

The Benefit of Having a Worthy Opponent

How the Theology of Seventeenth-Century Puritans Can Be Complemented by the Nineteenth-Century German Thought Known as the Mercersburg Theology

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CHAPTER TEN (Cont.)

Approaching Mercersburg Thought

It would be difficult to think about how improvement could be made to the writings just considered. Those of Owen and Mead were laced with Scripture more than that of Burroughs, but all were tied to Bible doctrine and presented practical guidance for the Christian regarding soul care. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the Puritan movement developed from the theology of the Reformation, but the brand of Puritanism which unfolded on the continent of North America brought sharp criticism from other ecclesiastical traditions such as Mercersburg which likewise claimed to be descended from Reformation theology.

When Nevin moved his family to Mercersburg in the spring of 1840, he met Frederick Augustus Rauch, a German and the president of Marshall College who would later be his colleague for a short time at the seminary. Rauch became a guide who helped Nevin navigate his way through learning both the good and the bad of German theology.

Frederick was from Kirchbracht in the Grand Duchy of Hesse Darmstadt and was born July 27, 1806. His father was a minister in the Reformed Church in Frankfort and was considered orthodox in his belief and practice. Nevin acknowledged his friend had been influenced by Kant, Schelling and Hegel, but without surrendering the tenets of the true faith.¹ As a young man Rauch was appointed professor at Heidelberg but became so outspoken about freedom that his friends urged him to leave the country as they detected the civil authorities were not pleased with him. With great sadness he migrated to Easton, Pennsylvania in 1831. Eventually he became president of Marshall College and served as the Professor of Biblical Literature at the seminary in Mercersburg.

¹ John W. Nevin, "Preliminary Notice to the Second Edition" in Friedrich August Rauch, *Psychology; or A View of the Human Soul, Including Anthropology, Adapted for the use of Colleges* (Andesite Press, originally New York: M. W. Dodd, 1841), vii.

Rauch published *Psychology; or, A View of the Human Soul, Including Anthropology, Adapted for the use of Colleges*. It did become a college textbook with numerous favorable reviews. One review said that since Rauch held to an eternal, unchangeable, all-wise, all-good, simple, immense, personal God, that fans of Hegel would be disappointed.² Since the opponents to Mercersburg would later attempt to discredit the movement because of its ties to Hegel, this is a significant observation by reviewers of that day.

With regard to the scope of this paper, Rauch's work was reported to recognize man's fallen state, the need for regeneration and the Holy Spirit's transforming work. The *Princeton Review* declared with regard to Rauch that a transcendentalist can be Christian and is not bound to be a pantheist, and Nevin would come to the same conclusion when defending Rauch's work. The historian J. I. Good concurred, but he pointed out that Rauch inherited pantheistic forms of expression (such as plastic power, instinct, and teachings related to dreams, etc.). Rauch rooted ethics in the will of God which was expressed in divine revelation, the central goal of which is to exalt God. The central motive for ethics is the love of God.³ He sought to bring together Scottish and German philosophies to find common ground.⁴

While the Puritan authors previously summarized served pastoral roles, Rauch did not. And he lived in a different time and place. The Puritans sought to confront empty formalism, but Mercersburg sought to confront a runaway subjectivism which had overtaken the church. Rauch's psychology textbook was not intended for a similar audience or a similar use as were the pastoral works just surveyed. The hope is that by comparing the two it can be determined if there is a fundamental incompatibility or mutual negation of the two approaches to soul care.

Rauch introduced his textbook by relating psychology and theology on the common ground of man. Man is the subject of psychology, and he is created for religion and cannot do without it. In fact, "Religion is not a mere *quality*, but the *substance* of man." If a person lacks religion, he or she ceases to be human and is reduced to a highly advanced animal. The soul of religion, he wrote, is faith which includes thoughts of providence, sin, sanctification, regeneration, repentance, etc. Psychology develops the nature of reason and thoughts. "Faith must be active by love, or else it is dead." Thus, it affects the will and fills it with love and animates it to good works. The study of the nature of the will before

² Theodore Appel, *The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin, D.D., LL.D.* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 103-104.

³ James I. Good, *History of the Reformed Church in the United States in the 19th Century*, Ed. Eric D. Bristley (The Synod of the Reformed Church in the U. S., 2004), 134-135.

