

Drees's What Are the Humanities For?

with Peter Harrison, "Defining and Defending the Humanities"; Michael Ruse, "Willem Drees on the Humanities"; Douglas F. Ottati, "Theology among the Human Humanities"; Lisa L. Sienmark, "Who are the Humanities For? Decolonizing the Humanities"; Donald L. Drakeman, "Some Second Thoughts about the Humanities"; and Willem B. Drees, "The Coherence and Character of the Humanities: A Reply to Critics."

THEOLOGY AMONG THE HUMAN HUMANITIES

by Douglas F. Ottati

Abstract. This essay indicates how theology of a certain sort may contribute to the "human humanities" as Willem B. Drees understands them, but also that there is no single entirely satisfactory solution to the question of how to give due attention to the intensely self-involving character of plural religions. The best we can do is to undertake theology, religious studies, and philosophy of religion in proximity to one another. This helps to maintain the sense that, in the humanities generally and the study of religion specifically, we not only develop comparative and disciplined reflections that aspire to a measure of neutrality, but also invite persons to undertake inherently self-involving and reflexive inquiries, including theological ones.

Keywords: humanities; philosophy of religion; religious studies; theology

Neil Postman wrote in 1992 that "modern secular education is failing" largely because it does not "put forward a clear vision of what constitutes an educated person, unless it is a person who possesses 'skills.' In other words, a technocrat's ideal—a person with no commitment and no point of view but with plenty of marketable skills." He concluded by advocating the image of a "resistance fighter," who might rescue humanistic education by promoting a noncommercial and nontechnical conversation with historic texts, ideas, and artworks, while refusing to believe that efficiency is the pre-eminent goal (Postman 1992, 181–89). More recently, a former dean of Harvard College bemoans an overwhelming drive toward specialization in the sprawling modern research university that forgets how to educate human beings (Lewis 2006, xii, 255). Another commentator

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emphasizes pressures toward education to profession and immediate economic utility that undercut liberal arts education, neglect existential questions, and lead colleges to turn out elite graduates who disproportionately choose to work for consulting firms and investment banks (Deresiewicz 2014, 16, 18–20).

The complaints vary, but they share certain judgments. (1) Increasingly, the point of education has become to equip people to make money in a commercial technocratic environment dominated by business degrees and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). (2) The education of persons to a meaningful life (or “a life worth living”) falls by the wayside. (3) This is bad news for liberal arts, and especially for the humanities.

These critiques come from Americans who, partly due to the history of higher education in the United States, often worry about the future of liberal arts colleges that emphasize the “general education” of “the whole person.” *What Are the Humanities For?* emerges from a different context. Willem Drees is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy of Humanities and former dean of the School of Humanities at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. Founded as the Roman Catholic University of Commerce in 1927, Tilburg University is now a public university that emphasizes economics, business, law, and social and behavioral sciences, and also includes a school of theology. By training, Drees is a physicist and a theologian, and he previously has served as a professor of philosophy of religion, ethics, and theology, as well as dean of a faculty of theology and religious studies.

This helps to explain why he does not focus on liberal arts and general education, and why he makes more use of theology and religious studies than do most other accounts of the humanities. As a theologian in a religious studies department in the humanities division of an American liberal arts college, I find Drees’s book especially interesting. My aims here are to review salient features of his approach, and then suggest how theology of a certain sort may appreciate and contribute to human humanities.

HUMAN HUMANITIES

Like his inaugural lecture at Tilburg, Drees’s book offers an account of the intrinsic worth of the humanities even as it explores their relevance for other endeavors (Drees 2015). He argues that, in “human humanities,” people study the self-understandings of persons and communities that come to expression in texts, practices, institutions, and so on. These self-understandings, he maintains, also include understandings of self-in-the-world, and so qualify as worldviews, or models that bring together ideas about who we are, what there is, and how we should act. The humanities are human, then, not only because disciplines, such as literary

studies, history, and religious studies, explore human self-understandings, but also because we humans are the ones who engage in these explorations.

