

# David Walsh's Anamnesis of Modernity: A Preface to a Preface

## **The Crisis of Modernity Has Been Called Off**

With the publication of *The Modern Philosophical Revolution: The Luminosity of Existence*, David Walsh has completed his trilogy of the modern world that also includes *After Ideology: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Freedom* and *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*.<sup>1</sup> One might characterize Walsh's trilogy as nothing less than an anamnestic recovery of our humanity in the modern world, as he suggests in another venue:

Anamnesis is therefore the recovery, not of a past, but of the present of a conversation that is perpetually available because its fullness is there in every moment from the beginning to the end. What is called forth is not a retrieval from the past but an

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<sup>1</sup> David Walsh, *After Ideology: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Freedom* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990) (abbreviated hereinafter as AI); *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), (GLS); *The Modern Philosophical Revolution: The Luminosity of Existence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008) (MPR). Other works discussed in this volume include: *The Third Millennium: Reflections on Faith and Reason* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999) (TM); *Guarded By Mystery: Meaning in a Postmodern Age* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000); "Editor's Introduction," in Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics, Collected Works*, Vol. 6, trans. M. J. Hanak and Gerhart Niemeyer, ed. David Walsh (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 1–27 (A); "Eric Voegelin's Place in Modern Philosophy," *Modern Age* Vol. 49, No. 1 (Winter 2007): 12–23 (EV).

enlarged awareness of what is already present as the possibility of the encounter itself. . . . The only measure available is that which emerges in the test of existence itself. An existential mode of philosophy consists in the encounter with Being from which the language of being originally sprang. Anamnesis in the modern context must become a recovery not simply of knowledge but of reality (A 17–18).

Walsh's anamnesis moves among modernity's three pillars: rights, science, and the turn to existence (MPR xii). All three volumes consider these three pillars with varying degrees of intensity. Additionally, his reflections within these volumes are of necessity circumscribed by these pillars because they are not to be understood as concepts, but rather as the core of a practice whose nature is intimated only in its unfolding; or, as Kant explains, our consciousness of the dispositions to virtue can only be known in the effect they have on the mind.<sup>2</sup>

In *After Ideology*, Walsh explained how the "critique" of modernity can only be made by passing through its deepest evils, and making the existential ascent beyond its horrors. Thus its keenest critics, Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn, Camus, and Voegelin bore witness to its horrors while affirming human dignity. *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* treats the liberal tradition as a series of existential evocations of human dignity. There is no such thing as a liberal "philosopher" because the core of liberal thinking is the evocation and practice of dignity, not the discovery of doctrine. Walsh turns the incapacity of liberal thinkers to provide a complete defense, usually seen as its weakness, into the source of its strength.

The third volume sheds the deepest light on modernity by focusing on the third pillar, the turn to existence, because it illuminates what is going on when one ascends from ideology (AI) and when the liberal soul "grows" (GLS). *The Modern Philosophical Revolution* is a meditation on the activity of reason in partaking in the revelation of being itself. It is less an analysis of luminous experiences of order than a report on the unfolding of the tensions of existence. The first

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<sup>2</sup> MPR 69, citing *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 399.

two volumes are “contained” within the third, but each contributes something significant on its own terms. With these three volumes as a whole, Walsh has achieved nothing less than a clarification of the meaning of “modern,” and locates this meaning not in the dogmatic or abstract terms with which interpreters have become so familiar, but in the existential turn in which human beings become conscious of their participation in moral struggle and the boundaries in which that struggle takes place. Modernity is philosophy, the endless quest for wisdom, articulated most clearly, and of necessity with a sense that no articulation can be adequate. Thus, Walsh’s work—and any account of it—must necessarily remain incomplete, only a preface.

Walsh shows the dominant narratives of modernity to be inadequate because each represents a form of closure. The standard narrative of modernity, as an advance on antiquity and Christianity, progressing toward a free and equal regime based on the scientific method, is inadequate because it prophesies an end of history. Furthermore, apocalyptic lamentations that technology is our fate are also inadequate because the people making these proclamations forget that such lamentations are based on a perspective beyond technology and the calculus of effective causes. Critics of modernity skirt around its core by claiming that modernity is: a project to “lower the goals” of political order (Strauss); an idealistic Gnostic revolt (Voegelin); or technology (Heidegger). Proponents are misled in holding up the scientific method (Bacon), democratization, or historical progress and objective knowledge (Kojève) as the meaning of modernity.

Rather, the existential turn in modern philosophy consists of an intensification of the desire to “stand in the light of being that must regard anything less than itself as mere counterfeit” (MPR 70), while recognizing perpetually that our efforts to stand in the light of being are necessarily incomplete. The modern existential turn—begun by Kant and articulated most profoundly by Kierkegaard, practiced most profoundly in the liberal political form, and redeemed from its deformations most successfully by thinkers and novelists such as Voegelin, Dostoevsky, and Solzhenitsyn—consists of a deepened understanding and practice of Aristotle’s insight that

the road to completing our human nature is a form of immortalizing.<sup>3</sup> Walsh compares Aristotle's assertion with Kant's observation that "[v]irtue so shines as an ideal that it seems, by human standards, to eclipse holiness itself, which is never tempted to break the law."<sup>4</sup> Modernity represents a deeper awareness of that holiness than Plato or Aristotle could articulate because of the ancients' tendency to speak of knowledge of being, instead of recognizing fully that being possesses us.<sup>5</sup>

The veracity of this claim will depend on how well Walsh shows the moderns to have shorn philosophy as a mode of existence from the ancient and medieval mode of thinking in terms of the four causes and its consequent tendency to objectify existence. Moreover, even if the moderns are successful, with deepened insight comes the seeds of its own deformation, as the critics of modernity have done so much to show. Modernity has produced the gulag, and modern philosophers have given in to errors including the inevitability of historical progress and the sovereignty of the scientific method. Walsh's achievement has been to demonstrate the achievement of modernity while accounting for its deformations. While the *Modern Philosophical Revolution* demonstrates how the existential turn reveals a deeper meaning for modernity than these deformations reveal, the fact remains that many modern philosophers did in fact succumb to them, and Walsh recognizes the turn itself plays a role in its own deformation:

Each of the thinkers we will review struggled mightily with this new mode of philosophizing in which the challenge is to deal nonobjectively with what is nonobjective. To yield to the temptation to objectify what is nonobjective is to lose the emerging luminosity. . . . What could be more tempting than to draw the whole within the mastery of the self? The glamour of the project can be broken only by the awareness of the falsity of the instrumentalization of all truth, for everything

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3 MPR 70, citing *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b30.

