evaluates particular developments by locating them within wider tectonic cultural shifts. The next step would seem to be to focus on particular controversies around technology and the environment in order to show how the kind of analysis promoted in *NTS* might help to steer a course through them.

The third challenge is to expand my analysis to include parts of the world that have been shaped by quite different religious traditions. Cruz is right to hint at this but surely misses the point when he makes the charge that my conception of the sacred is too "Western, Eurocentric, and even WASP" (2006, 795). My book seeks to expose the cultural specificity of what are generally taken to be universal truths about nature and technology, and about the human relationship with both. My focus on European religious traditions is centrally implied by my analysis of modern ideas of nature and technology, since this analysis involves tracing the particular cultural path that has shaped them. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that my project is one that seeks to *expose* Eurocentricity, to make us more aware of the deeply European renderings of nature and technology

that are routinely projected onto other cultural contexts, in repeated moments of intercultural misunderstanding. But although I would entirely defend the book's Western focus, the task of de-particularizing the mode of analysis of *NTS* is one that I would relish in the future. For example, China and India seem to be particularly fertile territory for this kind of analysis, given the extraordinarily rapid processes of (post-)industrialization that are currently happening in parts of these countries, not least as they seek to compete with Europe and North America in various areas of innovation and new technology. The prediction here would be that the analytical approach of *NTS* would be highly productive but that the book's specific narrative, the "long arc" of institutional monotheism, would not fit, requiring the development of quite different narratives of the sacred's transformation and quite different approaches to the immanent critique of history and civilization. Similarly, the cultures and cosmologies of small-scale indigenous cultures in areas as far-flung as Canada, Amazonia, and East Asia are being culturally recoded as "ecological," as a result of complex dialectics between the political interests and cultural narratives of social groups in the global north and global south. There, too—in the "minority" traditions of the world—lie some fascinating challenges for any comparable analysis to that carried out in *NTS*.

So, if *NTS* is stimulating debate, I am pleased. And if this debate generates an agenda for greater exploration and synthesis, I am even more pleased. Anne Kull, Eduardo Cruz, and Michael DeLashmutt have helped to open up some new paths to be cleared and explored as part of this agenda, and for this I am very grateful.

#### NOTES

1. So, lurking behind the broadly relativist cast of my approach to ontology is a more fundamental commitment to a historical view of being (see Scott 2006).
2. Thanks are due to David Littlewood, conversations with whom have, as so often, helped me to clarify this point.
3. There are echoes here of Aquinas's doctrine of the analogical relation between divine and creaturely being.

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