⁴ Appel, 106.

regeneration can be studied as its desires, inclinations, emotions and passions are analyzed. Thus, psychology is useful to serve theology.⁵

Chapter one opens with a discourse on why humans must be considered distinct from animals even though there are some similarities. A detailed description of sensation and perception and the differences between humans and animals with regard to those categories ensues. While both humans and animals share the ability to sense and perceive on some level, humans possess the capacity for apperception or thought that builds upon sensation and perception. Included in apperception is the ability to classify kind, species and the individual nature of things. Thus humans are able to distinguish between their perceptions and the objects perceived. Lacking higher reasoning powers, animals cannot grasp concepts such as power, capacities, energy, proportions, beauty, truth, etc. Those things are not accessible by mere sensation such as animals can experience, but only by thought.⁶

There is no history of animals cultivating the arts. Any artistic quality to their work reveals the design of the Creator who gave them instinct. Only humans can appreciate the arts and beauty. Where pure human thought prevails, instinct fades. Human complex reasoning and will grant the ability to reign over instinct and to discipline it. The will can act without necessity to yield to fear or pain. Human reason fosters an innate desire for knowledge which the animal lacks as it relies on instinct. Animal instinct is tied to gratification of pleasure, whereas human pleasure embraces a hunger related to the intellect.⁷

Rauch describes mental philosophy as composed of two fields – the human mind in connection with the body (anthropology) and the human mind in relation to itself (psychology). Anthropology examines external influences and the effects they have on the mind, while psychology considers the nature of the mind as it is conscious of itself. While the mind is subject to forces of physical nature through the body, it is not fully controlled by those forces. Through consciousness and will it can bring the body into subjection.⁸

Under the topic of anthropology, the textbook under consideration attempts to explain how environment may affect a person, such as seasons, the character of one's homeland, whether one lives in a rural or urban setting and the stability of civil government. Yet these are far from being absolute, deterministic principles. There is something within the human makeup which determines habits and outlook.⁹ "The first step to civilization," Rauch related, "is a willingness to submit

⁵ Friedrich August Rauch, *Psychology; or A View of the Human Soul, Including Anthropology, Adapted for the use of Colleges* (Andesite Press, originally New York: M. W. Dodd, 1841), iv.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 46-49.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

our individual will to laws and duties, and to seek for liberty no longer in our own arbitrariness.”¹⁰

To a savage, limiting selfish desires and passion would be a foreign concept. Reason and will would be buried in the life of nature which fosters bondage to sensual enjoyments. To break free, a savage’s reason and will could only break free by acting against themselves.¹¹ Does this not amplify the Puritan emphasis on grace to free sinners from bondage to nature?

From within the savage way of thinking, magic finds a place. Rauch defines magic as “the desire to realize what we wish by the mere expression of our will, without any intermediate causes.”¹² And the savage culture would have no history. “History is the intellectual process that begins with the less perfect, and passes over to the more perfect, for it develops what is in man.”¹³ “Hence the savage has no history, for he is what he always has been.”¹⁴

The volume continues on to describe differences between the sexes and then varying temperaments and mental capacities. Since the soul and body are interfused, the nature of one affects the other. Temperament, the unique union of an individual’s soul and body, is greatly affected by how well the inner workings of the body function. Knowledge is accompanied by feeling, and both are required for the will to act. Empirical knowledge and sensual desire are affected by sensation which is produced by the nervous system.¹⁵ Included within the text are descriptions of four temperaments – sanguine, choleric, melancholy and phlegmatic. Rauch notes that it is will and not temperament which determines character.¹⁶

Each person receives from the Creator a capacity to learn. Mental capacity to receive knowledge and ideas enables an individual to be a moral agent and feel religious affections. Religion and moral character are the highest ends a person can engage in this life.¹⁷ Rauch describes three categories of mental disorder – melancholy, insanity and mania. Melancholy is defined as when one is convinced his wishes should become reality but is possessed by a dark sense that such is impossible, and so the person resigns himself to fate and does not try to make those wishes reality. Insanity is when one “has lost every idea of the world as it is and of its relation to him.” He believes his imaginations are real. And mania is a uniting of both melancholy and insanity. This is when a person realizes her imaginations are out of step with the world and so wishes to destroy the world so

¹⁰ Ibid., 68.