4 MPR 69–70, citing *Metaphysics of Morals*, 396–97.

5 Inadequate too is the medieval distinction between natural reason and faith.

can be assigned a price only if there is that which is beyond all price. The urge to reach such definitive possession of truth that it renders all further quest for truth obsolete can often prove too powerful (MPR 9).

Just as the immortalizing activity of the philosophers includes within it the deformation that the philosopher is somehow self-sufficient, and just as the Christian differentiation of reality includes within it the Gnostic deformation, so too the modern turn to existence includes within it the overconfidence that the philosopher's intense focus on the moral law (e.g., Kant's comment that virtue is higher than holiness) leads him to forget that he too is human and not an *Übermensch*. His intense focus on the moral law can induce him to concoct ideological constructions of society and history because he "can allow himself the luxury of ancillary historical observations" (MPR 51, n.18). His focus on the horizon of moral action undermines his political prudence, as seen with several of the philosophers Walsh considers in the *Modern Philosophical Revolution*. The modern philosopher's focus on Being includes the possibility of making oneself oblivious to beings. Walsh claims that the deformations of modern ideology cannot be taken as derived from modern philosophy. Perhaps. But the superhuman effort to act according to duty and not in the hope of reward cannot be expected for the majority of human beings. This is why Augustine distinguishes between the carnal understanding of God's justice, which looks to his rewards (including eternal life), and the spiritual understanding of justice, which looks to God himself as its reward. To formulate the problem of modern philosophy's wager in deficient but still useful scholastic terms, the virtue demanded of the modern appears theological, not natural, or perhaps it is monkish, not political.

This is why Kierkegaard is at the "end" of the modern philosophical revolution that Kant inaugurates. Kant formulates the moral law one would need to be superhuman to fulfill. Because Kant knew one could not in fact fulfill it, he struggled mightily to provide a reason we would wish to act autonomously while acknowledging the paradox of having to provide a reason, if one exists. The difference between what the modern philosophical revolution re-

veals (and what it transcends) is starkest in Kant. Kierkegaard constitutes its greatest advance from Kant because he recognized the problem of fulfilling the moral law, which is in fact impossible to fulfill, is actually a pseudo-problem, precisely because the moral law, as duty, is experienced at its deepest level as love. It is not we who obtain the ideal, but the ideal that achieves us, and thereby constitutes our freedom.

### **After Ideology**

In his effort to recover the spiritual foundations of freedom, Walsh begins by identifying the crisis of totalitarian horror as the crisis of modernity. He cites Voegelin's description of a crisis as "not that a breakdown has occurred, but that when this has happened the 'remedial forces' that ought to restore order prove to be ineffective" (AI 90). A civilizational crisis occurs when it cannot bring itself out of its own breakdown. The modern crisis is the Promethean turn to technology: "The Faustian bargain, by which a vast new power is given us at the cost of the soul that alone can provide the wisdom for its use, is the problem that lies at the very beginning of the modern world" (AI 13). Walsh relies on Voegelin's diagnosis of modernity as the "Gnostic divinization of human nature" to describe the crisis. He also notes the "countermovement within modernity, of dissatisfaction with power as a self-sufficient principle" among thinkers lamenting the "disappearance of the classical and Judeo-Christian worldview" (AI 18). *After Ideology*, then, reflects an ambiguity that Walsh clarifies in subsequent volumes. In this volume, modernity is in crisis because it has ignored the "classical and Judeo-Christian worldview," but representatives who have transcended the crisis do so by working through the logic of the crisis on its own terms.

Walsh looks to Solzhenitsyn, Dostoevsky, Camus, and Voegelin as representative thinkers who personally confronted the darkness of the Faustian bargain and then transcended it. The virtue of Walsh's analysis is the focus he brings to their existential search; theirs was an existential ascent that worked its way through the currents of modernity and into the light. Dostoevsky and Solzhenitsyn ascended from the false freedom promised by ideology to the true freedom of Christ; Camus and Voegelin ascended from that false

freedom to true freedom in a “Christian direction” but did not attain it. Walsh characterizes each step of the ascent that starts with the identification of the crisis that then transforms into catharsis, to diagnosis, to ascent, and to the restoration of order.

*Metanoia* or Platonic *periagoge* is central to each representative. Solzhenitsyn’s discovery that the “line between good and evil moves through the heart of each man” corresponds with his discovery of the genuine freedom of the *zeks*, whose freedom runs deeper than that of the guards (AI 148–53) and Dostoevsky’s conversion upon recollecting the peasant, Marey (AI 66–67). Of Camus and Voegelin, Walsh emphasizes the stages and self-consciousness of their ascent. Voegelin writes in volume five of *Order and History*: “The truth is in motion; even more, as we have seen, the motion is the truth.”<sup>6</sup> Rather than signifying a deformed modern symbol that truth is “made,” this statement reflects the insight of Aristotle that practical “knowledge merges into concrete action, and action is the truth of the knowledge; what separates the two is not the distance of subject and object but a noetic tension in the movement of being.”<sup>7</sup>

Already then, the topic of the trilogy is stated in *After Ideology*. This work differs from the second and third volumes by emphasizing the crisis of modernity, whereas the purpose of the *Modern Philosophical Revolution* is to resolve that crisis, which is to say that there never was a crisis in the strict sense of the term. Even so, Walsh already anticipates this resolution in the concluding chapters of *After Ideology*, in which he outlines the defense of freedom and dignity in the liberal tradition that will be elaborated in *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*. The examples of Solzhenitsyn, Dostoevsky, Camus, and Voegelin, who ascended from their own caves from within those caves, serve as guides for Walsh’s own diagnosis and ascent from the crisis of liberalism.

