"On Dupré's Passage to Modernity"

Peter J. Casarella, *DePaul University*
INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Marc Ouellet, Francis D. Kelly
Brian E. Daley, Livio Melina
Ignace de la Potterie, Robin Darling Young
Agnes Cunningham, Angelo Scola

also in this issue:

A joint statement: “A civilization of love: The pope’s call to the West”

Raymond Gawronski
Only the unique really dies: Hans Urs von Balthasar
and the uniqueness of the Word

Pawel Goralczyk
The formation of an attitude of ecological responsibility

Peter Casarella
On Dupré’s Passage to Modernity

Retrieving the Tradition

Charles Péguy
On the mystery of hope
Notes and Comments

On Duprè’s Passage to Modernity

It is no longer provocative to contend that modern culture has exalted the role of rational objectivity, moral tolerance, and individual choice in an absolutist fashion. Nowadays anyone who attempts to diagnose the spiritual and intellectual state of Western culture can hardly allow the narrow identification of the real with the objectifiable, progress with the advance of technology, and freedom of speech and action with detachment from tradition and social communion to remain unquestioned. To some it may even seem surprising that any new light could be shed on the matter. Passage to Modernity, however, offers vast erudition and genuine philosophical wisdom that is increasingly rare in contemporary debates about modern culture. Louis Duprè’s account of the cultural passage to the modern world is a comprehensive analysis of a complex matrix of social, religious, scientific, and artistic forces. The sweeping scope and potential contribution of its vision compare favorably with such influential works as Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Truth and Method, Hans Blumenberg’s The Legitimacy of the Modern Age, and Alasdair MacIntyre’s After Virtue.

Whereas our contemporaries juxtapose handy but non-informative categories like “pre-modern,” “modern,” and “post-modern,” Duprè goes to the very roots of the current cultural crisis. Little in Duprè’s narrative qualifies as original historical research. Its merit lies rather in the synthetic vision of the distinct patterns of thought that are all too homogeneously thought of as “modernity.” The synthesis which he offers could be labeled metaphysical, although he himself shrinks from an overconfidence that existing philosophical systems are not already allied uncritically to the same presuppositions that have made modern thought problematic. Rather than proposing an instant remedy, his work challenges us to “explore how the fragments we are left with may serve as building blocks for a future synthesis” (7).

Two fundamental hypotheses guide the inquiry: that the modern self-understanding took shape in a basically two-step process and that the effect of these transformations was to reconfigure the relations between reality’s “transcendent constituent,” the cosmos, and the human person. Passage to Modernity describes only an initial revolution extending roughly from the late fourteenth to the end of the fifteenth century, what Duprè refers to as an “archaic beginning of the mod-


Communio 21 (Fall, 1994), ©1994 by Communio: International Catholic Review
ern.” The original transformation in thought and action, first manifested in late medieval speculative theology and early Italian humanism, is to be distinguished from the idea, clearly conceived by Descartes and carried forward by the Enlightenment, that the subject is the sole source of meaning and value in the cosmos. Only the first stage, he argues, was able to uphold with any consistency a truly theocentric cosmology in which the freely creative, human microcosm remains in harmony with nature. Implicit in this distinction is the suggestion that we may discover a path not taken once the distinct layers of the modern revolution are uncovered.

Dupré’s differentiated exposition challenges current views about the origin, significance, and end of the modern age. For example, he contextualizes the alleged novelty of “post-modern” critiques of modern subjectivism. By his account, recent strategies for deconstructing the centrality of the modern subject into a trace of arbitrarily fabricated verbal signifiers are often little more than thinly disguised rehabilitations of the nominalist theory of language that sparked the modern revolution in the first place.2

Dupré’s theory of modernity also poses a sharp challenge to Hans Blumenberg’s modification of the secularization thesis.3 For Blumenberg the characteristically modern stance, human self-assertion, “re-occupies” the position left vacant by the conceptual failure of nominalist conceptions of divine omnipotence. In Blumenberg’s view, the modern view of unlimited human freedom, for example, is not a secularization of Christian eschatological hopes so much as a resolution of a traditional problem with a thoroughly modern solution. Passage to Modernity, however, considers figures who reverse the process of re-occupying traditional forms with a modern content. The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, for example, is an exemplary expression of a modern spiritual method informed by traditional spiritual content (226).

