

Radical Orthodoxy and Henri de Lubac

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The theological sensibility known as Radical Orthodoxy emerged in the 1990s amongst a group of theologians in the University of Cambridge. It quickly became one of the most influential and widely discussed strands in contemporary Christian theology, offering a bold new confidence (some would say hubris) in the face of the supposed decline of religion and the apparent hegemony of secular discourse. From its beginnings, Radical Orthodoxy understood itself as a variety of *ressourcement* theology, seeking to recover the riches of patristic and high medieval Christian orthodoxy in order to address contemporary theological, philosophical, political and cultural concerns. Although Radical Orthodoxy's roots lie to some degree in the tradition of catholic Anglicanism, it is not an attempt to resource any particular church or denomination. One of Radical Orthodoxy's most significant but easily overlooked achievements is the considerable attention it has drawn from a wide range of theological traditions, including Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Reformed Protestantism. Add to this the significant conversations between Radical Orthodoxy and other disciplines and philosophical traditions, and one quickly realises its important contribution to our recent intellectual culture.

Radical Orthodoxy has found natural allies amongst theologians and philosophers seeking to challenge the priorities and assumptions that are characteristic of modern and late modern thought. Amongst twentieth and twenty-first century figures, one might include Charles Péguy, Maurice Blondel, Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Louis Bouyer, Alasdair McIntyre and Charles Taylor. Most importantly, the perspective of Radical Orthodoxy is 'in profound continuity with the French *nouvelle théologie*' and none of the figures associated with that movement is more important than Henri de Lubac.¹ He is the only modern thinker who has been the subject of a book-length treatment under the Radical Orthodoxy banner, namely John Milbank's

¹ John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, eds, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.

*The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural.*² In an essay on the programme of Radical Orthodoxy, Milbank writes,

Radical Orthodoxy considers that Henri de Lubac was a greater theological revolutionary than Karl Barth, because in questioning the hierarchical duality of grace and nature as discrete stages, he transcended, unlike Barth, the shared background assumption of all modern theology. In this way one could say, anachronistically, that he inaugurated a postmodern theology.³

De Lubac has a pervasive influence in so many writings in the Radical Orthodoxy genre and the defence of de Lubac's position on nature and grace has proved central to the various debates in which Radical Orthodoxy is most invested.

In order to assess de Lubac's considerable influence on Radical Orthodoxy, I will first offer a brief description of its key priorities and claims. This will include Radical Orthodoxy's genealogy of the secular and its account of the tradition of patristic and Thomist theology which gave way to modernity. Having briefly established Radical Orthodoxy's basic contours, this chapter will focus particularly on the debate concerning grace and nature. This is the arena in which Radical Orthodoxy has thus far engaged most thoroughly with de Lubac's thought. Included within this grace-nature discussion will be fundamental contemporary themes, particularly the nature of the secular, theology of gift, the centrality of paradox and the structure of teleology.

² John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014). In a substantial review of Milbank's book, Edward Oakes comments, '...Milbank's admiration for de Lubac seems ultimately grounded, at least as I read his text, in his insistence that de Lubac was really the first advocate, *avant la lettre*, of Radical Orthodoxy: "In effect, the *supernatural* thesis *deconstructs* the possibility of dogmatical theology as previously understood in modern times, just as it equally deconstructs the possibility of philosophical theology or even of a clearly autonomous philosophy *tout court*.'" See Edward T. Oakes, SJ, 'The Paradox of Nature and Grace: On John Milbank's *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*', *Nova et Vetera* 4(3) (2006): 667–696, here quoting 682. Oakes is quoting Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, page 11 of the first edition and page 12 of the second edition. All further references to *The Suspended Middle* are to the second edition (2014).

³ John Milbank, "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy? - a Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 35.

*What is Radical Orthodoxy?*⁴

Whilst its concerns and claims have expanded and developed over twenty years, Radical Orthodoxy arguably began with the publication in 1990 of John Milbank's ground-breaking and provocative *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*.⁵ In this work, Milbank offers a stunning theological challenge to the standard thesis of secularization in the West that began around the sixteenth century. The standard thesis understands the secular to be a sphere of neutral and autonomous reason that developed through the simultaneous retreat of religion and theology, hence the common association of secularization with *desacralization*. So the clutter of theology and religion in antiquity and the Middle Ages was swept aside to reveal the cool, clear air of natural and autonomous reason. In this new secular world the question of humanity's (or creation's) ultimate origin and purpose is largely side-lined in favour of questions that concern the more immediate and immanent workings and functions of human beings and nature. Questions about the facts of nature were now divorced from questions of value or purpose. Desacralization sees the secular as the result of clearing away the debris of superstition, ritual and tradition that we imagine dominated mediaeval Europe in order to open new possibilities directed by the neutral hand of reason expressed most particularly in the natural sciences. The advent of the secular is therefore seen as the result of the inevitable progress of human knowledge and thinking. Moreover, desacralization is a negative thesis with its own theological assumptions because it assumes that what is real consists in an indifferent natural order to which is *added* a sense of the sacred. Therefore, sociology tends to regard Christianity not as the discernment of reality, but the *addition* of the sacred to an essentially neutral bedrock. The sacred is not intrinsic to the natural order and is a superfluous addition; desacralization is the process of its removal.⁶ We will see below that Radical Orthodoxy points to a direct connection between modernity's invention of an autonomous secular sphere of the natural and a supposed *natura pura* to which is added divine grace.

⁴ For a more detailed introduction see Simon Oliver, 'Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: from participation to late modernity' in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, ed. Simon Oliver and John Milbank (London: Routledge, 2009), 3-27; James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004).

⁵ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

⁶ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 9. In important respects, Milbank's thesis is in agreement with Charles Taylor's seminal *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

Milbank rejects this view of the emergence of the secular from the ruins of the mediaeval consensus. The secular is not simply that which is left behind once we have rid ourselves of religion and theology. Neither is it a neutral, dispassionate or objective view of the world and ourselves; it had to be created as a positive ideology. The secular view holds its own assumptions and prejudices concerning human society and nature that are no more objective or justifiable than those of the ancient and mediaeval philosophers and theologians. It had to be instituted and imagined through theology, philosophy, politics and the arts. So Milbank's crucial point is that the secular is not simply the rolling back of a theological consensus to reveal a neutral territory where we all become equal players, but the replacement of a certain view of God and creation with a different view which still makes theological claims, that is, claims about origins, purpose and transcendence. The problem is that this 'pseudo-theology' is bad theology. Secularism is, quite literally, a Christian heresy – an ideological distortion of theology.

The void opened by the advent of the secular is filled with many ideologies and philosophies that attempt to provide new metanarratives. The Enlightenment pursuit of neutral and objective reason, eventually distilled in modern philosophy and the natural sciences, is perhaps the most familiar, accompanied by the characteristic modern suspicion of tradition, practice and history and its devotion to 'progress' through the overcoming of the past. The late decades of the nineteenth century saw the pursuit of reason devoid of tradition and community begin to founder on the rocks of suspicion and scepticism. The logic of modernity finally reveals itself in the postmodern disavowal of the reality of truth and the reduction of philosophy and theology to the play of cultural and linguistic forces (hence Radical Orthodoxy's tendency to refer to 'late' rather than 'post' modernity). In the midst of the remains of the so-called Enlightenment project and the contorted knots of postmodern philosophy and critical theory, Radical Orthodoxy detects an opportunity for theology. Whilst not a movement of reactionary nostalgia, Radical Orthodoxy seeks to recover the riches of ancient and high mediaeval Christian thought in order to confront the ideologies and confusions of late modernity. As such, it is in profound continuity with *ressourcement* writings of the twentieth century and, one might add, the earlier Anglican Tractarian movement of the nineteenth century. At the instigation

of figures such as John Keble, E.B. Pusey and John Henry Newman, the Tractarian renewal first returned the Church to the sources of orthodox patristic theology through a host of new translations of ancient texts. This was paralleled in de Lubac's establishment, with Jean Daniélou and Claude Mondésert, of the *Sources chrétiennes* series in the early 1940s. In short, the church was to recover itself by recovering its *proper* theology and philosophy, and its understanding of the dynamic inheritance of faith.