*After Ideology* illuminates how it is that each of these repre-

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6 Eric Voegelin, *In Search of Order, Order and History, Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 57.

7 Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, trans., Gerhart Niemeyer, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 69, quoted in AI 227. We shall comment below on Walsh’s assessment of Voegelin in general, and *Anamnesis* in particular, which Walsh edited for the *Collected Works*.

representatives ascends on his quest, and explains *metanoia* as the determining factor of ascent. However, his focus on the externals of *metanoia* and the ascent leave its relationship to the wider modern world unclear. Walsh recognizes this when he admits, “the most difficult element to convey in articulating the foundation of morality is as we have seen in chapter 1, the sense of ultimate rightness that underpins it” (AI 194). The ascent is an experiential movement toward transcendent reality, but Walsh can say little more in this volume. The subsequent two volumes elaborate this movement not only for lonely representatives in the modern world, but as a way of characterizing the modern world itself. Along the way, Walsh will clarify how we gain “the sense of ultimate rightness that underpins” morality when its ultimacy is always beyond our grasp.

### **The Growth of the Liberal Soul**

Walsh argues that the liberal constitutional tradition proves that what does not work in theory can work in practice. Like a pair of friends who constantly argue and bicker but for some unknown reason remain friends, the liberal order persists despite a history of failures, from Locke to Rawls, to demonstrate its truth. As bickering friends cannot explain what attracts them to the other’s “central fire,” as Bertrand Russell said of his friend Joseph Conrad, so too the specific genius of the liberal order “is to have learned, in the greater absence of theoretical defenses, to rely more than most on an opening toward the fulfillment inchoately present within it” (GLS 6). The liberal tradition is never in a position to give an account of its own foundations because its defenders are perpetually aware they are “steeped in the awareness of a crisis of order” (GLS 105). The liberal tradition is not so much reflective as it is evocative in the sense of evoking practical responses to civilizational crisis: “the refusal to entertain the ultimate implications of the collapse of order saps the disintegrating impulse long enough to allow the emergence of practical virtue to renew its strength” (GLS 105). The practical response to crisis is borne of a faith in the liberal order whose deepest elements need no elaboration. This means that “theory and practice are mutually illuminating, neither taking place in a



self-contained realm apart from the other.”<sup>8</sup>

It would be hasty to say Walsh “saves” the liberal order by pointing to the priority of the practical over the theoretical, because in recognizing this priority one opens himself to further problems, especially when the lineaments of that relationship are not adequately understood (as they were not by the liberal thinkers Walsh examines). One of these problems is that liberals understand the priority of the practical as the sovereignty of technique (or scientism, which gets judged by its “success” in obtaining efficiency) and progressive history. Let us consider two of Walsh’s examples, John Locke and J. S. Mill.

Locke is the quintessential liberal in this mode of theory and practice illuminating one another because he was as much philosopher as polemicist in the English Civil War. To characterize him as a philosopher of crisis is an understatement, as the Civil War was only one of many problems facing the English polity during his lifetime and for the next fifty years. Voegelin observes that the national death rate was so high in the first part of the eighteenth-century, due largely to the alcoholism of the “Gin Age,” that the rate of population increase in other European countries was roughly thirty times as high as that of the English.<sup>9</sup> In contemporary times, one would have to look to Russia in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union for a similar national suicide. Seen in this light, Locke’s demiurgic project is Herculean in scope—and precarious.

Walsh is virtually alone in seeing Locke, not as a crypto-deist,

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8 GLS 107. Walsh cites Voegelin and Alasdair MacIntyre as thinkers who have understood the interdependency of theory and practice (GLS 330n.3). He praises the Quentin Skinner school for establishing the importance of ideas and their historical setting, but criticizes it for overlooking the philosophical character of that relationship as a quest for truth. While he does not cite Strauss and Straussians in this immediate context, his main criticism of the Straussian interpretation of liberal thinkers is that they overlook the “opening toward the fulfillment inchoately present within it” (see GLS 6), which is to say they tend to interpret liberal thinkers as thinking they have achieved science.

9 Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, Vol. 6; *Revolution and the New Science*, *The Collected Works*, Vol. 24 (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 150–53.

Enlightenment rationalist, voluntarist, or mere pamphleteer, but as a serious philosophical mystic whose “faith is not arbitrarily willed but, rather, arises organically from a reason that knows its own incapacity to ground its presuppositions” (GLS 338n.9). His political thought is situated within this broader Christian philosophical meditation. And contrary to the view of most who are more willing to regard Locke as some form of latitudinarian Anglican, Walsh points to a journal entry, where Locke can be forthright about his religiosity, that “miracles were to be judged by the doctrine, and not the doctrine by the miracles.” According to Walsh, Locke maintains the Christian tradition as the basis for the “circularity of reason” in his meditative unfolding of reason. The experience that is the “center of Locke’s Christianity” is the genuine “effort of repentance” and the turn to the “law of faith [that] is allowed to supply the defect of full obedience.”<sup>10</sup>

Yet, the peak of Locke’s meditation also reveals his inadequacy (or reveals his relationship to the “bad” modernity of scientism). Walsh insists that the Gospel’s importance for Locke is that it apprehends for us:

“the rule of morality as law, carrying the full force of obligation because it derives from the divine lawgiver. . . . Only if we understand morality in this sense as law do we see it clearly as an authoritative order, independent of our estimations of it because it derives from a source absolutely capable of imposing rewards and punishments on us.”<sup>11</sup>

Has Locke lost something in characterizing the Gospel as “law” and Christ as lawgiver instead of as person?<sup>12</sup> “Law” as an enduring order is a cosmological symbolism that approximates that which is

10 GLS 157, quoting *Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. George W. Ewing (Washington: Regnery, 1965), pars. 22, 167, & 181.