The second underlying hypothesis of the work entails a twofold metaphysical claim. The break-up between God and the cosmos is reflected in the one between mental life and cosmic being. Running throughout the narrative is the conviction that neither the sources nor the future of the modern self can be properly identified without taking seriously the ontological dimension of modernity’s cultural symbols. Although the subtitle might suggest something less, Dupré’s inquiry intends to encompass more than the genealogy of how our thought has come to be dominated by the language of modern subjectivity. His aim is to show that modernity began

---

2The critique of Derrida’s and Rorty’s purported break with modernity is elaborated in greater detail in “Postmodernity or Late Modernity? Ambiguities in Richard Rorty’s Thought” Review of Metaphysics 47 (December 1993): 277-95. See pp. 281-85 for the nominalist origins of the deconstruction of “logocentrism.”


Our prese modern. A its past rexture of t insists th three con ratony in three com tanatity of ontologica self-suppofessness of a while intrsom. (251)

Accordin Western with the i man free asymmet world the ren epo cl a prologo menal u physical vocally c we live.

Passag three part ing conc in the enjectivity modern
no less than “a new epoch in being as much as a new stage of reflection” (252).
To this end, one detects throughout the narrative a subtle but persistent apologetic for the unfinished future of the modern program. He insists that there is no turning back to a former age. For Dupré a modern construal of the relation between God, self, and cosmos—albeit one purged of its anthropocentrism—is the only legitimate basis for metaphysical reflection today:

Our present and future project remains modern. Nor ought the one-sidedness of its past realizations discourage us about its future prospects. That one-sidedness may in the end matter less than the autonomy modernity has gained for the three components of culture: the spontaneity of a freedom recognized as an ontological principle, the sufficiency of a self-supporting cosmos, and the distinctness of a transcendence perceived as wholly encompassing the finite realm while intrinsically sustaining its autonomy. (251)

According to Dupré, even a purified Western culture will have to grapple with the unique manifestation of human freedom and the mutual but asymmetrical autonomy of God and world that has emerged in the modern epoch. His narrative is meant as a prolegomenon to a more fundamental understanding of the metaphysical assumptions that have irrevocably changed the world in which we live.

Passage to Modernity unfolds in three parts. The first analyzes changing conceptions of nature that result in the emergence of the form of objectivity we associate with early modern science. The second examines the concept of the self at modernity’s origins, in its relation both to its transcendent ground and to the world in which it is constituted. The third focuses on how the idea of God changes from the principle that infuses, permeates, and deifies nature to an extrinsic, “super-natural” component.

Part I: From cosmos to nature
The new view of nature that emerges in Bacon’s pragmatism and Galileo’s quantification of the real was not without precedent in ancient and medieval cosmologies. Aristotle acknowledged the relative independence of technē, and the Pythagoreans revered mathematical order. The Greek understanding of nature, however, was predicated upon a basic confidence in the harmony between appearance and reality. Aristotle had justified appearances through appearances. Unlike moderns, who take the appearance of appearances as a source of scepticism, Aristotle’s empiricism is rooted in a total trust in the order of nature. The breakdown of the older worldview becomes complete when Galileo distinguishes between primary and secondary qualities, driving a wedge between the inner, mathematically quantifiable secrets of nature and reality’s outward form.

Like Balthasar, Dupré recognizes that the great loss in the eclipse of Greek physikē is a decline of an aesthetics of form. For the Greeks, he argues, both the essence of the real and our knowledge of it consists ultimately of form. This is taken to mean that it belongs to the essence of the real to appear in an orderly way. Moreover, the concern for form’s ap-
The fundamental shift in the modern understanding of nature was not, pace Heidegger, initiated by Descartes's quest for absolute certainty. The seeds of Cartesian subjectivism had already taken root in the soil of late medieval nominalism. Ockham's epistemology carries the immanence of conceptual forms to a point where intuitive knowledge becomes entirely established within the mind. A crucial development takes place when Durandus of Pourcin questions the scholastic theory of the impressed species.