In returning to the riches of Christian thought prior to modernity, Radical Orthodoxy's method lies between the genealogical approach of late modern philosophy and the *ressourcement* theology of de Lubac and his *confrères*. The realisation that concepts are not fixed and timeless but have complex histories and contexts informed the various genealogical methods of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophers, notably Nietzsche and Foucault. The method of genealogy – tracing the origins and fluctuating histories of concepts – has become characteristic of Radical Orthodoxy, with writings focused on topics and discourses beyond the restricted purview of modern theology: nihilism, repetition, the city, motion, music, work and the gift, to name but a few. This approach refuses to accept the fixed disciplinary boundaries of modern academic discourse and reflects the traditional Thomist view that theology does not have a strictly defined subject matter, but is about all things in relation to God.⁷ De Lubac's *ressourcement* was similarly concerned with tracing the history of theological concepts in opposition to the ossifying tendencies of neoscholasticism. Uncovering shifts in the understanding of nature and grace, the interpretation of scripture, and the meaning of *corpus mysticum* and *corpus verum* are three obvious examples. Nevertheless, as some commentators have pointed out, Radical Orthodoxy's *ressourcement* extends beyond the immediate concerns of the Church's self-understanding and it is an extension of the project of *la nouvelle théologie*. As Milbank writes,

Is *ressourcement* enough? Is it enough to recover, after de Lubac, and many others, an authentic paleo-Christianity? Clearly not, and clearly the thinkers of

⁷ It has been noted that Radical Orthodoxy has extended the application of Christian ontology well beyond de Lubac's concerns. See, for example, Bryan C. Hollon, *Everything is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Eugene, OR.: Cascade Books, 2008), chapters 6 and 7.

the *nouvelle théologie* thought of *ressourcement* as but the prelude to a new speculative and constructive effort. It is, in a sense, the task of this ‘next phase’ which Radical Orthodoxy has sought to take up, though in a wider ecumenical context.⁸

Radical Orthodoxy’s return to the sources is focused on the recovery of a particular Christian ontology: the metaphysics of participation.⁹ It is the loss of the centrality and meaning of creation’s participation in God in the late Middle Ages that inaugurated the rise of the secular and the notion of an autonomous sphere of existence standing alongside God that would eventually become the *natura pura*. What is meant by ‘participation’?

The metaphysics of participation is more fundamental than a vague notion of ‘joining in’ or ‘taking part’; it is the doctrine of creation that enables the clear elucidation of the *communio* ecclesiology characteristic of *la nouvelle théologie*. The nature of participation in Christian theology can be explained through Aquinas’s distinction between existence that is *per essentiam* and existence that is *per participationem* – by essence or by participation.¹⁰ Whereas God exists in himself essentially, all that is not God – everything from angels to stones – exists only by participation in God. Aquinas writes:

Every thing, furthermore, exists because it has being. Consequently, a thing whose essence is not its being is not *through its essence*, but *by participation* in something, namely, being itself. But that which is through participation in something cannot be the first being, because prior to it is the being in which it

⁸ John Milbank, ‘The Grandeur of Reason and the Perversity of Rationalism: Radical Orthodoxy’s first decade’ in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, 373.

⁹ See Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, eds, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 3: ‘The central theological framework of radical orthodoxy is ‘participation’ as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity, because any alternative configuration perforce reserves a territory independent of God.’ Catherine Pickstock’s recent discussion of repetition includes a crucial and complex analysis of the paradoxical Platonic notion of participation in the Same and the Different. A detailed discussion of this book is beyond the scope of the present essay, except to remark on the depth of Pickstock’s new reflections on the metaphysics of participation. For example, creatures are both the same as themselves and yet, in constantly exceeding (or non-identically repeating) themselves in the dynamism of their existence, they are different. This participation in the Same and the Different (concepts traceable to Plato’s *Timaeus*) is, in a sense, the bedrock of time’s participation in eternity. See Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 51-53.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.3.4.responsio; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.4.3.ad 3.

participates in order to be. But God is the first being, with nothing prior to Him. The essence of God, therefore, is His own being.¹¹

What this amounts to is a crucial claim: there is only one real existent, and that is God.¹² When God creates, there are not suddenly two foci of being or two ‘things’, God plus creation. Creation does not stand alongside God or even ‘outside’ God. Crucially, in no sense is creation autonomous because creation is, at every moment, *ex nihilo*. It is suspended over the *nihil*, held in existence by participating in existence itself. So creation has no existence that is self-standing and properly its own. Rather, it receives its being at every moment from an infinite and gratuitous divinity. Creation’s existence is, in this sense, ‘improper’. Yet even the very participation of creation in God is ‘improper’ to creation; it does not belong to creation by right or power, but is always the gratuitous gift of God.

There is an important corollary of this metaphysics of participation: the difference between God and creatures is not like the difference *between* creatures. Whereas my difference from the table at which I am sat belongs both to the table and me because we have material natures that define the respective boundaries of our spatial existence, the difference between a creature and God is instantiated purely by God’s gratuity. To put the matter another way, God grants creation its own autonomy – its own otherness from God’s being – yet paradoxically this is no autonomy at all. To put the matter another way, God ‘holds’ creation as other than himself. This ontological difference is a sheer difference that Aquinas expresses in terms of the simplicity of divine being (essence and existence are one and the same) and the structure or composition of created being (essence and existence are united but really distinct). Moreover, the nature of this participation is analogical in the sense that all creatures are held together by their relation to a common focus in God, even amidst their countless and immeasurable differences.

Another important consequence of the metaphysics of participation that will become important in the discussion of de Lubac’s view of nature and grace concerns

¹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.22.9 (my emphases). Unless otherwise indicated, translations of Aquinas are my own.

¹² Of course, this is directly traceable to Plato’s allegory of the sun in *Republic* VI: everything exists by participation in the Good.

causation. Just as there can be no ‘competition’ or ‘contrast’ between divine existence and creaturely existence because they are fundamentally different, so there can be no ‘competition’ between divine causation and creaturely causation. The *Liber de Causis* (‘The Book of Causes’), a Neoplatonic work upon which Aquinas wrote an important commentary, begins by stating that ‘Every primary cause infuses its effect more powerfully than does a universal second cause.’¹³ This means that God, as first cause, is the very foundation of all causation within creation. Within creation, we can delineate a hierarchy of causes for any event. For example, what causes the football team to win a match? The players? The coach? The fans? The club’s owner? In a sense, they are all causes, but in different ways.¹⁴ There is, however, a fundamental difference between creaturely or ‘secondary’ causation and divine or ‘primary’ causation: the primary cause is universal, the origin of existence, the source of all other causes and therefore infuses itself most deeply in things.¹⁵ To put the matter simply, God is not a cause amongst causes, one agent amongst many, but the very basis of all causation. Crucially, because divine primary causation and creaturely secondary causation are of a completely different order, they do not compete with or displace each other. Rather, the latter participates in the former.¹⁶ An action need not be God’s *or* mine; it can truly be both. So participation in God’s primary causation does not render secondary causes purely instrumental or determined. Secondary causes within creation are real and potent.¹⁷ As we will see, the blending of primary and secondary causes is also the blending of grace and nature. This has the important implication that grace is not a miracle.¹⁸ A miracle occurs when secondary causes – that is, natural causes – are removed to leave only the divine primary cause. Grace, on the other hand, involves the blending of causes both divine and natural; they are not

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A. Guagliardo, OP, Charles R. Hess, OP, and Richard C. Taylor (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 1996), 5. All references are to the page numbers in this edition.