This last point indicates the humanities are inherently *self-reflective or reflexive*. The objects studied articulate human understandings of self and world and, at an existential level, those of us who study them are also persons trying to understand ourselves and our world. Thus, political structures, novels, religious traditions, family systems, and so on express and imply understandings of what people are and how they behave (and ought to behave). In effect, they make proposals for how you and I might understand ourselves as agents in our world too. This is why it is difficult to keep the objects of study in the humanities at arm's length. As we study them, we become involved not only in describing what is being proposed but also in estimating how it compares with our own views, practices, and commitments, and whether we find it serviceable, helpful, or even true. This is the deep root of Drees's argument for the noninstrumental value of the humanities: reflecting on ourselves and our world, who we are and what we should do, is part and parcel of being human.

Consider what may happen in a class studying the calling of physicians as outlined by the seventeenth-century Puritan Richard Baxter. Baxter claims the physician's specific line of responsibility before God and neighbor, is "the saving of men's lives and health." This responsibility requires strength of intellect, rigorous training, and considerable experience with the practice of able physicians. Baxter claims too that, in order to discharge their calling faithfully, physicians need to keep in mind the public good, help those who are unable to pay as well as those who can, and, where a case requires skills beyond their own, refer patients to abler physicians if there are any to be had. Otherwise, we judge that another aim, for example, accumulating wealth or furthering one's own professional reputation, has displaced the saving of persons' lives and health (1990, 771–72).

Might a student considering medical school today find this portrait helpful or even true? Why or why not? How might she modify it to fit her circumstances? How might a contemporary student of public policy understand Baxter's remarks? How might a citizen? The degrees and qualities of existential self-involvement with the objects studied ordinarily differ from classes in the sciences, for example, chemistry.

This illustration might also form part of an argument for the relevance of the humanities for those entering the medical profession. Though, if it does, that is because, lurking within it, is the more general existential and moral dimension mentioned above.

INTERPRETATIVE TASKS AND PROFESSIONS

Drees details important parallels between humanities studies and professions concerning "how to live with interpretations." His main point is

that humanities scholars often interpret texts from other eras, for example, Homer's *Odyssey*, Shakespeare's plays, and that the interpretative challenges they encounter when doing so are significant for other enterprises as well. Indeed, there is, in both biblical and general literary studies, a long history of modes and styles of interpretation that remains relevant when we consider contemporary questions of how to interpret texts that, in some fashion, continue to guide our own communities.

For example, the "originalist" strand in the interpretation of the U.S. constitution associated with Antonin Scalia can be illumined by considering the history of how Christian communities interpret the continuing relevance of the Bible. The turn to religion suggests that originalism has affinities with fundamentalism, but also that modern readings of canonical texts, which place high value on what the texts may have meant to those who formulated them, is the exception to the rule. Traditionally, religious communities have engaged in allegorical interpretations. They have engaged in selective readings that distinguish between core and peripheral texts (say between the Sermon on the Mount and specific passages in Leviticus) in accord with theological ideas (such as the Christological assumption that Jesus is the moral law's greatest interpreter). They also have reread scriptures through the lens of an authoritative oral tradition, for example, hadith alongside the Qur'an, or determinations of an authoritative teaching office, for example, the papacy. Fundamentalism, says Drees, which emerges only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, arises as a voice against too much flexibility in the interpretations of texts. What we find in living religious traditions, then, is a tension between the authority of texts and their continuing relevance for contemporary believers and, says Drees, a similar tension emerges when it comes to tasks of legal interpretation (2021, 138–39).

Consider the difference between interpretations we find academically and historically correct, and current appropriations of texts and their meanings by those who continue a community of conviction in changing circumstances. Drees quotes approvingly that the aims of the cleric differ from "those of the intellectual historian who simply wants to reconstruct the original meaning of obscure passages in old treatises" (2021, 142). Church theologians interpret past texts and practices in ways that may continue to guide a community of lifestyle and conviction in changing circumstances, and this leads to diversities of interpretations.