11 GLS 157, citing *Reasonableness of Christianity*, par. 243.

12 On the importance of the distinction between law and person, see Rémi Brague, *The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). For elaboration, see my “God’s Co-workers: Rémi Brague’s Treatment of the Divine Law in Christianity” *Political Science Reviewer XXXVIII* (2009): 76–104.

differentiated beyond the cosmos, but cannot be identified with it. One senses with Locke's "law" talk, especially with his insistence on the guarantee of rewards and punishments, the language of natural causes creeping back into his moral thinking. One still senses a Newtonian overlay that regards reality in terms of effective causes in Locke's treatment of the moral law.<sup>13</sup> The evidence Walsh draws from Locke's private journals undermines the perception that Locke was a crypto-deist or Enlightenment rationalist. However, his language of efficient causes (as opposed to, say, the language of *analogia entis*) suggests an effort to describe transcendent reality in terms ill-suited for it.

Moreover, efficient causes are about efficiency. For Locke, the Gospel provides a morality that works in the sense that it rewards and punishes, just as he insists political power has the right of "making Laws with Penalties of Death, and consequently all less Penalties."<sup>14</sup> The advantage of political power is that it is natural law made effective. Locke is less interested than Aquinas, for example, who omits coercion from his definition of law, in treating human law as a determination of the natural law and thus as an emblem of human rationality.

Locke's tendency to analyze morality, politics, and religion in terms of efficient causes and law is at odds with the mystical element Walsh detects. In Locke, the priority of the practical takes the form of articulating a morality that above all must work. This is the truth in Strauss's interpretation that the early moderns lowered the goal of politics, as the good and the noble is not always socially and politically effective. Locke's desire for an effective law includes a divine law that first and foremost ensures the just get rewarded and the wicked punished. While medieval political thinkers theorized about human law as an analogue of the divine and eternal law, they still confronted the mystery of God's mercy in meting out justice. If the liberal order is to be pragmatic, then its foundations had better work. As we shall see below with Kant, the moral language of law has a higher purpose than to reduce the moral life to efficient

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13 As described by Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 164–6, 172–9.

14 Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 268.

causes, but there too one can see vestiges of scientism in Kant's moral language. Moreover, the language of law obscures the ground of morality even as it reveals our duty.

If the turn to existence in the liberal order produces its own distortion in the form of scientism, the other distortion it produces is in the form of "progress," which is seen most clearly in J. S. Mill. The two distortions are of a single piece because both, in locating the work of reason essentially in the world (i.e., the subject-object dichotomy), deflect it from the subject and thus corrode the individual's sense of responsibility in moral struggle. If the liberal order can rely on science to secure order out of disorder, then the individual lacks incentive to turn within and ascend from disorder: "If the process of maturation and self-responsibility is part of the autonomic movement of history, then there is no necessity to undertake the arduous effort to inculcate and practice the virtues themselves. We can simply wait for history itself to perform the task" (GLS 86). Faith in progress has been the main expression of "an opening toward the fulfillment inchoately present within" (GLS 6) the liberal order, and if this faith is shattered, then "the shock of the collision of reality all the more traumatic. Liberals are typically astonished to discover that the generation that has grown up under its less demanding tutelage is less responsible and caring than any prior generation" (GLS 86).

Mill appealed to a secularized version of kenotic love in the form of each generation serving as a benefactor to the next. His liberal faith was grounded in his faith in progress. Walsh finds him an especially fascinating figure because his humanitarian love grasps at the essence of Christianity but, by relying on his secularized faith in progress, he "cannot explain the relationship between self-actualization and universal love. It stands as a bare postulate" (GLS 146). Mill has a "religious rejection of religion" (GLS 187). Mill's defense of liberty leads him to prefer Manichaeism to Christianity because he cannot bear a God willing to permit the existence of evil. His adherence to the pure moral law prevents him from being Christian. Walsh provides a lengthy quotation of the conclusion of "The Utility of Religion," where Mill contemplates the possibility of heroic service of the greater good without the possibility of

rewards or consolations (GLS 187). Walsh finds this passage significant because it constitutes an equivalent to Aristotle's notion of philosophizing as the act of immortalizing: "[Mill] does not need to contemplate an immortality of endless days because he has already glimpsed the reality of immortality" (GLS 187).

Yet, Mill lacks a "sense of reassuring contact with the redemptive divine presence, the mystery of the divine suffering of evil that renders the human suffering of evil bearable," which means he cannot await reconciliation. He must be a self-assured co-creator with God, if there is one, who works toward the ultimate "complete triumph of good over evil which history points to."<sup>15</sup> Mill is emblematic of liberals whose faith in historical progress gives them a sense of sustenance, but whose sustenance is shallow and undermines their responsibility in moral struggle. In the twentieth century, John Rawls would echo Mill's appeal to progress in his own appeal to evolution as a cosmic guarantee that society would induce people to act with a pure heart and a sense of justice: "The temptation to extrapolate from the fragile island of order, imagining that it will be extended infinitely into the vast sea of disorder that surrounds it, is virtually irresistible to some of the leading liberal thinkers" (GLS 85). A faith that an individual experience of order will translate into cosmic order is what Voegelin called "metastatic faith," and it seems to be built into the dominant strain of the liberal tradition's priority of the practical over the theoretical. Liberal thinkers expected the blessings of liberty to be so obvious that it would draw others into its wake (GLS 316). But that has not happened because liberalism itself has a crisis in faith, which is related to the priority of the practical. The practical is predicated on success, and the dark night of the soul required by moral struggle defies this expectation. This is the lesson liberal empire-builders in Mill's time and in ours seem to forget.