How could the species mediate, thus goes Durandus' objection, between the knower and the unknown when it remains itself unknown? It would require a second species to know the first one, and so on in an infinite process. This line of reasoning presupposes that the species functions as a separate reality that mediates between two wholly opposed elements. For St. Thomas, on the contrary, the species actually identifies what is already potentially united. No new bridge is thrown; the species only enables the mind to walk across the existing one. (40)

Once the nominalists separate the form known by the mind from the real form, it is only a question of time before nature is divided, as Bourdieu charged Descartes, between objective truth and subjective certainty. While Dupré is not the first to call attention to the nominalist origins of Descartes's separation between idea and reality, his comprehensive interpretation of the transformation of the concept of nature convincingly demonstrates that neither modern science nor methodical doubt are the true origins of the breakdown of the ancient and medieval cosmos. Even more fundamentally: a new real in which being of God, 

cr\text{f}t

Part II: From the Greeks and the Homo Faber

Originally lies under son idea of "sube the ultimate value previou or to a divine of subjectivity recognition is al ways nson. After the pa Homo Faber Prometheus the Greeks an for Prometheus for bringing the balanced by a less rebellious model for the Even before the he ready inevitable conquest of n characteristic modern age.

Neither at nor the Chris unaware of t chion of the h chain of be recently argu the spiritual that distigu thought.5 D

\text{5}Sources of vard Universit
ndamental shift in the mod-
understanding of nature was
Heidegger, initiated by
's quest for absolute cer-
he seeds of Cartesian sub-
1 had already taken root in
late medieval nominalism.
's epistemology carries the
ence of conceptual forms to
where intuitive knowledge
entirely established within
. A crucial development
place when Durandus of
questions the scholastic
of the impressed species.
ould the species mediate, thus
and the unknown when it re-
self unknown! It would require a
pecies to know the first one, and
infinitesimal process. This line of
presupposes that the species
as a separate reality that medi-
tween two wholly opposed ele-
For [St.] Thomas, on the contrary,
ces actually identifies what is al-
potentially united. No new bridge
on, the species only enables the
walk across the existing one.

the nominalists separate the
known by the mind from the
nt, it is only a question of time
ature is divided, as Boudin
ed Descartes, between object-
ruth and subjective certainty.
 Dupré is not the first to call
ition to the nominalist origins of
es's separation between idea-
liety, his comprehensive inten-
 of the transformation of the
nt of nature convincingly dem-
ates that neither modern sci-
nor methodical doubt are the
ors of the breakdown of the
ent and medieval cosmos. Even

more fundamental was the emer-
gence of a new onto-theology of the
real in which being, including the
being of God, is thought mechanis-
tically in terms of efficient causality.

Part II: From microcosmos
to subject

Originally *hypoikeimenon* ("what
lies under something"), the modern
idea of "subject" comes to stand for
the ultimate source of meaning and
value previously attributed to God
or to a divine nature. The new view
of subjectivity exploits the ancient
recognition that self-expression is
always in some way a self-making.
After the passage to modernity,
homo faber becomes tied to the
Promethean task of pure project. For
the Greeks and Romans, admiration
for Prometheus, the god responsible
for bringing fire to civilization, was
balanced by respect for Hercules, a
less rebellious but more trustworthy
model for the cultivating of nature.
Even before Boccaccio proclaims the
former the hero of culture, it was al-
ready inevitable that a technological
conquest of nature would be a chief
characteristic of the spirit of the
modern age.