How, then, does legal interpretation take into account new developments and changing circumstances? Drees says two jobs need to be distinguished. The task of the judicial system is to apply existing laws, "whereas the political process is free to set laws, abolish them, change them and so on" in accord with changing circumstances and moral intuitions. The legislative process is one in which neither originalism nor textualism (the conviction that one should appeal only to an historic text itself rather than

to other sources) is appropriate. Legislatively, we do not want neutrality about laws as they have been written so much as determinations of how to make laws that express “ideals of good social order” (Drees 2021, 143). Here, as in the case of interpretations offered by theologians, we enter into the business of developing the identity of one’s community by interpreting the resources available in one’s own time. This task is not haphazard, it entails critical reflection, and it may also take scholarly reflections into account. But the essential task is not a matter of neutral scholarship; it is existential and constructive. The cleric and the theologian, like the legislator, are engaged in continual reinterpretations within living traditions. They are furthering and constructing normative worldviews.

Drees concludes, “even if there are good reasons for textualism and originalism in legal interpretation and historical scholarship, these do not carry over into living religion and living law,” since the latter “are always in process.” The better analogue for constructive reinterpretation within living religious traditions is political and legislative processes that involve persons’ political preferences, rather than “a legal interpretation that aspires to be neutral and predictable” (Drees 2021, 144). Indeed, fundamentalist and/or originalist misunderstandings arise when religious traditions are treated apart from a distinction corresponding to the one between political and legal systems. In both instances, practitioners and professionals have a different role from scholars who want only to reconstruct the original meaning, though the professionals can be scholarly too, for example, Thomas Aquinas, and they clearly also can learn from those scholars who aspire to neutrality.

YES ... BUT: THE USEFULNESS OF THE HUMANITIES

Now for a related question. Are the humanities useful for commerce and society? Drees’s answers take the form of “yes ... but.”

Yes, “business interests make some of the humanities very useful,” for example, language skills for international business. There are also local economies, for example, “Leiden, a Dutch university town,” replete “with museums, publishers, translation services, specialized travel agents, services for design and editing and many more small businesses that have their roots in humanities scholarship” (Drees 2021, 177). *Yes*, humanities programs may train people in the basic skills, cultural agility, and critical thinking needed by employers when existing jobs change and new jobs emerge. Drees also reviews arguments for the broader usefulness of the humanities based in more complex notions of what a society is. *Yes*, the humanities may contribute “an ethics of reading,” including how to select and interpret texts, that is relevant for many professions, including law. *Yes*, the humanities may contribute the critical acumen needed to interpret worldviews, religious beliefs, and so on that impinge upon issues of

cultural diversity and inclusion, as well as issues of environmental policy (Drees 2021, 180).

But arguments for the humanities within the contexts of business and policy agendas do not do complete justice to the humanities as such. “Speaking of ‘products of research’ or ‘deliverables’ evokes the image of things that are countable, portable, and marketable.” The language of “knowledge production” evokes visions of the factory and “a pipeline from invention to application.” These images diminish exploratory and creative dimensions of humanities scholarship and research. *But* “the language of ‘innovation’” also has weaknesses. “What about care, curation for our heritage? What about criticism, challenging, raising questions, undermining answers?” Indeed, the language of “public value” itself suggests something singular, measurable, and quantifiable, but speaking of “plural ‘values’ would evoke a deeper sense of pluralism, and perhaps even incommensurability across domains.” It might also suggest “the impossibility of ever completing what it means to be human” (Drees 2021, 181–82).

Yes, the humanities enrich culture. *But* we need to avoid “conflating the significance of literature, music, and art with scholarship” about them. Do we need the humanities to make sense of the cultural contributions of musicians and writers? Might humanities scholarship sometimes get in the way of enjoying a painting or a piece of music? *Yes*, intellectual attention in the study of music, literature, art, or other facets of culture opens us to new ways of experiencing; it offers us alternative perspectives on the legacies of the past, and so on. *But* historical claims about linguistic purity and artistic forms “may also be used by nationalistic politics or identity politics” to draw boundaries that exclude and demean. Again, we need to counter overly limited attention to Western art and literature. We need to see the domain of the humanities as much broader and more pluralistic with an awareness “of the many inhomogeneities and [the] diversity of diversities within human existence” (Drees 2021, 183, 184).