¹⁴ See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.70.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, 8: ‘But the activity by which the second cause causes an effect is caused by the first cause, *for the first cause aids the second cause*, making it to act. Therefore, *the first cause* is more a cause than the second cause of that *activity* in virtue of which an effect is produced by the second cause.’

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, 132: ‘Now, whatever abundantly participates a characteristic proper to some thing becomes like it not only in form but also in action. ... Because form is the principle of action, everything that acquires its action from an abundant participation of the infusion of a higher agent must have two actions: one according to its proper form, another according to a form *participated from the higher agent*, as a heated knife cuts according to its proper form but burns insofar as it is heated.’ (my emphasis).

¹⁷ For Aquinas’s account of providence and divine causation, see *Summa Theologiae* 1a.22.

¹⁸ John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 25.

mutually exclusive. Jacob Schmutz, in an important essay on the changing views of causation beginning in the fourteenth century and the concomitant rise of the concept of *natura pura*, points to the paradoxical nature of Aquinas's position, focussing simultaneously on autonomy and dependence:

Aquinas could indicate both the dependence and the autonomy of the creature's being and action in relation to the Creator, on the one hand, by distinguishing them, through the doctrine of analogy, and on the other, by indicating the dependence by means of the doctrine of the essential participation of the secondary cause in relation to the first cause. Creatures can provoke movement or change, but they are not the adequate cause of them inasmuch as God is the immediate, active agent and giver of being...The first cause gives being, the secondary causes only determine it...¹⁹

This means that, for Aquinas, the primary cause acts *in* the secondary cause by means of *influentia* or 'influx' into the secondary cause. This will become very important for understanding the blending of nature and the supernatural.

Having sketched the basic lineaments of Radical Orthodoxy's vision, we now turn to the key debate where its main proponents have found most consonance with de Lubac's work, the relationship between grace and nature.

Grace and Nature: The Paradox of Creation

As Henri de Lubac observed, the debate concerning grace and nature that so dominated mid-twentieth century Catholic theology, whilst frequently focussing on the interpretation of Thomas Aquinas and the Thomist legacy, touched every aspect of Christian theology. Radical Orthodoxy has diagnosed with de Lubac the inherent dangers of separating existence into dual realms that stand over and against each other on a univocal plane, hence the desire to articulate the blended but distinct spheres of

¹⁹ Jacob Schmutz, 'The Medieval Doctrine of Causality and the Theology of Pure Nature (13th to 17th Centuries),' in *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., trans. Robert Williams (Ave Maria, Florida: Sapientia Press, 2009): 203-250, here citing 209-210.

grace and nature.²⁰ The wider debate concerning the supernatural is discussed in detail elsewhere in this volume. Our focus here is Radical Orthodoxy's particular contribution.

For de Lubac, the heart of the Christian mystery is paradoxical. Whilst it is the case that humanity could have a purely natural end, it is the case that humanity is created with a natural desire for the supernatural vision of God.²¹ Humanity's natural ends are simply intermediate ends which are enfolded in our final end.²² It is this final end which defines human nature. De Lubac writes:

For this desire is not some "accident" in me. It does not result from some peculiarity, possibly alterable, of my individual being, or from some historical contingency whose effects are more or less transitory...My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God. And, by God's will, I now have no other genuine end, no end really assigned to my nature or presented for my free acceptance under any guise, except that of "seeing God."²³

De Lubac sees that humanity's desire for the supernatural, in not being accidental, is constitutive of human nature. Of course, the vision of God is connatural only to God and cannot be achieved by humanity's natural power, even though the *desire* for that ultimate end is apparently natural. Following Aquinas, de Lubac insists that a natural desire of any creature cannot be frustrated without twisting and contorting that nature. So to frustrate humanity's desire for the *visio dei* would be to confine humanity to an

²⁰ Conor Cunningham, 'Natura Pura, The Invention of the Anti-Christ: A Week with No Sabbath,' *Communio* 37 (Summer 2010), 243-254, here citing 244. 'There is a perennial temptation that haunts all thought, a temptation that is dangerous for most discourse, but terminal for theology, namely, to parse existence in terms of dualisms: transcendence/ immanence; natural/ supernatural; sacred/ profane; philosophy/ theology, and so on.' Cunningham argues that only God could be a 'pure nature'.

²¹ Following Aquinas, for example in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.57.4: 'Besides, it was proved above that every intellect naturally desires the vision of the divine substance, but natural desire cannot be incapable of fulfillment. Therefore, any created intellect whatever can attain to the vision of the divine substance, and the inferiority of its nature is no impediment.' See also *Summa Contra Gentiles* III.59.1. However, de Lubac does not resort to arguments from authority. He is not interested in the possibility of a purely finite natural end of man (a possibility he readily admits), but the actual openness of human desire towards the infinite – the 'restlessness' of St. Augustine.

²² John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 25.

²³ Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 54-55. See below for a more detailed discussion of teleology.

endless suffering. So it seems that God is obliged to realise the beatific vision because the desire for that vision is innate in humanity's nature and, in being innate, it must be fulfilled.

But how could God's realisation of humanity's natural desire for the supernatural be a matter of grace – that is, a free gift – and, at the same time, of obligation? Milbank's answer to this conundrum reaches to the heart of Radical Orthodoxy's appropriation of de Lubac and the Thomist vision he espouses:

...the traditional account of grace and the supernatural [that of Aquinas prior to his sixteenth century commentators] is *ontologically revisionary*. The natural desire cannot be frustrated, yet it cannot be of itself fulfilled. Human nature in its self-exceeding seems in justice to require a gift – yet the gift of grace remains beyond all justice and requirement. The paradox is for de Lubac only to be entertained because one must remember that the just requirement for the gift in humanity is itself a created gift.²⁴

Maintaining the paradox of grace and nature in this way is part of Radical Orthodoxy's commitment both to creation as *the gift ex nihilo* and also to the metaphysics of participation. How? We saw above that the difference between God and creation is not like the difference between creatures; it is not symmetrical. God establishes creation as other than himself. The difference between God and creation is itself a gift. Importantly, creation's participation in God is not proper to creation; God grants to creation a participation in his own substantiality. So it is not the case that creation establishes itself as 'other' than God and then becomes the subject of God's gratuity because creation is, in itself, nothing. To put the matter another way, creation's ability to receive the gifts of God is itself a gift. There is nothing that stands outside this economy of divine gratuity. What creation has is genuinely its own, but what belongs to creation is always a gift. To return to the matter of grace and nature, for Milbank, following de Lubac, the innate and natural desire of humanity for the beatific vision does not constitute an obligation which is external to God, lying outside the divine economy of gratuitous creation, because that desire also finds its

²⁴ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 35.

ultimate source in God. Of course, that natural desire for the supernatural is genuinely the creature's own, but its ultimate first cause is God. Humanity's just requirement for the genuinely new *second* gift of grace which will bring humanity to the beatific vision must be understood as 'beyond all justice and requirement' because that just requirement emerges from a natural desire for the supernatural which is God's *first* gift in creation. Put more simply, humanity renounces any claim upon God because its primary nature is receptivity to the divine gift, first of 'being' and secondly of 'beatitude': 'For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?' (1 Corinthians 4.7).

The view that the natural desire for the supernatural is a gift of God, however, carries with it an obvious danger: it seems to turn everything into a matter of grace and rids human nature of any integrity. Of course, this is precisely the concern of those who maintain the need for a *natura pura*, namely the preservation of the gratuity of grace. Yet Radical Orthodoxy holds fast to the paradox of the natural desire for the supernatural. As we have seen, creation is the first gift of an existence that is other than God, while grace is the second and wholly new gift of deification in which humanity is united to God without losing creaturely integrity. The natural desire for the supernatural is 'the gift of the bond' between the first and second gifts, 'negotiated by the spirit's freedom.'²⁵ So the natural desire for the supernatural is a 'suspended middle' (to coin von Balthasar's phrase which is in turn borrowed from Erich Przywara²⁶) that indicates the unity-in-distinction of the orders of grace and nature. It rests in a double paradox: creation is autonomous being and yet heteronomous gift whilst grace is the raising of human spirit, as human spirit, to be beyond human spirit.