¹¹ Ibid., 72.

¹² Ibid., 68-69.

¹³ Ibid., 70.

¹⁴ Ibid., 72.

¹⁵ Ibid., 85-87.

¹⁶ Ibid., 92.

¹⁷ Ibid., 92-93.

her diseased will can be free. She rages because she cannot make reality what she designs it to be. Such a person may murder whoever seems to be opposed to her. Of such a person Rauch says, "His whole mind will have fixed itself on one idea, and cannot retire from it, because he has given it dominion over himself."¹⁸

How can the mind become diseased? The soul is diseased by nature because it is turned away from its proper objects which are truth and holiness and the love of God. Instead, it looks for nourishment in what is sensual and transitory. That which is used for nourishment communicates its own nature to what feeds on it. Will is an activity of the mind and is healthy when it freely acts in accord with the divine will, both in action and disposition. When driven otherwise by desire or passion it is not free, but enslaved. The divine law then lays the course for freedom. When the human will directs itself by divine law it is returning to the source from which it came.¹⁹ Rauch's presentation comes in a far different form than the Puritan authors under consideration, but his consideration of psychology as a servant to theology seems to dovetail with the big ideas they conveyed.

Rauch describes true freedom as acting according to its own nature and not merely being presented with a choice to do or be so. For example, fire is free only if it burns and not if it merely has a choice to burn or not to burn. Thus, true liberty includes within itself necessity and is not arbitrary. "But the human will, in its state of nature, is averse to necessity, and instead of perceiving in it the protector of its liberty, it views it as its enemy." A planet is only free if it remains in orbit, maintaining its constant relation to the sun. The sun of the human will is righteousness or the divine will, and a right orientation to it facilitates freedom. To refuse to maintain this orientation leads to mental disease. "The eye of man has a latent light in itself, but this light is darkness, and will remain such unless it be excited by the light of the sun."²⁰ Thus, the natural state of the will is to be diseased. "If man had faith in God, and loved Him supremely, if he confided in His providence, then he would not become prey of every passion, nor would loss and misfortune harm him."²¹ This conveys in different wording the message Burroughs presented about contentment. If sinful affections are placed wholly on earthly things, then when they are taken from a person despair sets in. For one who lives in delusion, it is easy then for the demons of pride and wounded ambition and unsatisfied vanity or jealousy to derange the mind because it has no grasp of the permanent and the solid.

Since the health of the body affects the health of the mind, Rauch concludes that one third of derangement in America and Europe in his day was due to liquor, and in China the culprit would be opium. Another contributing factor he identified is

¹⁸ Ibid., 151-153.

¹⁹ Ibid., 154-155.

²⁰ Ibid., 155-156.

²¹ Ibid., 157.

revealed in this statement – “the idiocy of children is frequently the consequences of the sinful life of parents.”²²

One must be careful not to blame the body for all mental illness. If the mind were properly fixed on the object of God and the Savior it could rule over the body and its passions for it would have purity and power over earthly things. If it was ready to lay down life for Christ’s sake, it would not be absorbed by want of health or by bodily defects.

Anticipating a question as to whether religion can foster derangement, he replied that good wine can be spoiled by an impure vessel, an analogy similar to one found earlier in Burroughs. “When a man will not surrender his life, and yet longs for the privileges of religion, when he will not give up his sin, and yet cannot resign the possession of divine favor, and when he then feels the contradiction between his state of sinfulness and that of desired sanctification, -- he may easily become deranged, not through religion, but by his relation to it.”²³

Rauch’s study reflected some scientific fads of the day which have since been abandoned. Since the work of the Puritans was more exclusively rooted in Scripture and less with philosophy or natural revelation, they are not as prone to reflect scientific ideas later to be proven faulty. Rauch’s work has a feel of lacking the power of the Puritan writings since it is not laced with Scripture, but his audience and purpose were different. A strong benefit of his work is that it provides a ready conduit in which theology may flow as it interacts with the thoughts of the world and establishes its practical superiority over them.