Drees comments too on Martha C. Nussbaum’s claim in *Not for Profit* that democracy needs the empathy, critical thinking, and ability to engage in civil disagreement and discourse that a humanities education provides (Nussbaum 2010). *Yes*, this seems so, and in the past several years the need for well-informed citizens in the United States who can evaluate the merits of arguments and ideas has only become more acute. *But* we should recognize contributions of *all* citizens. Consider the moral and critical contributions of economists, such as Amartya Sen, to questions of inequality and social justice, or contributions to political discourse made from disciplinary domains, such as environmental studies. Moreover, just as “an ethicist need not be particularly ethical,” mere “competence in the humanities need not deliver the political goods intended.” Humanities scholars may become bogged down in battles “over methods and worldviews,” some may also adopt excessively skeptical demeanors. All of which leads Drees

to conclude that, though intellectual and personal habits typical of the humanities may be conducive to democracy, the argument that “*democracy needs the humanities*” might be an overstatement.” Again, “accessible and stimulating primary and secondary education are far more important” for democracy “than academic humanities, though the humanities may contribute to the quality of such education” (Drees 2021, 185–86).

AN APPROPRIATE AMBIVALENCE

How can the dean of a school of humanities admit so freely to ambiguities surrounding arguments for their instrumental usefulness? Does he not realize that the humanities are in crisis and therefore need all the help they can get?

Some may fault Drees for failing to grasp the seriousness and the urgency of the crisis because he underestimates how thoroughly and perniciously the pressures toward commercial utility undercut the humanities. Where, for example, are the resistance fighters? Perhaps they will conclude that Drees’s less strident tone reflects a difference in context. After all, compared to many European societies, the erosion of education by acids of commerce in the United States seems especially intense.

Sympathetic as I am to this fundamental concern, I do not think the criticism holds. For one thing, the “yes ... but” style of responding to arguments for the humanities’ usefulness is grounded in Drees’s claim that the self-reflexive character of humanistic studies is endemic to our existential human quest for self-understanding. Beyond any instrumental usefulness they may have, the humanities therefore also have intrinsic worth for being human. Drees also recognizes that, in humanities scholarship, the quest for self-understanding rises to disciplinary heights concerned with methods of inquiry, identifying and comparing historical patterns in human self-understandings, and exploring peculiar (not to say apparently trivial) instances and expressions. That is to say Drees’s ambivalence about the instrumental use of the humanities is an appropriate one borne of a keen understanding of human reasoning and a conviction about human living.

Disciplinary heights in the humanities are due partly to the fact that, as the philosopher Peter Singer argues in another context, “reason is like an escalator—once we step on it, we cannot get off until we have gone where it takes us.” Thus, “an ability to count can be useful, but it leads by a logical process to the abstractions of higher mathematics that have no direct evolutionary payoff” (Singer 2006, 146). Similarly, as we compare different human practices, ideas, and texts, the quest for human self-understanding leads humanities studies to methods and abstractions that have no direct commercial, social, and political payoffs. As Drees points out, “we need teachers who can train people to analyze well and express

themselves clearly and eloquently,” but training people to do these things makes teachers “raise questions about methods and criteria, and thus questions of a more academic nature.” Or again, “if we want good teachers, they will need to have a broader basis than the immediate knowledge they need to have at their disposal in everyday practice ... they need not only to acquire professional skills, but also a broader academic habitus and knowledge” (Drees 2021, 187).

This realization, based in an appreciation for the dynamics of human reasoning, is profoundly true, even if some educational institutions seem structured in ways that subvert it. Moreover, that Drees can insist on the importance of a broader habitus and knowledge without demeaning the acquisition of skills and arguments for utility is one reason why his book is both interesting and good. (After all, as the economist Thorstein Veblen indicated in 1899, some cases for the humanities are elitist and classist; Veblen 2006, 93–103.) Another is that he never loses sight of the idea that “doing humanities is intrinsic to humans” and that, therefore, the humanities have value “for their own sake.” The humanities interest us and seem worthwhile because they are of a piece with the kind of reflective understanding, judgment, and effort involved in living a life. For some, this “self-reflection may take the form of curiosity about particular languages, histories, cultures, and religions.” Others look for comparative patterns, examine historical artifacts, and “engage in dialogue across cultural distances of various kinds” (Drees 2021, 188). The many levels of and forays into self-reflection indicate that “it is our nature” to be self-reflective. We communicate and we have cultures, but we also reflect on communication and revise and devise our cultures. In this sense, the humanities participate in a mode or sort of reflection that humans need in order to live well.