In a now famous letter to Maurice Blondel written in 1932, de Lubac asks, 'This concept of a pure nature runs into great difficulties, the principal one of which seems to me to be the following: how can a conscious spirit be anything other than an

²⁵ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 44.

²⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview*, trans. Joseph Fessio and Susan Clements (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 14-15; Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 290ff.

absolute desire for God?’²⁷ It is conscious spirit that stands in a suspended middle that cannot be simply a part of nature or purely a matter of grace. So what is ‘conscious spirit’? It is something natural and supernatural, human and divine. Following de Lubac, Milbank answers this question through a category that has been central to Radical Orthodoxy’s engagement with wider theology and philosophy, namely gift.²⁸ Spirit is conscious of continuously receiving itself as gift. This is more than a feeling of absolute dependence; it is the drive to know the source of what we are as recipient spirits who cannot fully command what is received because a gift must always ‘flow’, continually giving itself anew. The response is gratitude towards the mysterious and unfathomable source of an infinite gift. This establishes an important characteristic of the gift for Radical Orthodoxy, and Milbank in particular: reciprocity. Whilst Derrida theorises a pure one-way gift in which no return is possible lest the giver be tainted by self-interest, Milbank insists that for a gift truly to be gift it must be acknowledged as such. This acknowledgement takes the form of gratitude. The recipient offers a return gift: thanksgiving. So whereas, for Derrida, for a gift to be truly a gift it must be only one-way – from giver to recipient – and thereby totally selfless or purely altruistic, for Milbank the gift requires reciprocal exchange because the gift must be acknowledged as such. The recipient acknowledges the gift and reciprocates with gratitude to the giver. So gift, for Milbank, establishes relationship through reciprocity.

Moreover, following the logic of de Lubac’s position, Milbank argues that *natura pura* fails to guarantee the absolute gratuity of grace because it conceives of grace in a way that is univocal with gifts *within* the created order. Donation within creation implies the gift of something to an already established recipient. Similarly, *natura pura* implies a recipient standing in purity outside the economy of gift prior to the receipt of any gift. How, asks Milbank, does this ‘pure nature’ receive this gift? Does it do so purely of its own volition, recognising and thereby receiving the gift by virtue of its own wilful power, a power kept in reserve beyond the gift? Indeed, if a pure

²⁷ Henri de Lubac, *Mémoire sur l’occasion de mes écrits*, ed. Georges Chantraine and Fabienne Clinquart (Oeuvres complètes, 33) (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 188.

²⁸ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 49-52. Milbank’s interventions in the philosophical and theological debates concerning the gift have been crucial. See in particular *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003); ‘The Soul of Reciprocity Part One: Reciprocity Refused,’ *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 335-391; ‘The Soul of Reciprocity Part Two: Reciprocity Granted,’ *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 485-507. See also Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), especially ch.2.

nature is understood to stand outside the economy of gift in this way, it establishes an autonomy for the created order and a distance from God whereby humanity can wilfully *require* of God the gift of beatitude on the basis of its self-standing 'pure nature'. According to de Lubac, this reduces to Pelagianism.²⁹ Crucially, for grace to be truly gratuitous it must presume nothing, 'not even creation'.³⁰ This is why creation *ex nihilo* is not the establishment of a *natura pura* to which grace is later added, but the expression of an eternal gratuity into which nature is always drawn, even from the moment of its being spoken into existence by God. This is what Milbank refers to as 'gift without contrast'. There are modes or distinctions of gift and always the possibility of the genuinely new gift, but there is nothing lying outside the economy of divine gratuity against which it can be contrasted.

Milbank gives de Lubac's understanding of the gratuity of grace an even more radical reading. As we have seen, Aquinas's neoplatonic understanding of causation involved the in-flowing, or *influentia*, of divine causal power into secondary causes in such a way that God is not simply one cause amongst others.³¹ This has the crucial consequence that creation is not an object upon which God acts by means of the delivery of grace, but is the very instantiation of causation or 'influence'. So rather than God acting *on* something through the delivery of grace, Milbank proposes that the correct Thomist view as followed by de Lubac is that the act of creation is at one and the same time 'a gift of a gift to a gift.'³² God's creation establishes a threefold order of gratuity: the recipient of the gift, the gift itself and the donation of one to the other. This seems to establish, however, a radically unilateral gift: God simply gives everything.

So does this fatally compromise the gratuity of grace and the proper autonomy of the creature? Quite the contrary: this is the only way of preserving the sovereignty of God and the gratuity of grace. To understand why this is the case, we must recall that the

²⁹ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 50; De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 48.

³⁰ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 50.

³¹ Schmutz, 'The Medieval Doctrine of Causality', 215-30. Schmutz describes the shift in the understanding of *influentia* away from the influx of primary causes *into* secondary causes towards an understanding of primary causes acting *with* or *alongside* secondary causes. The distinction is subtle but the latter understanding leads to a more flattened view of 'causes amongst causes' rather than a hierarchical view of causation in which the higher causes inhere in the lower causes and act not *with* them but *in and through* them.

³² Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 96.

difference between God and creation is not like the difference between creatures. Whereas the difference between creatures (for example, between two people) belongs properly to creatures because of their separate and autonomous substantial natures, the difference between a creature and God is itself a gift of God. In itself, the creature is nothing; it does not instantiate itself as other than God and thereby exert its own causal influence or claim. It is God who, in the act of creation, gives existence to that which is other, holding creation at a distance so that it can be creation. The nature of creation's autonomy from God is therefore paradoxical: on the one hand, creation is autonomous because it is not God, whilst on the other hand this is no autonomy at all because creation's 'otherness' is always due to God and his act of creation *ex nihilo*.

Having received itself as the unilateral and all-encompassing gift of God *ex nihilo*, creation's only response is to return itself in gratitude to the source of its being. A creature's expression of its nature in its very existence is its return to, or desire for, God. Yet God does not receive anything because whatever God receives, God has already donated. So Milbank proposes a most profound paradox at the heart of the Christian doctrine of creation: 'unilateral exchange'.³³ Whilst there can only be genuine reciprocity in the Trinity or between creatures, the apparently reciprocal exchange between God and creation is only ever a matter of God's *influentia* by which creation is given the power of responding and returning to God. This guarantees the gratuity of grace because it refuses any pure natural autonomy that can be the basis of a claim by creation on God's gratuity. In short, there is nothing outside the gift and no position from which creation can assert itself over and against God. On this view, grace is the genuinely new (yet always inchoately anticipated) gift arising from within the primordial gift of creation by means of God's *influentia*.

Throughout Radical Orthodoxy's appropriation of de Lubac's understanding of grace and nature, the paradoxical structure of Christian theology is made evident. Indeed, Aaron Riches sees this as the heart of the dispute with neoscholastic theologians such as Lawrence Feingold who defend the concept of *natura pura*.³⁴ For many modern

³³ This paradox is expressed in the Church of England's Eucharistic liturgy with the use at the offertory of King David's prayer dedicating the people's gifts for the building of the Temple: 'For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.' (1 Chronicles 29.14).