Next the text presents a debate between materialistic and spiritualizing views of the relationship between body and soul. The author says that the body is more than a certain number of elements which compose it. It is an organic power which connects and relates all those elements by eternal and divine law. This would make the term *body* not so much refer to an external frame but more to the life and power which organizes all parts to be functioning as a whole. The elements that compose a body are human only when connected. “All life wherever it exists is formed and organized. Form is not and cannot be the result of matter, which itself is chaotic and shapeless.” “Form, in man, and throughout the Universe, is the result of thought. Hence life, being formed, does not proceed from matter; but is a thought of God, accompanied by the divine will, to be realized in nature, and to appear externally by an organized body.” Besides humans, the rest of nature is full of divine wisdom and reason but does not possess reason because it lacks self-consciousness.²⁴

The human soul likewise originates from divine thought and is a creation of God, “filled with power to live an existence of its own.” Soul comprehends itself and is

²² Ibid., 158.

²³ Ibid., 159.

²⁴ Ibid., 182-183.

able to produce new thoughts in accordance with laws of thinking. It develops inwardly by thinking and outwardly through its connection to the world through the senses of the body. The life of both soul and body share the same origin and are thus “a twofold expression of the same energy.”²⁵ The body is necessary for the soul. Neither the soul nor the body is the ground of human existence. God Himself is.²⁶

Humans share individuality with the animal world but share personality with God. Personality is also the union of many parts but is awake in itself, having discovered and possessed itself. As such it is the center of both bodily and mental activities. It determines a course and chooses which influences to allow. The term *person* refers to a union of reason and will and includes self-consciousness and self-love.²⁷

“Our personality,” writes Rauch, “is complete only when we are conscious of God and our relation to Him, and when we suffer God to speak to it and through it.” Neither nature nor matter can produce personality. Therefore, in order to truly know self, one must know God first. God’s personality differs from man’s, but He created man and woman. God is characterized by omniscience, omnipotence and other infinite attributes. By contrast, human personality possesses limited reason and will which is attached to nerves and muscles.²⁸

Kelly Kopic in unfolding John Owen’s use of faculty psychology noted that Owen emphasized each of the faculties in humans which manifest the image of God the Creator, but he most heavily emphasized the mind. The mind processes images and must manage proper objects for the will and affections to receive and embrace within the light it has received. Without the mind coordinating all faculties, a person becomes dysfunctional. It could be thought of as the gatekeeper responsible for the healthy functioning of other faculties. The mind’s impotence would be due to the fall until renewed by the Holy Spirit.²⁹

Rauch also gives priority to the mind, treating reason first in his systematic dissection of psychology, devoting three chapters to address sensation which refers to the receptive powers of reason, conception or the form-giving nature of reason, and pure thinking. Sensation is the indispensable preliminary condition for all eventual thinking and self-consciousness. Feelings and sensations as the beginning of knowledge are not able by themselves to produce knowledge. Attention must be learned so that distinction and clarity may develop and form be recognized. As the mind reflects on feeling, it can then begin to separate one feeling from another and to distinguish subject from object. While sensation is

²⁵ Ibid., 184.

²⁶ Ibid., 186.

²⁷ Ibid., 187.

²⁸ Ibid., 191.

²⁹ Kelly M. Kopic, *Communion with God: The Divine and Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 46-48.

limited to phenomena that can be sensed, attention is not stopped there, for it can press on to contemplate the unseen and the infinite.³⁰

Once the eye of the mind engages, all seeing is accompanied by consciousness. This Rauch terms intellectual perception or intuition. This intellectual perception has no content in itself but perceives everything outside of itself. It serves as a connection between the external objects and the person. It is conception which internalizes objects. Conception “transfers the objects of space and time into ourselves, and gives them an internal existence.” The image now in the mind fully represents the real object but is less complete than the object it represents. The conception is real but ideal.³¹

Our author will maintain this order which includes both the real and ideal as he discusses art and beauty. He sees the arts as attempting to bring the ideal into the real or the infinite into the finite, a union of the invisible with the visible. The arts are different from science which concerns itself with generalizing and classifying. Truth is spiritual and not felt by sense. And so the world of sense cannot satisfy spiritual longing. Christianity opens to the human mind the world of infinite spirit. “Nothing in the world can represent, in an adequate form, that God whom Christ has revealed.”³²

Conceptions only exist in the individual until words are assigned. Then they become independent of the individual and can be preserved after his demise. Thus, words make conceptions permanent.³³ The Author of reason is God. His will lives in reason as its law. Thus, God is the Author of language. He gave man the power to develop both thought and language.³⁴ Language is more than a compound of words. It is a system of kindred conceptions.³⁵ Writing gives language an existence in space.³⁶