Neither ancient pagan thought
nor the Christian Middle Ages were
unaware of the distinctive contribu-
tion of the human spirit to the great
chain of being. Charles Taylor has
recently argued that Augustine was
the spiritual father of the interiority
that distinguishes modern Western
thought. Dupré adds a significant
component to the pre-history of
modern interiority by expanding the
Neoplatonist contribution to August-
tine's inward turn. Even after August-
tine, Christian Neoplatonists in the
Middle Ages and Renaissance con-
tinue to reflect on the convergence
between the theology of a creative,
divine Word and a verbally produc-
tive, incarnate human spirit. The
most original contribution of the
Renaissance may not have been the
discovery of the individual (Burck-
hardt's outdated thesis) but rather the
humanists' vision of nature and
culture through the mirror of lan-
guage. Although the later develop-
ments were one-sidedly literary,
early Italian humanism and its theo-
logy of the Word briefly displayed a
real alternative to nominalist theo-
ries of language.

Since MacIntyre's *After Virtue*
(1981), contemporary moralists have
been acutely aware of the wide dis-
tance that separates Aristotelian pub-
lic virtue and natural law from the
privatized morality and natural rights
of the modern age. Once again, Dup-
re's distinctive contribution is his
account of the role that nominalist
theology plays in the passage to mo-
dernity. Nominalist voluntarism de-
termined the future course of modern
moral theory long before the hypo-
thesis of individual beings deciding to
move into a social state became
widely accepted at the end of the
sixteenth century, and long before
Hobbes had transformed natural law
into an amoral mechanism of the ap-
petite. In substituting absolute power
for divine necessity, the nominalists
created the condition for the possi-
bility of an arbitrary divine command
becoming the sole determinant of the
legal order. Ockham's own position,

---

5 Sources of the Self (Cambridge: Har-
i.e., that divine power remains absolute but supports the actually ordained order, had scholastic precedents. A distinctively modern conclusion, however, was drawn from his hypothesis. Later interpreters claim that if God’s absolute power may exceed his ordained power in nature, then the power of the divine law-giver undermines the intrinsic rationality of the law.

The practical outcome of modern subjectivism is a new view of freedom in which modern man, driven by an anxiety to demonstrate his superiority over past generations, exchanges the older claim of upholding a tradition for one of always surpassing it decisively. Only in modernity does the past come to be understood as irreversibly past. In modern culture, the past is basically used as a tool toward shaping the future. Bacon legitimated the idea of unqualified progress by projecting the past Golden Age into an anticipated future. Vico stands alone among early modern thinkers in questioning the radical opposition between historical and scientific truth that developed among post-Cartesian thinkers.

At the heart of the history of modern man’s emancipation from the past is the metaphysical question of human freedom. The new view of freedom, Dupré claims, initiates a decisive and irrevocable new epoch in the history of Being. For the first time in the West, modernity conceives of the mind as a dividing principle that causes a rupture in Being between its own subjective capacity to grant meaning and the real as object. Hegel’s philosophy of Spirit is identified by Dupré as the last great unsuccessful attempt in Western philosophy to synthesize the demands of historical contingency with a metaphysics of human freedom and transcendence. Post-modern critics, following Nietzsche, have abandoned not only the subjectively determined human freedom invented by modern culture but also the transcendent dimension preserved by the earlier onto-theological tradition. Dupré’s narrative suggests that we now stand in the wake of the rise and decline of the idea of human autonomy. Despite some recent attempts to rethink fundamental questions, our impoverished modern heritage offers us only fragments for a future anthropology.

Part III: From deified nature to supernatural grace

Dupré sees the modern age characterized by “a fateful separation” of nature and grace. For the Greeks, form resides within the appearing objects of which it constitutes the intelligible essence. Neither the ancient philosophers nor the Eastern Fathers know of a pure nature to which grace is added as a kind of superstructure. Dupré follows de Lubac, Balthasar, and Karl Rahner in decrying the late scholastic notion of natura pura as anything but a purely hypothetical construct.