³⁴ Aaron Riches, 'To Rest in the Infinite Altitude of the Divine Substance: A Lubacian response to the provocation of Lawrence Feingold and the resurgent attack on the legacy of *Surnaturel* (1946) – Part

theologians, paradox is a sign of incoherence and confusion and must therefore be resolved. Something must belong either to the realm of nature or the realm of grace. As nature is relinquished it gives way to supernatural in a kind of ‘zero-sum game’ – we have one or the other. For de Lubac, Christian theology is paradoxical in the sense that it is structured around both/ and, not either/ or. Creation is *both* other than God *and* nothing; Christ is *both* divine *and* human; spiritual creatures are *both* natural *and* intrinsically orientated to the supernatural; grace is *both* innately desired by nature *and* a wholly new gift. Paradox is not a logical contradiction to be overcome or a mystery that will be clarified on the far side of the *eschaton*. It is not a fog that will clear once further investigation has been undertaken or the concepts clarified. Paradox is not simply a function of language that could be resolved if only we sorted out our conceptual schemata, but is part of the highest reaches of metaphysics. The tension of paradox is itself (paradoxically) revealing. So it is only by holding together divine and human, grace and nature, faith and reason, sacred and secular, that the non-competitive and blended structure of these concepts becomes apparent and each reveals the other.³⁵ Milbank sees the paradoxical nature of metaphysics and theology as contrasted with modern dialectics that is associated particularly with the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).³⁶ Put very simply, dialectical thought works through the proposal of thesis and antithesis that are resolved into synthesis. In short, dialectics overcomes all tension and resolves into a unity whereas paradox requires the maintenance of tension as intrinsic to the depths of created being.

One,’ unpublished essay provided by the author, 32: ‘In this regard, the divide between de Lubac and Feingold concerns two distinct approaches to theological perplexity: the one sees theological perplexity as essentially internal to the paradox of the hypostatic union and the mystery of Christology – the very core of Christian thought and practice – while the other sees perplexity as a problematical failure of reason fully to understand faith, and thus an aspect of theology in need of resolution in the quest for systematic clarity.’ See also Part Two, 8ff. See Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*, 2nd edition (Ave Maria University: Sapientia Press, 2010).

³⁵ See Rowan Williams’s recent reflections on the wider implications of paradox in *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), chapter 5: ‘Advances in understanding come when both theoreticians and experimenters identify the oddity within ‘normal’ discourse and press its tensions a bit further – not with the aim of removing all tension but in order to find ways of holding it in a larger structure and discovering new tension at that level which in turn will generate further fruitful crises.’ (130).

³⁶ John Milbank, ‘The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek’ in John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2009): 111-233.

The importance of paradox for de Lubac and Radical Orthodoxy can be understood in relation to the central paradox of Christian theology, the incarnation.³⁷ Christ is fully divine and fully human, yet one person. How can the infinite dwell with the finite in one person? How can Jesus Christ be both God and man, and one person? Attempts to resolve this paradox – to decide that Christ is really divine *or* human – were rejected by the ecumenical councils of the Church. Asserting Christ’s essential divinity is known as Docetism while opting exclusively for his created, albeit exalted, nature is associated with the followers of Arius. At the same time, resolving the paradox by mixing or synthesising the divine and human natures of Christ results only in a hybrid whereby Christ is a separate third entity, neither human nor divine. All of these attempts at resolution fail because they do not do justice to the theological insight that only a single divine humanity can bring salvation. On the one hand, we are only saved by God’s grace; on the other hand, it must be a human sacrificial action that reconciles us to God because it is humanity that has estranged itself. So Christ must stand in a ‘suspended middle’ between divine and human, finite and infinite, by being *both* divine *and* human. Because these are not mutually exclusive univocal natures (they do not, as it were, compete for space in Christ), Christ is fully both. This paradoxical relationship between infinite and finite is mirrored in the paradoxical relationship between Christ’s body, the Church, and the world, as well as between the grace which Christ offers and the nature which always intrinsically desires that grace. The paradox of Christ, which seeks no synthesis or resolution, reveals implications beyond Christology in the paradoxical nature of metaphysics itself in which tensions give rise to tensions and there cannot be any final and complete analysis outside God in whom all opposites coincide.³⁸ Whereas modern thought seeks mastery and control in terms of resolution, the philosophy and theology of antiquity and the Middle Ages understood paradoxical mystery to lie at the heart of a symbolic created reality which points, paradoxically, to a creator who lies beyond all image and symbol.³⁹

³⁷ The connection between Christological disputes concerning the relation between divine and human natures and the debate concerning nature and grace is drawn by Aaron Riches, “Christology and *duplex hominis beatitudo*: Re-sketching the Supernatural Again,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14 (2012): 44-69.

³⁸ The term ‘coincidence of opposites’ belongs to the fifteenth century Cardinal, philosopher, mathematician and theologian Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464). See especially his treatise *De Docta Ignorantia* (On Learned Ignorance) in Nicholas of Cusa, trans. H. Lawrence Bond, *Selected Spiritual Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997).

³⁹ The most sophisticated account of the metaphysical implications of paradox in the Radical Orthodoxy genre can be found in Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with*

Grace and Nature: Some Implications

For de Lubac, the debate concerning grace and nature had significant implications for the relation between faith and reason, the sacred and secular, and the Church and state. Likewise, Radical Orthodoxy has proposed the always blended but distinct realms of theology and philosophy as well as faith and reason.⁴⁰ The neoscholastic concept of grace standing alongside a realm of *natura pura* mirrors an understanding of the Church standing outside the worldly and autonomous domain of the secular, delivering grace from outside according to the mechanism of its sacraments. The notion of a *natura pura* is coterminous with the modern establishment of the secular as a desacralized, autonomous and neutral order to which the sacred is added as an extrinsic addition.⁴¹ By contrast, for de Lubac grace is not an extrinsic power applied to autonomous nature. The natural desire for the supernatural means that grace works by the divine *influentia* in nature. De Lubac outlines the implications of this vision in an early essay:

The law of the relations between nature and grace is, in its generality, everywhere the same. It is from within that grace grasps nature, and, far from diminishing nature, raises it up, in order to make it serve its own ends. It is from within that faith transforms reason, that the Church influences the state. As the messenger of Christ, the church does not come to be the guardian of the

Nicholas of Cusa (London: SCM Press, 2013). Hoff's outstanding analysis focuses particularly on the mystagogy of Nicholas of Cusa and his notion of the coincidence of opposites.

⁴⁰ See, for example, John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, ch.1; Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. For an account suitable for students, see Andrew Davison, *The Love of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy for Theologians*, London: SCM Press, 2013 and Andrew Davison (ed.), *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition*, London: SCM Press, 2011. For a very closely related understanding of the relation between theology and philosophy, see D.C. Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013).

⁴¹ See, for example, Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley et al (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995); Henri de Lubac, *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), Part 2 section III. See also Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 311-312.

state; on the contrary she ennobles it, inspiring the state to be Christian and thereby more human.⁴²

The understanding of grace grasping nature from within is a clear rejection of what de Lubac calls the ‘extrincist’ understanding of grace that can be seen in the writings of early modern thinkers such as Michael Baius (1513-1589) and Cornelius Jansenius (1585-1638) and brought to fruition in the theology of neoscholasticism.⁴³ The idea that grace is an extrinsic addition to an autonomous natural realm issues in an understanding of the Church as an institution standing outside the world, shoring up its own boundaries and becoming one influence amongst other institutional influences over an autonomous ‘pure’ secular domain.⁴⁴ Following Aquinas, for whom grace is not ‘extraneous’, de Lubac sees that faith transforms reason from within whilst the Church is not an agency external to secular civic society which delivers grace from without. Rather, it builds up true society from within. For Milbank, viewing the Church as the extraneous source of grace leads to a sense that it is just another locus of power wielded within and over the world rather than the means of pointing to, orientating and perfecting an already present natural and created drive towards transcendence.⁴⁵

This approach to nature and grace has further implications for the understanding of theology’s relation to other modes of intellectual enquiry and investigation. Does theology wield a kind of extraneous power over other disciplines somewhat analogous to an extrincist view of grace? It is often assumed that Radical Orthodoxy has a triumphalist attitude to disciplines beyond the boundaries of theology that entails the extraneous judgement or ‘placement’ of non-theological modes of reason. We might

⁴² ‘La loi des rapports entre la nature et la grâce est, dans sa généralité, partout la même. C’est par le dedans que la grâce reprend la nature et, loin de l’abaisser, l’élève, pour la faire servir à ses fins. C’est par le dedans que la foi transforme la raison, que l’Église influe sur l’État. Messagère du Christ, l’Église ne vient pas mettre l’État en tutelle; elle l’ennoblit au contraire, lui inspirant d’être un État chrétien et, par là, plus humain.’ Henri de Lubac, ‘Le pouvoir de l’Église en matière temporelle,’ *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 12, 1932: 329-354, here citing 343-344.