THE PROBLEMATIC STUDY OF RELIGION

Drees recognizes that self-involvement “is particularly pronounced in theology and philosophy.” The latter has a (somewhat peculiar) place within the humanities because its argumentative reflections help us to evaluate convictions and practices. But religions are themselves matters of identity, belief, and practice. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz says, they offer symbols that establish moods and motivations and formulate a worldview or conception of a general order of existence (Drees 2021, 61, 67, 71). How shall we reflect with and about them?

Traditionally, theology as the intellectual articulation of Christian piety and believing, thinks with a specific religious community. It serves *catechesis*, or the education of converts and the young; it also becomes essential when theological disputes erupt. Over time, however, universities in circumstances of religious plurality have come to favor religious neutrality. The father of liberal theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher, who lived

in a Europe sharply divided between Catholics and Protestants, proposed a solution that continues to influence universities in Germany. Christian theology became concerned chiefly, not with metaphysical discourse about God, but with furthering the self-understandings of Christian communities. It interpreted “the fundamental life-orientation of believers,” and was housed in professional schools of divinity rather than schools of humanities as such (Drees 1996, 42–43, 2021, 73–79).

The more neutral comparative study of religion sprouted from the soil of liberal Protestantism. It thinks about religions, and it looks for patterns as it approaches religious texts that “show different ways of interpreting one’s life” (Drees 2021, 83). It therefore tries to reflect on affectively charged and self-involving dimensions of theology without the interest in furthering a specific community’s self-understanding. Not surprisingly, then, we sometimes find paeans to the existential significance of the study of religion, for example, Elaine Pagels’ *Why Religion? A Personal Story*, though these may conflate insider self-understandings of academic inquirers with existential dimensions of living traditions (Pagels 2018; Drees 2021, 86). Recently, yet another field, the philosophy of religion, tries to mediate between the insider perspective of believers and theologians and the (outsider?) perspective of empirically and historically oriented researchers. But Drees notes that this too has been criticized. An Indian scholar of Hinduism contends that, in a Western academic context, historical and social-scientific methods give less than adequate attention to the claims of Hinduism “to reveal important truths about the nature of reality that are essential for human well-being and to the evaluative and normative implications of such claims” (Rambachan 2016; Drees 2021, 87, 371). I should add that these methods sometimes have similar shortcomings when it comes to understanding Christian claims.; Drees notes further that attempts at limiting ourselves to a neutral discourse in the study of religion encounter significant problems, as they do also when we consider public moral discourse in pluralist societies. Indeed, efforts to exclude particular identities and their insider languages are “not adequate to human nature” (2021, 92). How to give due attention to the intensely self-involving (and, I would say, explicitly theological) character of plural religions? My own judgment is that, at present, there is no single entirely satisfactory solution. Accordingly, let me outline a humanist strand in theology, and then say how we may muddle through with some current institutionalizations of religious studies.

A HUMANIST STRAND IN THEOLOGY

There are approaches to theology that do not promise problematic neutrality and may also be more or less at home with Drees’s human humanities. For example, the sixteenth-century Protestant, John Calvin, whose

training was in humanities, and who applied much of it (via Erasmus and others) to his biblical commentaries, begins his major theological treatise this way. “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern” (Calvin 1960, 35).

Calvin’s “Christian philosophy” is a relational theological vision in which knowledge of self and of God correlate, and that deepens and extends a heartfelt way or manner in life (1960, 6). Thus, in relation to God as Creator, we humans are seen to be good and limited creatures with distinctive capacities to deliberate, feel, and act. We are envisioned as chronically corrupted sinners in relation to God as Judge, and, in relation to God as Redeemer, we are seen as beneficiaries of redeeming and renewing grace.