Pure thinking differs from sensation and conception. Sensation is a receptive activity. Conception sets sensation into space and time and so is form-giving and productive. Thinking generalizes, recognizing genus in nature and detecting identity in the mind, things created not by man and which the eye cannot see. Genus and species can be discovered by realizing commonalities in individuals and so human understanding is increased. Once the general image is developed, the mind no longer is dependent on the sensual existence of an object. So pure thinking goes beyond the visible. Once one has moved into pure thinking it is possible to contemplate such things as justice, truth and right. The pure thinking Rauch would promote engages content that is pure Being and stirs the inward

³⁰ Rauch, 201, 216, 221.

³¹ Ibid., 223-228.

³² Ibid., 242-247.

³³ Ibid., 251.

³⁴ Ibid., 256.

³⁵ Ibid., 259.

³⁶ Ibid., 264.

soul of man more than can be accomplished by fine images.³⁷ Here one could wish for clarification, because his statement about pure Being stirring the inward soul of man more than what is accomplished by fine images leaves the reader wondering about Isaiah's experience in the Temple in Isaiah 6. Was he not moved by what he perceived with his eyes?

Rauch's system of thought regards a quality of divine law to be generality, that is, "that power which alone constitutes every other commandment a law." As such it becomes evident in all individual laws. Thinking then is generalizing and looks to grasp the true nature of things, that is, their generality and necessity, for real and genuine truth. Or said another way, the object of thought is to grasp the "general nature of all those individuals through which that nature flows, and that are internally united by it."³⁸

Taking holiness as an example in applying his philosophical approach, it generally has no corresponding external object, but yet it cannot be without an object or it would amount to empty thought. Topics such as holiness exist in the realm of pure thinking.³⁹ Thinking is "the light that sees itself," and has divine law in it. It includes comprehension/apprehension, or the ability to recognize kind, generality, species, as well as particularity, the individual and singularity. The general nature "specifies and individualizes itself by its own power." Besides comprehension/apprehension, pure thinking involves judgment and conclusion, syllogism or reason, the phase in which thoughts are related to each other. So according to this philosophical perspective each doctrine of the Bible in some way contains all the others.⁴⁰

Who is capable of pure thinking? Among the qualifications are the following -- one who has a strong instinct to explore the origin of thought and the connection a thought has with the whole; one who sees nature not as a mere mechanism, but as reason or thought corporealized; one who loves truth and pursues science in search of it.⁴¹ At this point one is left wondering if Rauch has departed from a quest to know God in search of pure thought or what role special revelation really might play in the process he lays out in detail.

Moving into the section on will, Rauch proclaims will and reason to be inseparable. One includes the other. "They have one principle and one life." One cannot will a thing he does not know, and he cannot know a thing without the will directing him so.⁴² The natural will, that is, the will not transformed by grace, is deterministic as it is dependent on external objects or internal passions. Only the morally good will is free because it is led by law.

³⁷ Ibid., 277-279.

³⁸ Ibid., 281-282.

³⁹ Ibid., 283.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 284-286.

⁴¹ Ibid., 287-288.

⁴² Ibid., 293-294.

Natural desire influences the will, but such desire is limited to seeking pleasure in what is sensual, intellectual or rational. But there are true acts of the will that rise above natural desire and have the motive of “the knowledge and love of the divine law, and the feeling of regard for ourselves” because there is a pleasure involved, but it is moral in nature. Passion enslaves to the power of an object and overrules self-control. By nature, passions would turbulently rule the human will. In disregarding duties and rights, passion destroys the will and robs it of freedom which is found in divine law.⁴³

This volume defines love as entering the nature and being of something else, uniting oneself with it without expecting it to yield to you in return. The author claims that religious love for God is only possible when authored by the Holy Spirit and recognizes that Jesus alone was free of all self-love, loving a sinful world without self-interest.⁴⁴ One suspects that Rauch’s loyalty to the philosophical systems of Germany and the language he carried over into his writing may hinder clarity in his teaching. Such a statement would require an explanation as to how it squares with a passage of Scripture such as the one which indicates Jesus was intent on the glory that was set before Him when He went to the cross. Is it true that Christ entered into union with no expectation of the other party yielding? Was He not working in the elect to ensure an appropriate response and procure a bride for Himself?