⁴³ See Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Crossroad, 2000), chs. 1-3.

⁴⁴ For a helpful and succinct account of de Lubac’s rejection of ‘political Augustinianism’ which radically separated Church from state, see David Grumett, “Henri de Lubac: Looking for Books to Read the World,” in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 236-249.

⁴⁵ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 23.

even think that, in the end, all intellectual pursuits should be regarded as different modes of theology, answering to the external power of its canons of authority and reason. This, however, is certainly not Radical Orthodoxy's position and this can be shown through its appropriation of de Lubac's basic theological sensibility. If one regards nature as intrinsically orientated to the divine and human nature (including its various modes of intellectual enquiry) as innately desirous of the vision of eternal truth, this implies that all modes of human investigation harbour an intrinsic thrust towards the knowledge of God via the particular knowledge of other things. This is why Aquinas can appropriate pagan Aristotelian metaphysics and natural philosophy to produce a synthesis with the Neoplatonic tradition, all under the interpretative authority and orientation of the Church's holy teaching. Just as grace perfects nature, so Christian theology turns the water of pagan philosophical learning into the wine of Christian theology.⁴⁶ It is not that theology acts extraneously as just another mode of intellectual enquiry that must be victorious over other disciplines in a battle for superiority. Rather, theology operates as that mode of reason orientated always towards transcendence and yet lacking any specific subject matter. It works, as it were, within human enquiry to perfect our investigations in pointing to the ultimate goal of all enquiry in a singular and transcendent source of truth. Theology might also identify erroneous theologies or metaphysics lying behind certain disciplines, and this has certainly been one of Radical Orthodoxy's defining tasks.⁴⁷ So human investigation of the created order by means of natural philosophy (later becoming the natural sciences) is prompted by the sense that new discoveries orientate us towards a transcendent truth. This is why de Lubac could take a very positive approach to theological dialogue with science, including (with Teilhard de Chardin) the exploration of evolutionary theory.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, following the Thomist tradition, we cannot understand such wonder and exploration as simply a matter of epistemological curiosity; as Milbank makes clear, it is part of creation's basic

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.1.8 and *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, 2.3. ad 5.

⁴⁷ Aside from Milbank's critique of the social sciences in *Theology and Social Theory* and Pickstock's theological consummation of philosophy in *After Writing*, see Michael Hanby, *No God? No Science?* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) and Conor Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Idea: Why the Creationists and Ultra-Darwinists Both Get it Wrong* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013).

⁴⁸ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 24.

ontological orientation to a divine end in which every creature is united to God after the manner of its own nature.⁴⁹

Grace and Nature: The Final End

As we have seen, much of the debate surrounding grace and nature concerns the relation of divine action, creaturely causation and humanity's ultimate end. According to Radical Orthodoxy, the idea of a purely natural end only arises once teleology is eclipsed in early modernity.⁵⁰ More specifically, a shift occurs in the way that teleology is understood. So what is teleology and how does this affect the debate concerning grace and nature that so embroiled de Lubac?⁵¹

Teleology refers to the study of final causes – the purpose or goal of a particular action or event. Typically, a teleological description will use phrases such as 'in order to' or 'for the sake of'. For example, I go to the shop to buy a drink in order to quench my thirst. What causes me to go to the shop is the *telos* of quenching my thirst. For ancient and medieval philosophers and theologians, the whole of nature is teleologically ordered.⁵² The bird has wings in order to fly. The man runs in order to get fit. The child prays in order to become closer to God. In the modern period, however, the notion of final causes came under significant attack, particularly from natural philosophers such as Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and René Descartes (1596-1650). It was clear, they thought, that teleological orientation, if there is such a thing, belongs only to human beings because human action is intentional and purposive. A person can deliberate and plan so that certain goals are achieved whereas wider nature works by efficient causation and mechanism. To the extent that artefacts and human systems (chairs, cars, the postal system) are the outcome of human intentional planning, they too are orientated towards certain ends and might therefore be classified as teleological. However, the teleological orientation of something like a chair is not intrinsic. It does not belong to the chair *per se* as a material object. Rather, the teleological orientation of the chair (the act of sitting) emerges from the chair's

⁴⁹ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 26-27; see Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.25.

⁵⁰ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 21.

⁵¹ For a more detailed account of this shift in the understanding of teleology, see Simon Oliver, "Aquinas and Aristotle's Teleology," *Nova et Vetera* 11(2013): 849-870.

⁵² For example, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a.44.4.responsio: 'Every agent acts for an end: otherwise one thing would not follow more than another from the action of the agent, unless it were by chance....Therefore, the divine goodness is the end of all things.'

designer and the person who uses it. In other words, the teleological orientation of the chair is extrinsic – it lies outside the chair, in its designer or user.

So we arrive at an important distinction in the modern understanding of teleology: an end can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Insofar as the goal of a creature is an expression of that creature's intrinsic nature – or, to put it in more precise Aristotelian terms, its blend of form and matter – the goal is intrinsic or innate. When the goal does not belong to a creature but is applied from elsewhere, for example by the designer of an artefact such as a table, it is extrinsic. The rejection of 'real natures' or 'form' in the increasingly mechanistic natural philosophy of the seventeenth century suggested that there were no genuinely intrinsic ends, except perhaps in the case of human intention. Matter came to be understood as passive and something to which one could subsequently *add* a goal or purpose.⁵³ So just as the teleology of a car is extrinsic and donated to the material by a human designer, so the teleological orientation of nature was first and foremost extrinsic, being granted by God the creator. God comes to be understood as a designer according to an analogy with human designers of artefacts, hence the growing popularity of the design argument for God's existence based on the concept of extrinsic teleology. Meanwhile, any attribution of intrinsic teleology to the natural realm, and particularly to inanimate objects, is merely a case of anthropomorphic projection. We only see purposiveness in nature because we humans are (uniquely) purposive creatures who are apparently less restricted by irrational animal instinct. In fact, there is no intrinsic purpose in nature; it works by simple material mechanisms orientated towards certain functional ends given by the divine designer. Modernity therefore marks the rejection, first and foremost, of intrinsic teleology. Extrinsic teleology, in which purposes are layered on top of a passive material nature according to a design, is preserved insofar as it is consistent with a more fundamental mechanistic cosmology.

⁵³ For a clear and succinct account of the understanding of matter as passive, see Gary Deason, "Reformation Theology and the Mechanistic Conception of Nature," in *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, ed. David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986): 167-191.