Despite the ordering of the trilogy, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* thus ends where *After Ideology* begins, though at a deeper level, which is with the uncertain status of the goal of our moral struggle in the modern world. However, now it is uncertain whether

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15 J. S. Mill, "Utility of Religion," *Three Essays on Religion* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 117.

it is even appropriate to speak of the “goal” of moral struggle: “Is it possible to authoritatively communicate the great purpose of human freedom without prejudicing that freedom itself?” (GLS 316). *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* ends with one wondering whether, despite the resilience of the liberal order, it finally needs some recourse to classical Christianity to ground itself because it is not entirely clear what deepening the priority of the practical in the modern context would look like.

### An Interlude to Change Modes

Walsh published two pivotal books, with implications for the direction of the trilogy, between *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* (1997) and *The Modern Philosophical Revolution* (2008): *The Third Millennium: Reflections on Faith and Reason* (1999) and *Guarded By Mystery: Meaning in a Postmodern Age* (2000). Along with his introduction to the volume of Eric Voegelin’s *Anamnesis* he edited for the *Collected Works* project, Walsh changed his mode of scholarship. Instead of writing about philosophy, these works gave Walsh the opportunity to explore how to write in a meditative mode as an exercise in philosophy.

In *Anamnesis*, we find in Voegelin a model of a thinker adopting a more meditative mode of writing. As indicated above in the introduction, *Anamnesis* is less a report on philosophy than a philosophical exercise participating in the unfolding of the very luminous experiences it explores (A 9, 27). Walsh found that Voegelin’s essays on Aristotle (“What is Nature?” and “What is Right By Nature?”) stand out as efforts to move beyond the subject-object dichotomy of philosophy. These essays are paradoxical because, though about Aristotle, they partake of the modern philosophical revolution.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> According to Walsh, Voegelin’s existential turn shows he participated in the modern philosophical revolution, but did not sufficiently appreciate the extent to which it is modern, as his analysis of modern thinkers focused on their deformations (EV 14–17). Walsh’s effort can be seen as a continuation of Voegelin’s meditation while applying it to the modern world more thoroughly. This being the case, the role that Voegelin’s critique of modernity in bringing the modern philosophical revolution into focus deserves attention as well. In *Growth of the Liberal Soul*, Walsh had conceded that efforts to retrieve premodern traditions are crucial in recollecting “the depth from

“Natural right” is found inadequate because it neglects the revelation of being that is the source of nature (see MPR 12). In these essays, Voegelin refigures the question of *physei dikaion* as the soul’s participation in its quest for order. His effort represents not a departure, but a deepening of Aristotle. Voegelin’s later meditations explore the “intentionality-luminosity tensions” in the “continuities between the ancient and modern world” (A 22), and despite Walsh’s disagreement with Voegelin over the nature of modernity in figures like Hegel and Nietzsche, Walsh’s subsequent work in *The Modern Philosophical Revolution* constitutes a continuation of Voegelin’s exploration of “continuities.”

An example from Voegelin illustrates this continuity. In his last essay, “Quod Deus Dicitur,” Voegelin himself treats as a trajectory, Aquinas’s “proof” of the existence of God, Leibniz’s “principle of sufficient reason,” Descartes’ cogito, Hegel’s exploration of thought’s movement, and Anselm’s *Proslogion*.<sup>17</sup> This essay is characteristic of Voegelin’s frequent return to the same thinkers and even texts to reconsider, refigure, and reinterpret experience. Aquinas’s “proof” is insufficient because his categories of causes based on a subject-object dichotomy overshadows the divine-human encounter that characterizes the quest for God. A deepened sense of the quest-like character is seen in the other thinkers, which is seen in its greatest clarity with Anselm’s noetic prayer. Voegelin treats “ancient” and “modern” as, at best, secondary categories. Thus, the task for phi-

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which the modern world springs and on which its liberal self-expression still depends. Without such a work of recovery, there would be no chance that the liberal political order could be rendered coherent; it would be condemned to wander forever in the half-light of its intuitive twilight that never dawns into the full luminosity of articulate transparence” (GLS 259). While Walsh in the *Modern Philosophical Revolution* would not state this so starkly, and in fact seems to argue against this, the modern philosophical revolution cannot be understood as such without understanding the “existential” turn in Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine that enables modern thinkers to work through the implications of their existential turn (all of whom play pivotal roles for the thinkers Walsh discusses in the *Modern Philosophical Revolution*).

<sup>17</sup> Voegelin, “Quod Deus Dicitur,” *Published Essays, 1966–1985, Collected Works*, Vol. 12, ed. Ellis Sandoz, 376–94.

losophy now is to recapture man's discovery of his existence as illuminated from within by Intellect or Nous, and not by Aristotelian etiology.<sup>18</sup> With Voegelin's achievements, Walsh suggests, "perhaps it is not too sanguine to expect that we may be on the verge of a new beginning in the modern world when philosophy and revelation could come together to again shelter the life of reason within time. This would surely be a continuation of the great path of anamnesis" (A 10). Walsh's suggestion could stand as an epigraph for the final volume of his trilogy.

Before turning to the final volume, notice should be paid to the meditative character of *Guarded By Mystery*, which extends his analysis of liberty made in *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*, but resides now within a meditation from within liberty that has been made possible by the kinds of Aristotelian insights made in *Anamnesis*. Walsh guides the reader through a meditation on the ethical life, and does so in the conversational mode. In this book, Walsh deepens his reflections on the priority of the practical, and the inner, mysterious vitality of that priority as we experience it when we disclose truth in the very act of living the ethical life (G 7–11, 49–97). In *After Ideology*, he notes that the most difficult task in articulating morality is conveying "the sense of ultimate rightness that underpins it" (AI 194). In *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*, we saw how liberal thinkers participated in that ultimate rightness but in a mode of misplaced concreteness (i.e., identifying the source of liberal faith in terms of progress).