Rauch is aiming to set a course for the Christian out of self-love and into love for God for His own sake just as he says Jesus loved the world for its own sake.⁴⁵ Self-love arises out of natural self-preservation, and it is the mother of all inclinations because one cannot take interest in anything without first taking interest in self. Love of life is naturally a part of self-love.⁴⁶ Self-love as a passion is selfishness, and a selfish person values truth and beauty only so far as they seem useful.⁴⁷

In a section on passion which enslaves a person to property, Rauch helpfully directs, “Christ demands our whole affection, and whatever we love on earth must have a reference to his kingdom, and we must love it only because of this its relation.”⁴⁸ He presents many healthy loves such as love of honor which can produce healthy character traits, but he then considers when a love becomes a passion and no longer conforms to moral law. When love of honor becomes a passion it then is converted to ambition or pride.⁴⁹ His arguments seldom refer to specific Scripture passages.

⁴³ Ibid., 304-306.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 317-318.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 318-319.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 320.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 327.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 340.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 344-345.

The final chapter, "On Religion," considers man in relation to his Creator. If that relation is pure it rests on faith which is a gift from God. By nature, the human soul is selfish, blind and corrupt. Humanity is moved by self-interest. Man has nothing innately good from which would proceed pure religion or a knowledge of divine things. While man is in a sinful state, God is veiled from him. Religion is not valid unless God's holiness is central. Man is dependent on revelation.⁵⁰

Religion is more than merely knowing that there is a God because such knowledge still leaves the heart cold and cannot animate it to do good. It is more than morality engaged in an effort to avoid judgment. An unsanctified will can at best produce stoic pride.⁵¹

Religion does not originate in a feeling but requires knowledge. Feeling is not a sure sign one is in possession of truth. A religion based on feeling produces mysticism and superstition.⁵²

True religion is "a peculiar activity of God, which announcing itself to the heart of man, changes it, converts it, restores man to peace with himself, with the world, and with God." The object of religion is the restoration of peace, accomplished only by union of man with the Creator through whom he can then perceive the true value of all created things. Establishing and sustaining this union is solely God's work in the human heart. That work is self-authenticating and needs no proof, just like sunlight needs no other light to make itself seen. This grace purifies and converts the heart which then unites thought and will and feeling and is the source of desires and passions according to the Bible. The heart also is the seat of the conscience, consciousness and the entire inner man. Thus, the devising of religion out of an unholy imagination ceases. The entrance of God into the heart will enthrone Him as the object of thoughts, will and actions as well as feelings.⁵³

"Religion then is always based upon a communication of God to man" and regeneration from the Holy Spirit. Outside of these there can be no true religion. All other types of religion originate from within the natural man. Those false religions foster sin instead of freeing from it.⁵⁴

In evaluating each of these schools of thought of soul care, the similarities between Rauch's work and the Puritans earlier reviewed is significant. Both emphasize the necessity of grace to trump nature and the bondage nature carries inherently within it. Both emphasize divine initiative and dependence on divine revelation. Both stress surrender to the divine will. In some ways the later

⁵⁰ Ibid., 383.

⁵¹ Ibid., 384.

⁵² Ibid., 386-387.

⁵³ Ibid., 388-389.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 389.

Rauch with his mental philosophy unfolds and expands Puritan teaching by leading the reader to contemplate more deeply the inner workings of elements such as emotion, feeling, imagination, perception, conception, attention, and the like. But in other ways Rauch's work can serve to obscure the reader's perception of Scriptural truth about the soul in that the thought is conceived in terms of German philosophy, and so it comes in expressions that at times seem to flow against the current of Scripture, most times though made clear paragraphs or chapters later in summary statements that agree with Scripture. For the common man, the Puritan material, as tedious as it may be for the modern reader to digest, carries a plainer message. But for those whose primary calling is in the field of soul care, Rauch's work awakens useful scientific considerations, such as how the arts and imagination can be useful in connecting to truth.