St. Thomas is of course free of this sort of dualism because he never conceived of nature as an independent reality with a self-sufficient natural end. Dupré nonetheless finds fault with Aquinas’s theology on two counts. First, he points to the same issue that followers of Scotus would eventually attack, i.e., the Thomistic thesis that without the fall the Incarnation

"View Dupré be into for a n initiati grace' utable would balan\n
terprett have more polemas's come III, a. Bonav conv edy ol camat how b is a f the gr conce the di had st Dupré

"On bate, s spätmis Münch (1955): "See 276), E but wis Thoma
historical contingency and physics of human free-ness. Post-modern Nietzsche, donned not only the sub-determined human freed by modern culture but transcendent dimension by the earlier onto-theo-dition. Dupré’s narrative that we now stand in the rise and decline of the human autonomy. Despite attempts to rethink the old questions, our impov-modern heritage offers usments for a future anthropology.

From deified nature to supernatural grace

sees the modern age char-

acterized by “a fateful separation”

and grace. For the Greeks, grace was within the appearing of which it constitutes the inner

essence. Neither the ancient nor the Eastern know of a pure nature to grace which is added as a kind of

nature. Dupré follows de Lubac, and Karl Rahner in g the late scholastic notion of pura as anything but a purely

ethical construct.

Theodore is of course free of this dualism because he never treads of nature as an indeterminacy with a self-sufficient nat-

d. Dupré nonetheless finds in Aquinas’s theology on two

points. First, he points to the same fatal flaw of followers of Scotus would ally attack, i.e., the Thomistic

idea that without the fall the Incarna-

tion would not have occurred.

“Viewed from this perspective,” Dupré argues, “redemption might be interpreted as a supernatural cure for a natural disease and, as such, as initiating a wholly different order of grace” (172). This position, if attributable to St. Thomas in this form, would in fact endanger the delicate balance that holds his synthesis to-

tgether.

It is therefore surprising that Dupré chooses to interpret St. Thom-

as through the narrow lens of a fourteenth century debate between Thomists and Scotists. Modern interpreters of Aquinas’s theology have developed a more nuanced, more historically accurate, and less polemical interpretation of Thomas’s understanding of why God became man. In the Summa theologicae

III, a. 1, q. 3, Thomas claims (with Bonaventure) that it is more fitting (convenientius) to accept the remedy of sin as the reason for the Incarnation. This modest claim about how to speak about the Incarnation is a far cry from the conception of the grace of Christ as a medicinal concept that breaks continuity with the divine self-communication that had started with creation, a charge Dupré levels against St. Thomas. Moreover, other passages in the Ter-

tia pars, i.e., ones not sufficiently heeded by Thomas’s fourteenth century advocates, confirm the unity of the single, undivided, eternal act of predestination, without any temporal sequence in the divine will, whereby God chooses to become man and to communicate salvation universally. The unity of the divine act allows St. Thomas to interpret God’s saving act as an exemplary (and not just efficiently caused) manifestation of the magnitudo caritatis of a divine person.

The second aspect of Thomas’s theology which may have contrib-

uted to the separation of nature and grace at a later stage, according to Dupré, is his application of the Aristotelian categories of causal depen-
dency to God’s relation to the world. Dupré contends that “never before the modern age did Christians con-
sider a notion of extrinsic causality adequate to express the intimate, permanent presence of God to his creation” (173). Dupré freely concedes that Thomas balances his preference for Aristotelian efficient causality with participation motifs drawn from the Platonic tradition, yet he sees the subsumption of the latter under the former to have un-

wittingly contributed to the theological dualism of the modern age. One can only wonder whether the recent


4 See p. 172, In a footnote (n. 9, p. 276), Dupré softens the blow somewhat, but without acknowledging the importance of personal, divine love to St. Thomas’s Christology.

5 ST III, q. 24, a. 3-4. See also, G. H. E. M., The Loyalty of God’s act of understanding.

renewal of interest in St. Thomas's critical encounter with the metaphysics and theology of Dionysius the Areopagite will add greater insight into this complex question.10

For Dupré the true merit of St. Thomas is that he provided the most balanced synthesis of Christianity with the Aristotelianism of his day. The real dissolution of the medieval synthesis begins with the nominalist theologies of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. John Duns Scotus makes a quasi-independent abstraction of pure nature. Some nominalists take the distinction between potestia absoluta and potestia ordinata to refer to successive moments in God's power. These theological developments will eventually lead to the idea of an independent order of secondary causes. Once the distinction between nature and grace becomes an actual separation, then theology can no longer rely on the analogy of nature in the fullest sense. Once the full force of the modern presuppositions becomes accepted, the only logical options are either an anti-philosophical fideism or a materialistic, non-creationist pantheism. The subsequent history of Christian theology is rife with examples of both.