There is no need here to outline Calvin’s entire theology. For him, the ancient injunction, “Know thyself,” should be paired with another, “Know God.” This is the fulcrum of his Christian humanism, and what makes the self- and world-understanding that he presents explicitly theological. Moreover, Calvin views the arts and sciences as God’s good gifts. These are to be cultivated, he says, and their excellent exercises appreciated, whether among secular or religious writers (1960, 273–75). Their fundamental aim is to honor and give thanks to God, who is the source of all things, including truth and goodness. This, in fact, is the chief calling of human life, whether we are worshipping, practicing medicine, studying rhetoric, or what-have-you.

Here, we glimpse the idea that education, as the cultivation of the distinctive gifts and abilities of persons, has intrinsic worth for humans. Its value extends beyond commercial utility and even classical ideas about the formation of free citizens. Education has value for living a genuine and worthwhile human life before God. Drees’s idea of the human humanities surely does not emerge simply or even primarily from Calvin’s theology; its roots extend in many directions. But there are important affinities.

This is the specific theological tradition developed in a forthrightly hermeneutical fashion by Friedrich Schleiermacher. Indeed, it is possible to regard him as an early exponent of a broadly experiential approach that extends back to Calvin’s emphasis on true religion and piety, forward in a variety of directions, and that also wants to appropriate and develop an affectively charged and historic Christian view of God, self, and world. In any case, with the help of something like Geertz’s understanding of religious moods and worldviews, this seems a promising approach to theology. Religious symbols and theological language point toward the divine at the same time that they both shape and express the lives and views of believers. The task of a church theologian, then, is to deepen, extend, and reinterpret the affectively charged piety and theological vision of a particular religious community in order to help express and guide the contemporary

self-understandings and lives of its members in changing circumstances (Ottati 2020, 46–56).

Now the word *theology* is not neutral. It has a particular history in the west and some especially developed meanings within Christianity. Should we add a further meaning—the normative appropriation and construction of religious worldviews? Should we deploy the several terms that different religious communities use to speak of the continuing business of formulating and interpreting their teachings, for example, midrash, hadith?

In any case, this expansive understanding theology (and its analogues) fits with Drees's understanding of the task of theologians. What the cleric (and/or theologian) does in a living religious tradition is analogous to what the political process does within a living constitutional tradition. Moreover, just as there are reasons to distinguish what judges do as they interpret and apply the law and what the political process does as it extends and devises a community's laws in the light of current knowledge and circumstances, so there are reasons to distinguish the jobs of humanities scholars and theologians. For Schleiermacher, this meant placing the study of theology at the university, rather like the study of law, in a distinct professional school or faculty. But if the ways in which religious studies are institutionalized reflect distinctions between the tasks of theologians and humanities scholars, they also need to reflect the interrelationships.

Humanities scholars in departments of religious studies explore diverse articulations and expressions of the self-understandings and worldviews of religious persons and communities in texts, practices, etc. They look for patterns, frame comparisons, and so on, and they deploy and devise methods and ideas that help them to do so. As they do these things, the escalator of human reasoning takes them to (occasionally abstract) disciplinary heights.

Theologians explore diverse expressions of the self-understandings and worldviews of persons and communities in the texts and practices of a particular religious tradition. They do not aim at neutral understandings or comparisons of religious worldviews, so much as a normative reinterpretation and extension in the present of a specific tradition and its worldview. To do so, they explore patterns and compare different expressions within their particular religious tradition. They look for relationships with contemporary knowledge and sensibilities, and they employ and devise methods. Often, they also make use of humanities scholarship in the form of religious studies and/or other inquiries. And, as they do these things, the escalator of human reasoning takes them from catechesis to (occasionally abstract) disciplinary heights.

But note important overlaps. A theologian may find herself making use of one or another comparative study or even theory of religion developed by humanities scholars. Humanities scholars who study the self-understandings and worldviews of religious communities have a strong

interest in examining just how these self-understandings and worldviews come to be appropriated, revised, and developed. That is, they have an interest in the dynamics of normative and constructive theologizing.