Much of Rauch's philosophy would serve as a guide for Nevin who continued in the same vein at Mercersburg after Rauch's death at an early age. In Nevin's treatise "Human Freedom," he repeated the philosophical view of life in terms of the actual and the ideal, each being in the other, the general and the particular, at the same time. "Each is what it is always, only by having in itself the presence of the other, as that which it is not."⁵⁵ This concept appears in Mercersburg thought as a guiding principle for interpreting the world and recognizing truth. Nevin used a tree to illustrate this philosophical principle. A tree is single and has certain particular characteristics discernible by human senses. But at the same time, it is more because it is a revelation or representation of a life more comprehensive than its own – a life belonging to all plants and trees. General vegetable life is not the sum of all such that exists but exists before the particular in the order of being. That makes the tree at the same time universal vegetable life and a single manifestation of it. One cannot exist without the other.⁵⁶

Humans are at the same time a part of the general system of nature and more than nature because men and women are rooted in this sphere and yet ascend to one that is higher because of self-consciousness and a self-active spirit. The intelligence that governs plants and animals is not their own.⁵⁷ Only human life is that which is free and able to grasp reality because it's reason and will open self-consciousness and self-possessed personality. Proper being for man is found in the life of the spirit. Of all creation, human consciousness alone has the ability to apprehend the particular or the singular in the presence of the universal. Personality is the power of a universal life being revealed through individual existence.

Nevin equates personality and moral freedom. He defines moral freedom as the "single will moving with self-conscious free activity in the orbit of the general will,"

⁵⁵ John Williamson Nevin, *Human Freedom, and a Plea for Philosophy, 2 Essays* (Originally Published in the *American Review*) (Mercersburg, PA: P. A. Rice, "Journal Office," 1850), 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

carrying in itself the sense of the self and the sense of a moral universe, including both a sense of independence and of authority and law, a union of the objective and the subjective, the universal and single.⁵⁸ When Nevin says that God is free to carry the world forward “according to its appointed laws,”⁵⁹ it is not clear if he means that God is bound by laws of nature He has instituted or if this is philosophy speak for the idea that God will only act consistent with His own nature. In contrast, the universe is not free and does not possess self-apprehension or self-motion, having no choice but to obey a foreign force. It’s obedience carries no light, no love, intelligence or will. Human individual independence involves the light of intelligence and the power of choice. “All knowledge begins and stands perpetually in the consciousness of self,” and so acts of the will are in a sense acts of self-apprehension. In other words, a person or subject is not simply an individual center but knows and seeks itself as such. This can be called subjective independence.

This line of thought is helpful in thinking through being a moral agent made in the image of God, but it is helpful only in a secondary sense because it contains no Scripture which can feed the soul. On the other hand, there is no evidence this small treatise was ever intended to be a sermon. Nevin was making a highly specialized argument to establish a philosophical understanding of what it is to be human, but one can imagine that a Puritan, pastoral treatment of the topic would begin with God’s knowledge of Himself as the foundation of all human knowing. If anything, Nevin’s argument leaves little doubt that humans are special and distinct in all of Creation, and in speaking of submission to moral law flowing from a personal God, he has certainly not given in to the pantheism so popular in philosophical circles of his day.

Intelligence itself does not equate independence. Consciousness in subjection to nature or some other force would be bondage which would be worse than never having gained consciousness. Even if the divine will acted on a conscious being and moved it in a certain direction, if there were no self-impulse at all in the subject, it could not be classified as independent. Independence requires the power of choice.⁶⁰ Here the philosophical framework Nevin constructs tends to confusion, because he does acknowledge in other works the Scriptures which teach election, and He does speak of reliance on grace.

Nevin clarifies that the autonomic will itself is not all there is to freedom. An objective, universal law which binds the individual will is also required. Without obedience to it, the individual will would never be true to its own nature.⁶¹ So while Nevin has carefully argued to preserve the freedom that belongs to consciousness humans possess, he then explains that true freedom is not arbitrary, but exists in submission to divine law. So true self-consciousness is

⁵⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁶¹ Ibid., 10.

“the power of a life that is general and universal as well as individual.” Nevin sees all life as the union of those two forms of existence. So, intelligence yields both self-knowledge and the apprehension of a more comprehensive life, one that is universal.