In *Guarded by Mystery*, Dostoevsky's pathos and Mill's hubris get replaced with a common sense and indeed humble reminder of our participation in the moral life. His meditation on liberty includes a forceful reminder that our experience of liberty contains an awareness of what is not free, and thus liberty has its own limits or logic in its unfolding in the moral life. We are invited to "be not afraid!" and to return to ourself in the goal of our longing, "ever old and ever new, as Saint Augustine described it" (G 77). All human beings recognize themselves in the unfolding of the moral life Walsh describes. Most will also recognize that "now it emerges within us as the most real reality there is, as the true measure, loss of which

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18 See also Voegelin, "On Debate and Existence," *ibid.*, 36–48.



would be loss of all that makes life meaningful. At stake is nothing less than reality itself. By responding to the pull of the moral reality that draws us, its presence is manifested more completely in our lives. The miracle of illumination occurs” (G 56). Faith sustains the moral life in its darkest moments, but in recognizing the darkness as darkness, we recognize what transcends it: “Now for a brief magical moment all that looking toward an unlimited horizon is rewarded. The mystery that seemed to guard its own secret so well inexplicably comes into partial focus. We see through the depths of divine being it contains. That is the outburst of revelation” (G 77). *Guarded By Mystery* is a meditation on the mysterious horizon of being in which we live out our moral lives. It recollects the moral life within that horizon. With *The Modern Philosophical Revolution*, Walsh explicates the paradox of that horizon and our turn to existence towards it.

### **The Luminosity of Existence**

If *Guarded By Mystery* is a meditation on the moral life that engages the reader in the moral life, *The Modern Philosophical Revolution* explores the horizon of the moral life and the experience of the horizon as such. For this reason, the book’s subtitle, *The Luminosity of Existence*, was the originally intended title. As intimated already in *Guarded By Mystery*, the *Modern Philosophical Revolution* shows a modernity not characterized by secular reason, but a re-cognition of faith, and indeed kenotic love, that arises out of a deepening of the meaning of reason. The breathtaking scope and impetuosity of Walsh’s thesis, no less than a reinterpretation of a philosophical movement including Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, Levinas, and Kierkegaard, prevents an adequate summary of the argument’s constituent parts. Instead, we will seek the argument in outline form by considering Walsh’s treatment of the bookends of the modern philosophical revolution: Kant, the first thinker covered because he makes the turn to existence, and Kierkegaard, the last thinker covered not because he comes last in time but as a marginal figure barely understood even now, he reflected most deeply on the turn to existence.

Stated somewhat simplistically, the modern philosophical revo-

lution is a turn to the activity of reason and the turn toward the other as our partner in living the moral law. These two moments constitute the same turn. The luminosity of existence reveals our other-regarding nature. The priority of the practical over the theoretical means the priority of the moral over the metaphysical, and implies human beings are beings toward the other.<sup>19</sup> It begins with Kant's discovery of the priority of practical reason over theoretical reason, argued most thoroughly in the *Critique of Judgment* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and finds its deepest insight in Kierkegaard's unique insistence on the nature of morality revealed in action and in love as the horizon of existence. Existence becomes luminous when we are most fully aware of the mystery that guards us, and this can be seen with increased intensity of the thinkers Walsh treats, as they come to grips with the understanding that the human can be given but it cannot be contained by the means by which it is conveyed.

Kant plays a central role in Walsh's trilogy. Kant's devotion to the moral law is central to Walsh's treatment of the liberal order (e.g., GLS 212–9). However, Kant's full significance is seen in his recovery of teleology (within freedom) in the modern world in the *Critique of Judgment*. Kant's explanation provides the context, in retrospect, for Walsh's argument about moral action in *Guarded By Mystery*, and, because it still contains Kant's critique of Aristotelian etiology, extends the deepening of reason initiated by Voegelin seen in the essays cited above. While the previous volumes showed that practice reveals purpose, Kant now shows us why:

Once it had been admitted that we have no access to ends other than our own enactment of purposes, there was little point fretting, as Kant appeared to do, over our inability to find empirical confirmation for finality. We must simply admit that ends can be known only from within their pursuit and accept that, if we wish to apply the notion of finality to the working of nature, we have no option other than to extend the structure of purpose we already know through our own prac-

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<sup>19</sup> It should already be evident that Walsh's treatment of otherness is not reducible to an "I-Thou" relationship of subjectivities.

tice of it. Kant's great contribution was to demonstrate that it is only on that basis that we can make nature intelligible. He took the crucial step of relieving us of the burden of finding empirical proof for the process of empirical proof by showing us the impossibility of the task. If we could provide empirical verification, that would in turn stand in need of the same verification. Kant's significance in the history of thought is that he laid bare the conditions for the possibility of knowledge in ways that have not been surpassed, although he did not lay to rest the deeper questions of reliability that can never ultimately be answered by knowledge itself. Without actually admitting it, Kant disclosed the extent to which reason rests on faith (MPR 34–5).