In fact, without an extensive acquaintance with what we may call the dynamics of the constructive and normative theological task, the accuracy and vitality of the study of religions in the humanities may suffer. Why? Because it will risk holding its objects of study too thoroughly at arm's length, and so losing its inherently self-reflective or reflexive dimension. Where this comes to pass, something is missing, and perhaps we should expect to see strong emphases on two apparently opposite things: (1) the instrumental utility of religious studies for commerce, culture, and politics, and (2) the personal importance of a somewhat eclectic "religionism" for the self-understandings of some humanities scholars.

CURRENT INSTITUTIONALIZATIONS

Suppose, then, we envision something other than a clean progression from theology to religious studies and beyond. Distinctions still matter. A religious studies scholar qua religious studies scholar is not a theologian, and she therefore is delivered from the explicitly normative and constructive task of furthering the worldview and existential identity of a specific religious community. A theologian qua theologian is not a religious studies scholar, and he therefore is free to pursue the relatively independent, existential, and normative task of formulating a particular theology (Ottati 2107, 136–37). But there are reasons to think it may be helpful for these tasks be undertaken *in proximity* to one another, and occasionally, perhaps even by the same person.

Divinity schools educate religious professionals. Given the escalator of human reasoning, they also spawn theologians who advance normative worldviews, or pictures of God and ourselves in the light of contemporary knowledge and circumstances. Those who teach in these schools need this additional layer of discipline and complexity in order to teach well. For this reason, they also may benefit from proximity to the humanities and social and natural sciences, including the comparative studies of religious traditions, their texts, and practices that characterize religious studies and other elements of a broader humanities program.

Even so, some rather important questions must be faced, and more than one divinity school has faced or is facing them. Should these schools include religious professionals and theologians who identify with different faiths or religious traditions? Will multiple religious communities care to participate in such institutions, or will they regard them as hegemonic expressions of Western sensibilities? Should divinity schools include religious studies scholars together with theologians and students of ministry? Should they try instead to relate to a department of religious studies within

the broader humanities division of the university? Shall they morph into outsized religious studies departments that exclude ministries students?

Again, the theologies formulated and constructed by professors in divinity schools necessarily will make and explore proposals for understanding humans as agents in the world. These theologies, in turn, may be compared with other worldviews, and they will lead those who study them to review their own self-understandings, views, practices, and commitments. This unabashedly self-involving and constructive aspect of theological studies is a reason to associate them with professional clerical training. But it also may be a reason why a broader humanities program will covet proximity to departments of theology maintained by divinity schools.

Similar things may be said about theology, religious studies, philosophy of religion, and human humanities in the context of liberal arts colleges that do not include professional schools—especially those that mean to educate the whole person in a manner that keeps in touch with existential questions and worldviews. Here, too, the *proximities* needed to keep theology and religious studies both informed and honest about their self-involving, insider, and critical dimensions as well as their dependence on other intellectual endeavors, may be enhanced by departments that *mix* theologians with practitioners of religious studies. Indeed, given the broad meaning I should like to give to *theology*, two of my most theologically inclined colleagues, are a Muslim who self-identifies as a Sufi and a Hindu economist who specializes in developing economies. (By extension, departments of language and literature may benefit by mixing in occasional novelists and poets, or by maintaining vibrant relationships with departments of theatre. Political science departments may benefit from proximity to philosophers, journalists, and politicians who aim to advance specific trajectories in politics.)

CONCLUSION

At many contemporary colleges and universities in pluralist settings, there may be no consistent and untroubled way to institutionalize theology, religious studies, philosophy of religion, and the humanities. But institutional proximities can help to maintain the sense that, in the human humanities generally and religious studies in particular, we not only develop comparative and occasionally abstract reflections that aspire to measures of neutrality, for example, models of text interpretation, or models of religious leadership. We also invite persons to undertake inherently self-involving and reflexive inquiries, including theological ones, that resist reductive neutralities and instrumentalities, and that contribute to the education/formation of the whole person in a meaningful life.

I do not know whether Drees himself will agree with this or with the other ways I have interpreted and developed some of his ideas. But the

more important point is that his *What Are the Humanities For?* can call forth extended and diverse responses from a variety of disciplinary quarters. At a time when the humanities are in crisis and religious studies are confused, it deserves a wide and serious readership.

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