How does this compare with pre-modern understandings of final causation? For Aristotle there is no dualism of intrinsic and extrinsic teleology. Human intentionality is just another instance of the wider intrinsic thrust of all things towards their particular ends or goals, and eventually towards the Good. For Aristotle, the end or goal of something is already given by its form; he says clearly ‘the form is the final cause’. To be a heavy object is simply to be orientated towards a low place in the cosmos. To be a bird simply is to be orientated towards flight. To be an acorn is to be orientated towards becoming an oak. To be a human being simply is to be orientated towards God. The form contains potentially that which is fully actualised in the achievement of something’s *telos*. For example, the oak tree is contained *potentially* within the acorn. Crucially, the motion from potency to act in the achievement of a *telos* is the creature’s own. Yet blended with this intrinsic orientation is a creature’s continual striving to exceed its current state in moving towards a yet-to-be-achieved goal that lies as yet out of reach. As Aquinas puts it, ‘To desire or have appetency is nothing else but to strive for something, to stretch, as it were, toward something which is destined for oneself.’⁵⁴ The creature, being receptive to the external actualising power of others, achieves its goal. So the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of teleological orientation are always blended. Even in material human artefacts, the matter (for example, the marble of a sculpture) is not entirely passive and the teleology is not wholly extrinsic. By virtue of its substantial form, the matter is intrinsically orientated towards certain ends and not others – one can make a statue out of marble but not a coat.

Returning now to the relationship between grace and nature, it is possible to see that the neoscholastic position opposed by de Lubac requires a strict distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic teleology. A *natura pura* has an intrinsic orientation towards certain natural ends that are largely concerned with self-sufficiency and self-regulation and hence come to be intelligible in mechanistic terms.⁵⁵ To this is added a desire for the supernatural that is ‘elicited’ and is therefore extrinsic in origin, even though it comes to reside in nature. Thus there are two ends that run parallel, one intrinsic and purely natural (the things that are proportionate to human nature such as making dwellings and supplying food) and the other extrinsic and supernatural (the

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 22.1

⁵⁵ See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 22.

vision of God).⁵⁶ Yet it is not clear how, if at all, these dual orders relate. This means that the extrinsic supernatural end can be seen as an arbitrary and unintelligible addition to the purely natural and self-sufficient ends of humanity. The supernatural end becomes a focus for superstition and it leaves behind a largely autonomous ‘secular’ realm of the purely natural.⁵⁷

For de Lubac, humanity’s orientation towards the supernatural is natural in the sense of being an intrinsic or innate *desire*; it is extrinsic because it is an orientation to what is transcendent that is achieved only through the second gift of grace. It is by grace that God enables the human creature to be moved and to move towards a supernatural end. In other words, the teleological motion towards God is both God’s and genuinely the creature’s own, made ‘sweet and delightful’, as Aquinas puts it, by God’s grace.⁵⁸ For de Lubac and Radical Orthodoxy, the very form of humanity is always a teleological orientation towards the beatific vision: ‘My finality, which is expressed by this desire [for the vision of God], is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God.’⁵⁹ The key point of dispute concerns the more exclusively extrinsic nature of human teleology conceived by neoscholasticism. For Reinhard Hütter, for example, the second gift of grace begins by *initially* ordering the first gift of created human nature to a supernatural end (an end it did not previously have in any guise) *and then* perfecting that nature in beatitude.⁶⁰ So both acts are, as it were, extrinsically ordering human nature to a supernatural end in such a way that humanity becomes passive and its beatitude a matter of ‘design’. According to Radical Orthodoxy’s appropriation of de Lubac, the first gift of created human nature is *always* teleologically ordered to a supernatural end that is, paradoxically, beyond

⁵⁶ See, for example, Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters*, 230-242.

⁵⁷ Of course, contemporary defenders of *natura pura* according to the tradition of Francisco Suárez (1548-1617) and against de Lubac completely reject this accusation. It is beyond the scope of this essay to engage their intricate arguments in detail. See Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters*, 339-343 and 431-435; Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), chapter 1.

⁵⁸ See Simon Oliver, “The Sweet Delight of Virtue and Grace in Aquinas’s Ethics,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005): 52-71.

⁵⁹ De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 55.

⁶⁰ Reinhard Hütter, “*Desiderium Naturale Visionis Dei – Est autem duplex hominis beatitudo sive felicitas*: Some Observations about Lawrence Feingold’s and John Milbank’s Recent Interventions in the Debate over the Natural Desire to See God,” *Nova et Vetera* 5 (2007): 133-83. See especially 102-103.

all proportion to human nature.⁶¹ Blended with this intrinsic teleological orientation is the second gift of grace that brings that desire to fruition. As Aquinas puts it, ‘when [an] end is beyond the capacity of the agent striving to attain it...it is looked for from another’s bestowing.’⁶²

This emphasis on ‘form’ is open to an important objection articulated by Lawrence Feingold, whose position on the relationship between grace and nature is squarely opposed to that of de Lubac and Radical Orthodoxy. If the form is indeed the final cause, this implies that the addition of a new form known as ‘grace’ will also bring with it a new final *telos*. Feingold states:

...we cannot conclude that because God has destined man for an end that is above his nature, such an end must therefore be a finality “imprinted on the nature” itself, or an “intrinsic” or “ontological” end, or an “essential finality.” All that we can conclude is that if God has eternally destined us to a supernatural end, it is fitting that he give a new form, “added on” to our nature, by which we are suitably ordered to that supernatural end. This new accidental form, which is sanctifying grace, must necessarily be above our nature, so as to make us proportionate to an end above our nature, connatural only to God.⁶³

Nicholas Healy points out that the texts to which Feingold appeals (*Summa Contra Gentiles* III.150 and *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae.62.1) do not support the view that the addition of the form of grace provides humanity with a new final end.⁶⁴ In the passage from the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas is particularly concerned to argue that ‘sanctifying grace is a form and perfection remaining in man even when he is not acting.’ In other words, sanctifying grace is not simply a force acting externally on the

⁶¹ The standard neoscholastic argument that over-extends the Aristotelian principle that ‘the end of nature must be proportionate to that nature’ seems to suggest that grace is a gift that renders nature proportionate to its supernatural end. It is not clear, however, that a created nature could *ever* be proportionate to the vision of God. The supernatural end is, rather, the deification of humanity that is a deepening participation in the divine life, not by proportion but by attribution.

⁶² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.62.4. *responsio*.

⁶³ Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*, 321. See also 318.

⁶⁴ Nicholas J. Healy, “Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace: A Note on Some Recent Contributions to the Debate,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35 (2008): 535-564, especially 560-561.

human person; it is a power that becomes the person's own and in which the person is settled through a transformed nature, not merely transformed activity. Form, for Aquinas, is complex and maybe qualified or added to. The addition of the new form of grace perfects natural form, it does not destroy it or supplant it. The basic natural orientation of humanity to its final end is qualified by the addition of a genuinely new form called grace: humanity is now able to move and be moved to its final end in response to its natural formal desire for that end.

Healy and Riches, clarifying further the basic contours of Radical Orthodoxy's appropriation of de Lubac, trace much of the dispute concerning grace and nature to different deployments of Aristotle's maxim that 'the end of nature must be proportionate to nature.'⁶⁵ For neoscholastic theologians, this maxim applies both to the desire for an end and the power to achieve that end. Yet crucially Aquinas's views of providence and grace include two elements: first, degrees of potency to a given end and, secondly, a hierarchy of ends in which the lower participate in the higher. So whilst there is a sense in which humanity is in potency to beatitude as its final end, that potency is radical (a passive potency) because it takes the form of a desire that cannot be fulfilled except by God's grace.⁶⁶ Yet at no point is humanity neutral or indifferent with respect to the vision of God. Therefore, it cannot be neutral or indifferent to the means of achieving that vision, namely grace. Meanwhile, humanity has two ends, one natural and another ultimate or supernatural. These ends are not parallel or separate. Rather, they are non-contrastive in the sense that humanity's natural end is enfolded in the ultimate end of beatitude.⁶⁷ For de Lubac, expounding a

⁶⁵ Healy, "Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace" and Aaron Riches, "Christology and *duplex hominis beatitudo*." Whilst Healy is not in agreement with Milbank's position concerning de Lubac's response to *Humani generis* (see 552 n.41 of his "Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace") his view on the debate concerning the supernatural compliments very effectively the arguments of those who identify themselves explicitly with Radical Orthodoxy.