From the perspective of Christian faith and Christian theology, the remaining chapters of Dupré's narrative may constitute the most engaging part of the entire book. It concerns the attempted reunions of nature and grace and provisional syntheses of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Here he surveys the contributions of Nicholas of Cusa ("probably the last thinker to reunite the theocentric and anthropocentric forces that had begun to pull the medieval synthesis apart"), humanist religion and theology (Valla, Erasmus, Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola), Luther and Calvin, the spiritual theologies of St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis de Sales, early modern Protestant mysticism and speculative thought (V. Weigel, J. Boehme), and the last comprehensive synthesis—the Baroque.

His treatment of the Baroque merits special consideration. Few thinkers (Balthasar being the most notable exception among theologians) have given this complex artistic and cultural movement the attention it deserves.11 Baroque culture, according to Dupré, moves form beyond form. It symbolizes an expanding artistic and social world (think of its now infamous missionary conquests!), permanently in a state of being created and refusing to be confined to established forms.

Dupré highlights the essentially representational character of Baroque culture. Drama of this period revives the classical notion of the world as a stage. Life is taken to oscillate between truth and illusion.

---


---

Actors on the stage to belong to two distinct splendidous glory and the terrifying rea masked. In politics a becomes the meta time, the Baroque matic form loses its logical foundation a into the decorative known as Rococo at Dupré's account c modernity's theolog nings continues at the work of Henri di followers. Like the s nouvelle théologie, loss in modernity's s ture and grace into distinct orders, one and the other supern adds to their pres atheistic roots of mo a more intensive c the spiritual theolog dieval, Reformation Reformation period ges tis that spiritual th faced the theologi sented by the new d objectivity but may eceeded in offeri presentation of the tent of a Christian la longer be meaning in scholastic categorie

Assessment anc

There is a tende book to treat the c place in modern cul a result solely of a my and cosmolog Even his treatment r reformers centers an action with spiritu
Actors on the stage know themselves to belong to two distinct spheres, the splendid glory of appearance and the terrifying reality of being unmasked. In politics as in art, conflict becomes the metaphor for life. In time, the Baroque pursuit of dramatic form loses its dynamic, theological foundation and degenerates into the decorative fragmentation known as Rococo art.

Dupré’s account of the genesis of modernity’s theological underpinnings continues and complements the work of Henri de Lubac and his followers. Like the adherents of the nouvelle théologie, he sees a tragic loss in modernity’s separation of nature and grace into two historically distinct orders, one purely natural and the other supernatural. What he adds to their presentation of the atheistic roots of modern theology is a more intensive consideration of the spiritual theology of the late medieval, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation periods. Dupré suggests that spiritual theology not only faced the theological crisis presented by the new definition of subjection but may even have succeeded in offering a faithful presentation of the traditional content of a Christian faith that could no longer be meaningfully expressed in scholastic categories.

Assessment and conclusion

There is a tendency in Dupré’s book to treat the change that took place in modern culture as if it were a result solely of a new anthropological and cosmological awareness. Even his treatment of the Protestant reformers centers around their interaction with spiritual writers as they developed a fragile and (especially in Luther’s case) overly unsystematic synthesis of God’s relation to the world. What is virtually absent is the presence before, during, and after the passage to modernity of what has been called the plain sense of Scripture (sensus literalis). To be sure, Dupré mentions the conflicting desires of various humanists to initiate the historical-critical and poetic-figural modes of scriptural interpretation that now dominate the contemporary theological scene. But there seems to be only a sparse acknowledgment on his part that the philosophical views of most Christian writers whom he treats are mediated through the lens of Scripture’s plain sense as had been handed on in the Church’s traditional confession of faith. Some of the speculative sys-