Universal reason and will is the conception of law which carries with it objective authority, universality or necessity. Universality is here not the compilation of individual wills. “It is absolute and one within itself,” revealing itself in single wills but not being derived from them.⁶² Law is not merely the conception of what is right. It exists objectively whether or not it is grasped in the self-consciousness of humans or not. Law should not be regarded as the product of the forces of nature. It “forms rather the inmost life of its entire constitution” in both the moral and physical realms.⁶³ The law is seated in God’s bosom, but God is not the author of law as something standing external to Himself. Thus, He is not to be pictured as a human making laws to fix situations as they arise. The law does not make God as if it had some authority before Him or at some time determined His existence. “It has its being only in God and from God; not however as something different from the Divine mind itself.” “It is the necessary form of God’s infinitely wise and holy will, as exercised in the creation and support of the actual universe, considered both as nature and spirit.”⁶⁴ In other words, it is resident in and identical with the Divine will and crosses over into the actual world to be known as a power to be acknowledged and obeyed.

This raises the question, how can one be autonomic or independent and be bound by the objective authority of law at the same time? When in a state of sinfulness, any liberty the subject exerts is sinful and licentious, and any obedience is forced and external and of no real worth in the law’s estimation.⁶⁵ Since the law cannot relinquish its right to rule over the will, wrath is induced. Liberty of the will and authority of the law stand opposed at that point. An organic, internal union is required for true freedom to be produced. The two sides are necessary to each other. The ideal and the actual, the universal generic nature and the particular single existence are truly different and distinct from each other, each negating the other, yet are brought together in the constitution of the same life. This is not accomplished mechanically but by a mutual interpenetration where each grows into the other. Moral freedom is subjectively having the freedom to choose what agrees with the objective law. Therefore, it is bound and unbound simultaneously since there are two forms of existence joined as the power of a single fact – “the law coming to its proper expression only in the independence of the subject, and the independence of the subject having no reality, save under the form of obedience to the law.”⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid., 11.

⁶³ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 16.

Thinking back to Owen's comments in his work on the mortification of sin, there was a tension in that there is a call from God for the believer to mortify sin, but yet it is the Holy Spirit alone who can do the mortifying. Owen explained that the Spirit brings the cross of Christ into the heart, and he said that it happens in such a way that human liberty and free obedience is preserved. The Spirit transforms the understanding, will, conscience and affections.

Nevin attempts also to explain that tension. He writes, "In obeying the law the will obeys in reality its own true constitution." "Freedom, in order that it may be free, must be bound," binding itself to the law "as the necessary form of its own existence." "The will of the subject is ruled by a force that comes from beyond itself, and yet it is strictly autonomic at the same time." One's private will comes to be comprehended in the law without finding foreign constraint in it.⁶⁷

Thus, religious freedom is the union of liberty and authority with neither excluding nor oppressing the other because both constitute the force of a single life.⁶⁸ Nevin perceived in his day that the common error was to go overboard in asserting the rights of the individual while refusing to see the objective divine will at work in history, taking a low view of the church as simply an aggregate of private religious thinking. Likewise, he observed citizens regarding the state also as a creation of the people who give permission for it to function. Such a low view of the church and the state are the outcroppings of pursuing liberty without acknowledging divine law. Exalting private independence is just as fatal as exalting authority and fostering despotism. Christianity can make people free, but not by mechanically imposing rules. It is a law, but a law of liberty.⁶⁹ Nevin wrote, "no government can be rational and good in the case of men, that does not aim at making them able to govern themselves." Subjects need to be educated for freedom.⁷⁰ True obedience is not slavish but should be intelligent and spontaneous. "In other words, the law must enter into him and become incorporated with his life." "No authority can be moral that does not seek liberty as its end; and no liberty can be free that is not filled with the sense of authority as the proper contents of its own life." "Man must be at once independent and bound, self-governed, and yet obedient to authority," and so he will then be distinguished from the rest of nature.⁷¹ Family, church and state bring forward the objective force of law. "To be without reverence for authority, is to have always to the same extent the spirit of a slave."⁷² Nevin highlighted the incarnation, the union of the divine and the human, as the central event of history which produced the required change in the human condition and enabled the submission he here recognized as necessary in order to be truly human and the Puritans saw as necessary for salvation and contentment. The Puritans would emphasize the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 20-21.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁷¹ Ibid., 22-23.

⁷² Ibid., 24.

cross over the incarnation as the key to union with God.

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