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III.9.2.responsio: 'What is in potentiality is reduced to act by what is in act; for that whereby things are heated must itself be hot. Now man is in potentiality to the knowledge of the blessed, which consists in the vision of God; and is ordained to it as to an end; since the rational creature is capable of that blessed knowledge, inasmuch as he is made in the image of God. Now men are brought to this end of beatitude by the humanity of Christ, according to Heb. 2:10: "For it became Him, for Whom are all things, and by Whom are all things, Who had brought many children unto glory, to perfect the author of their salvation by His passion."'

⁶⁷ Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate* q.6. a.4 ad 5: 'We are endowed with principles by which we can prepare for that perfect knowledge of separate substances but not with principles by which to reach it. For even though by his nature man is inclined to his ultimate end, he cannot reach it by nature but only by grace, and this owing to the loftiness of that end.'

text from Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*,⁶⁸ humanity's beatitude is twofold (*duplex beatitudo*).⁶⁹ First, we have an imperfect beatitude that belongs to this world. Secondly, we have a true and perfect beatitude that is the vision of God obtained only by grace even though that perfect beatitude is desired by nature. According to Aquinas, the first beatitude is associated with the contemplation of divine things that we find in ancient philosophy that indicates a desire for the vision of God possessed by the blessed that comes only by the grace of God in Christ. The desire that leads to the contemplative life is fulfilled – not supplanted – only in the vision of the First Truth, namely God.⁷⁰

For Healy, a key implication of de Lubac's position on nature and grace is that the primary form of humanity is receptivity (following 1 Corinthians 4.7).

If human nature desires a final end that exceeds nature, then the form of nature's desire is receptivity – a receptive desire for the surprising and surpassing gift of friendship and assistance from another. This is supremely fitting for a nature whose very existence is from another.⁷¹

The exemplary instance of this receptivity is Mary's fiat in the incarnation. As Riches points out, this is also an affirmation of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in which the first gift of created reality – the reception of being – is consummated in receptivity to *theosis*.⁷² The natural desire for the supernatural is therefore a recognition that the creature, in itself, is nothing and receives its being at every moment. This leads to the renunciation of any demand on God. It is not, however, a passive receptivity because it is also a positive yearning for the utterly gratuitous and unmerited friendship of

⁶⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae.62.1: 'Now man's happiness is twofold, as was also stated above (q. 5, a. 5). One is proportionate to human nature, a happiness, to wit, which man can obtain by means of his natural principles. The other is a happiness surpassing man's nature, and which man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the Godhead, about which it is written (2 Pet. 1:4) that by Christ we are made "partakers of the Divine nature."'

⁶⁹ See Henri de Lubac, "*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo* (Saint Thomas, Ia 2ae, q. 62, a. I)," *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948): 290–99 translated by Aaron Riches and Peter M. Candler, Jr. in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35 (2008): 599-612.

⁷⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.63.2 and 10.

⁷¹ Healy, "Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace," 561.

⁷² Riches, "Christology and *duplex hominis beatitudo*," 56. See also Healy, "Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace," 547.

God.⁷³ With an emphasis on receptivity as well as donation, this view supplements very effectively Milbank's appropriation of de Lubac focussed on gift as a fundamental theological category. Milbank offers a more radical extension of de Lubac's theology because the gift of grace and the receptivity of nature do not constitute only a theological anthropology and soteriology but also a doctrine of creation.⁷⁴ Insofar as nature is teleologically ordered to the human person in such a way that creation is made for the intellectual spirit, the ends of all creatures are gathered up in the supernatural *finis ultimus* of humanity's vision of God.

Conclusion

The extent of Henri de Lubac's importance and influence over contemporary theology is demonstrated by Radical Orthodoxy's thorough appropriation of his work. This is particularly the case with respect to the crucial debate concerning grace and nature that has been the focus of this chapter. More could be said about the importance of de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* for Radical Orthodoxy and the centrality of the Eucharist for ecclesiology and language.⁷⁵ A more thorough absorption by Radical Orthodoxy of de Lubac's work on the theology of history and biblical exegesis remains in the future.

It would be a misunderstanding, however, to think that Radical Orthodoxy simply picks up what de Lubac says about grace and nature in isolation. The alignment with de Lubac is possible because of more fundamental and basic agreements concerning the importance of *ressourcement* (particularly, for Radical Orthodoxy, the neoplatonic legacy), the interpretation of Thomas Aquinas, the understanding of philosophy's relation to theology, and the basic structure of creation *ex nihilo* centred on the metaphysics of participation. It is clear that Radical Orthodoxy is not merely repeating de Lubac but regards his legacy as unfulfilled.

⁷³ Healy, "Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace," 548.

⁷⁴ Lewis Ayres is right that what de Lubac (mostly) treats as matter of theological anthropology, Milbank extends to a doctrine of creation centered on gift. See Ayres, "The soul and the reading of scripture: a note on Henri de Lubac," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61 (2008): 173-190, here citing 183, n.23.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Catherine Pickstock's use of de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* in her *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 158-166.

For some time now I have contended that Roman Catholic intellectual culture finds it very difficult, for institutional reasons, altogether to negate a false Tridentine legacy, and to pursue all the consequences of de Lubac's theological revolution (a subversion as real as it was stealthy). An enterprise of 'natural theology'...is perpetuated, along with a parallel discourse of 'natural law' considered in an unThomistic way, apart from the law of charity.⁷⁶

For Milbank, there is still a tendency to delineate a realm of 'nature' lying beyond theology and the Church that remains ostensibly indifferent to a transcendent finality. In particular, he has pressed the political implications of de Lubac's vision through an insistence that there is no 'pure nature' lying outside the economy of reciprocal gift and charity, an economy that can only be understood theologically on the basis of creation as gift. This means that worldly politics and economics, whilst tragically necessary in a fallen world, are only possible because of a more fundamental ontology of gift exchange. The postulation of a *natura pura* in any guise will simply perpetuate the violent power-play of modernity because there will be a contest (into which the Church is inevitably drawn) for control of that supposedly neutral sphere.

Also, Radical Orthodoxy's appropriation of de Lubac has implications for the understanding of the task of theology. With no *natura pura*, there is no sphere to which theology is indifferent. This means that de Lubac's vision deconstructs the notion of an autonomous and self-enclosed Christian dogmatics that is focussed on a clearly delineated subject matter known as 'revelation'.⁷⁷ As natural theology is also rejected, so too is a purely autonomous philosophy. Whilst theology and philosophy remain distinct for Radical Orthodoxy (and strictly speaking not conflated as a 'philosophical theology'), theology requires philosophy's original speculative structure and philosophy in turn is ordered to, and consummated by, theology. As von Balthasar states, 'De Lubac soon realized that his position moved into a suspended middle in which he could not practice any philosophy without its transcendence into

⁷⁶ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 117.

⁷⁷ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 12. For an excellent account of the origins of the modern concept of revelation in the work of Francisco Suárez, see John Montag, SJ, "Revelation: The false legacy of Suárez," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. Milbank, Pickstock and Ward (London: Routledge, 1999): 38-63.

theology, but also any theology without its essential inner structure of philosophy.⁷⁸ With no strictly delineated subject matter such as the modern concept of ‘revelation’, theology *looks* different; it will always involve speaking about God by speaking about other things and in continual conversation with other modes of human enquiry that nevertheless enjoy their distinct subject matters and modes of enquiry.

Central to Radical Orthodoxy’s speculative extension of de Lubac’s work, however, is the view that there is no pure nature lying outside gift. That gift, grounded in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, is taken to a wholly new and unimaginable pitch in the deliverance of grace through Christ. The radical implications of this claim are explored in conversation with the Christian orthodoxy so beautifully expounded by de Lubac.

⁷⁸ Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 15 quoted in Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 13 n.17.