Reason finds itself in the reality it judges and seeks to understand. Practical reason is prior to theoretical reason because theoretical reason cannot understand its own limits while practical reason can see its limits in the mystery of existence: "we cannot serve any good other than the good that is disclosed in our movement toward it" (MPR 73). Even so, both theoretical and practical reason frequently "formulate . . . the limits of thinking in terms of an antinomy of judgment" because reason becomes self-aware of its own limit. Thus, Walsh's analysis frequently takes the form of an antinomy in order to recollect that the deepening of reason can only come through itself, and the necessity that reason finds its roots in faith.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The following examples suffice: "Only reason can grapple with the self-imposed limitation of reason" (MPR 2); "Technology, which treats everything as a means and nothing as an end, cannot furnish its own purpose" (MPR 2); "Mastery cannot master itself" (MPR 3); "If science holds a monopoly on truth, how do we validate the truth of this monopoly?" (MPR 7); "Reason cannot annihilate itself, because it has never really possessed itself" (MPR 15); "Writing . . . cannot be concluded and it is this impossibility that provides the possibility of writing" (MPR 25); "Contrary to the Hegelian suggestion that the necessity might be grasped and thereby overcome, Kierkegaard understood that the necessity was precisely the nongraspability of necessity" (MPR 26); "Being cannot become present to us because, if it did, we would no longer be able to exist in relation to it. It is by

In turning to morality, finding the outer limits of practical reason, whether in the form of the postulates of God, immortality, or freedom, or in the laws that express the “boundaries of right” in moral action (MPR 66), entails both articulating the formal structure of moral action in the self-limiting logic of autonomy, as well as its motivation. As noted above, Walsh accepts Kant’s claim that Aristotelian *eudaimonism* is always prone to becoming self-interested action.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps, but acting out of duty, where “our action partakes of the divine freedom of action as moved by nothing beyond itself” (MPR 41) contains its own Pelagian seeds as we saw with J. S. Mill. Kierkegaard, as we shall see, will have to correct Kant on the meaning of freedom.

Walsh views the *Metaphysics of Morals* as “a model of what metaphysics must be when it becomes existential” (MPR 60). The “Doctrine of Virtue” with its emphasis on the motivations for virtue follows the formalistic “Doctrine of Right,” which lays out the conditions for ethical action. Here Kant answers the charge of Pelagianism by explaining how “responsibility is thrust upon us in ways that not only rob us of the leisure of contemplation but compel us to confront depths of existence we had scarcely even suspected” (MPR 61). For this reason, politics is at the heart of philosophy because it is given to us; it forces us to make choices. In other words, even asking for the motivation for moral action, whether out of duty, inclination, *caritas*, *eros*, or *eudaimonism*, derives from the motivation it seeks. Thus the “circularity” of Kant’s meditation (MPR 69).

Kant’s treatment of friendship at the conclusion of the “Doctrine of Virtue” exhibits the starkness of existential choice and shows why he “requires us to wrestle with the conflicts generated by its own application” (MPR 66). The formalistic Kant, who outlines

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the mercy of being in its absence that we exist” (MPR 26).

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle is always on the verge of losing the insight that virtue is its own reward (MPR 70). Kant expresses this idea with a pun: “if *eudaimonism* (the principle of happiness) is set up as the basic principle [or morality] instead of *eleutheronomy* (the principle of the freedom of internal lawgiving), the result is the *euthanasia* (easy death) of all morals” (“Metaphysics of Morals,” 511).

right, says, as he does in his “Lectures on Ethics,” that friendship develops the “minor virtues” of life because it is simply partial and preferential. However, Kant of the *Metaphysics of Morals* places friendship at the conclusion of the “Doctrine of Virtue” as an emblem to its being paramount in our obligations to others. One suspects he is now closer to Aristotle, whose two books on friendship (compared to one on justice) constitute the penultimate books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Friendship is the “union of two persons through mutual love and respect. . . . For love can be regarded as attraction and respect as repulsion, and if the principle of love bids friends to draw closer, the principle of respect requires them to stay at a proper distance from each other.”<sup>22</sup> One might wonder why Kant uses Newtonian categories to describe moral phenomenon.<sup>23</sup> Laying aside the question of whether this is an adequate way of considering friendship “in its perfection,”<sup>24</sup> Kant here characterizes the epitome of virtue as standing on the knife-edge (not mean) of two extremes. Love as attraction, without the leavening of respect, becomes narcissistic intimacy where friends reveal things about their “natural state,” which is a loathsome outrage to humanity.<sup>25</sup> Taken to its extreme (or perfection), love as attraction leads to its opposite, to conquest, destruction, consumption, rape, or obliteration. Perfect attraction obliterates individual identity. In the romantic Kant recognizes love’s ideal of perfect absorption of selves, as Plato has Aristophanes describe it in the *Symposium*.<sup>26</sup> For its part, respect, as repulsion,

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22 “Metaphysics of Morals,” 584–85.

23 See Marcia Baron, “Love and Respect in Doctrine of Virtue,” in *Kant’s Metaphysics of Morals: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Mark Timmons, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 392.

24 Aristotle describes *sunaithesis* as the peak of his friendship teaching. Love as attraction and respect as repulsion are beside the point because at the stage of moral development where *sunaithesis* is practiced, each self regards himself and the other as a unique individual revelation of the good as they both partake of the good in partnership (see my “‘Sunaiesthetic’ Friendship and the Foundations of Political Anthropology,” *International Political Anthropology* I:2 [November 2008]: 179–93).

25 “Lecture on Ethics” in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship*, ed. Michael Pakaluk (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 215.

26 Kierkegaard has his romantic seducer recognize this Aristophanic (as

would find its perfection in the utter inability to share a common world, enmity. So friendship considered in its perfection means prudentially negotiating the knife-edge between conquest and enmity, which amount to the same thing. Or, the attempt to balance attraction and respect (as repulsion) might actually suggest the example of a pair of lovers where one of them has betrayed the other: the betrayal severs their love, but attraction remains.<sup>27</sup>

If this existential choice seems stark, it is helpful to recall that as Kant argues in *Religion Within the Limits of Religion*, “partaking of both time and eternity, we act always as if we implicate the whole of our existence in each moment and reach beyond ourselves into the divine relationship of all creation” (MPR 60). Walsh’s Kant, the paradigmatic Enlightenment philosopher who supposedly articulates the unity of knowledge, is closer to Kierkegaard, the first great critic of the Enlightenment’s ideal of the unity of knowledge and purported proponent of radical choice, than many think. Walsh demonstrates that the picture of Kant as proponent of secular reason and Kierkegaard as existentialist is simplistic when seen in light of the priority of practical reason.