---


13 This lack of attention to the overriding hermeneutics of the revealed Word in this period may help explain the charge which Dupré levels against Cusanus’s Christology. While Cusanus’s use of Scripture could be highly idiosyncratic, it is not the case, in my opinion, that the Christology of On Learned Ignorance, Book III, is logically inconsistent (189). As Rudolf Haubst demonstrated in his Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues (Freiburg: Herder, 1956), the supposition that Christ, “the perfect man,” is the absolute maximum is not a corol-
tems which he considers are exceptions to this rule, e.g., the cosmologies of Giordano Bruno and Jacob Boehme. Many others, e.g., the subalterate Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas and the natural theology of John Calvin, clearly are not. To have treated the passage to modernity as a hermeneutical development in the interpretation of a realistic narrative would probably not have resulted in wholly new conclusions regarding the move toward anthropocentrism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, it would have helped to explain why actually existing religious communities in the Christian West were able to maintain a sense of real, social cohesiveness for at least two centuries after the modern presuppositions had become almost universally accepted.

Another difficulty that arises in reading Passage to Modernity is the author’s failure to lay out more clearly the basic principles which determine the structure and content of the narrative. If he had rejected “method” as an objectifying illusion of modern subjectivism, then one could explain their absence. But Dupré’s critique of the Cartesian desire to abstract from the concrete, practical situation in order to derive universally applicable norms for thought and action is relative, not absolute (at least when compared to the more strident anti-foundationalism of Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida). Given that Dupré defends a mutual relation between theory and practice, it would seem consistent with his approach to have spelled out in more detail the theoretical position which he deems compatible with modernity’s original but now lost inspiration. His allusions to the attempts by Blondel, Jaspers, and Ricoeur to rethink the relation between freedom and transcendence in noncausal terms or to the new panentheism running from Hegel to Whitehead tantalize the reader, but they hardly elucidate the foundational presuppositions of this penetrating study (163, 253). These shortcomings are best addressed in future publications.14 They do not detract from the enormous contribution which Dupré’s volume makes to current debates about the past and future of Western culture’s modernity.

In an interview that was allowed to be published only posthumously, Heidegger responded to a question about the crisis and politics with god can save us. not accept Heid rejection of hun ambivalence w truth of the reve. share the later F awaiting. To envi culture in crisis n to the emergent physical synthesis chaotic longing f to Modernity ofl for a new metaph return to the sha of a lost epoch is cultural enforcer nity’s recurrent d technological pnal detachment social bonds.

The practical l from Passage to ing, but nonev one. If we are to ority that mark evolution of modern in a still sp

about the crisis in modern culture and politics with the quip, "Only a god can save us." While Dupré does not accept Heidegger's shortsighted rejection of humanism nor his dark ambivalence with respect to the truth of the revealed Word, he does share the later Heidegger's sense of waiting. To envision the future of a culture in crisis requires an openness to the emergence of a new metaphysical synthesis shorn of all romantic longing for the past. Passage to Modernity offers no simple recipe for a new metaphysics. To coerce a return to the shared presuppositions of a lost epoch is as dangerous as the cultural enforcement of late modernity's recurrent dream of unbounded technological progress and individual detachment from tradition and social bonds.

The practical lesson to be learned from Passage to Modernity is sobering, but nonetheless an optimistic one. If we are to recover the interiority that marked the original revolution of modernity, with its anchoring in a still spiritualized cosmos and radical openness to the self-disclosure of the transcendent, then we have no choice but to begin with the ancient and medieval authors whose wisdom about nature and culture continued to impregnate philosophers, theologians, and other spiritual writers until the sixteenth century. Dupré's work admonishes us to prepare for this spiritual and intellectual task. Our form of preparation today may not be wholly unlike Petrarch's examination of the Confessions upon descending Mt. Ventoux, for his experience of self still required "the penetrating eyes of Augustine" in order to convey an objective quality and transcendent perspective to his introspection (98). Relying on a retrieval of the past, Dupré's book nurtures the hope that Christian faith in a secular age may still be renewed by a prophetic humanism that has not yet been discovered by the modern world.

Peter Casarella