Because we cannot determine ahead of time where the knife-edge will be, Walsh interprets Kant as a theorist of practical reason, who deepens Aristotle’s view of practical reason: “interpretation of principles is established through an internal meditation” (MPR 66). As seen in the example of friendship, the principles of love and respect require balancing, which is a sign of our freedom; their application requires practical wisdom. While the “Doctrine of Virtue” is less formalistic than the “Doctrine of Right” or other reflections on right in Kant’s writings, it still has a “formalistic style” for which Walsh frequently needs to apologize because such formalism hides

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attributed by Plato) ideal as well (*Either/Or: Part I*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987], 443–4).

27 “She had never known any torment like this. This mixture of intimacy and inaccessibility, of repulsion and attraction, of hopeless loss and hope that all might yet be regained—this confused sensation seemed to become a crimson glow in the darkness, its incandescent rays filling the room scorching her breast, drawing from her. . . . one long wail!” (Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, *November 1916*, trans. H. T. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 695).

the existential imperative (e.g., MPR 62–63, 66). Of course, it is this very formalism that has led interpreters to regard him as, indeed, formalistic on account of his application of the scientific method to ethics. Moreover, Kant was “enthralled” with the success of modern science because its method organized phenomena within patterns generated by understanding (MPR 51). Walsh demonstrates that Kant’s understanding of practical reason moves beyond scientific reason. However, one wonders whether Kant, like Locke before him, was overly enthralled by the concept of “law” in the first place and whether his formalistic style prevented him from pushing his existential turn deeper.

Kant’s formalistic style serves his view that ethical reasoning takes the form of legislation. Walsh argues law has three advantages. First, the idea of law implies the equality of every human being under it (MPR 68). Our submission to law is also our submission to the dignity of all human beings. Second, law obliges us to choose an action for its own sake, and by doing so elevates choice as the pivotal moment in moral life. Walsh argues this represents a differentiation within the classical and Christian understanding of law (MPR 47).

Third, laws reveal the boundaries of right more adequately than do examples: “For all examples (which only illustrate but cannot prove anything) are treacherous, so that they certainly require a metaphysics.”<sup>28</sup> Just as the example of Jesus Christ was predicated on the idea of Christ within human beings (MPR 56), so too does our knowledge of examples presuppose the rule to which they point. Kant underestimates the nature and power of the moral example. For his part, Aristotle regarded particular examples (e.g., the actions of Achilles) as containing the universal.<sup>29</sup> They play an important role in moral education not only for showing the principle in action,

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28 MPR 66, quoting *Metaphysics of Morals*, 355.

29 “An example (*epagoge*) is in fact a source of something universal, while deductive reasoning is from things that are universal. Therefore there are sources from which deductive reasoning proceeds, of which there is no deduction, and therefore what makes them known are examples.” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs [Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002], 1139b39–40). See also Heyking, “‘Sunaiesthetic’ Friendship and the Foundations of Political Anthropology,” 185.

but also in showing them in application, which is the Achilles heel of Kant's formalism, as laws do not tell us how they should be applied. Moreover, as Aristotle notes, examples are, in a mysterious sense, the first principles of moral action insofar as they represent a society to itself and are therefore the pre-given principles and practices of that society, which is why Aristotle, unlike Kant, does not face the problem of having to find reasons for obeying the moral law. Indeed, Walsh helpfully illuminates the importance of examples in terms of myths in his discussion of Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason* when explaining myth's utility in explaining original sin: "Myth extrapolates the boundaries of experience. It does not explain, but marks the limits of explanation. Yet myth, as Kant demonstrates, is indispensable for fully articulating the parameters of the moral life, which must confront the difficulty of eradicating evil that is the inexplicable failure of goodness" (MPR 55). If practical reason opens toward supersensible reality that bursts the bounds of immanence (MPR 53) and shows us our actions originate in time but partake of unconditioned eternity (MPR 58), then myth is well-suited to express that boundary, as it always has done.

It is this consideration of myth's ambivalent philosophical status that leads us to the end of Walsh's modern trajectory, Kierkegaard. Kant's formalism serves his universalism, but Kierkegaard's use of "dramatic" or mythological pseudonyms is a way of conveying the incommunicability of the particular individual, the human person, who stands, finally, above the universal (MPR 419). It is also a means of showing love as the horizon of existence because the pseudonyms, along with the writings in Kierkegaard's own name, reveal the limits of authorship. In an existential mode, which is also the mode whereby love is revealed as the boundary of existence, the author is forced to realize that all he can do is evoke experience in another, in the reader.<sup>30</sup>

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30 In considering Kierkegaard living philosophically and thereby gaining distance from his authorship, *The Modern Philosophical Revolution* returns to the beginning of the trilogy, *After Ideology*. For example, "Dostoevsky was to develop the polyphonic novel as the means by which the author's point of view could be withdrawn to allow the characters to speak for themselves. Only the truth that emerged indirectly from the test of 'living life'



As Kierkegaard observes in *Works of Love*, we cannot implant love in another but must presume love is already in the other. This requires a doubling back on the lover/author, who must be prepared for his own transformation in love. Thus, as a lover loves his neighbor and thereby risks his own transformation and self-sacrifice, so too does the author write in anticipation of being rewritten by the reader. This is why Kierkegaard refers to this and other works as an “upbuilding discourse” and not “discourses for upbuilding” because the author himself is being upbuilt (MPR 415, citing *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*). In Walsh’s terms, the author is written by the text.<sup>31</sup> Kierkegaard’s meditations on the aesthetic, ethical, and religious, point to the paradox of faith that reveals the singularity of the individual but, paradoxically or because of this singularity, the individual cannot be contained in the means by which it is communicated. Kierkegaard deepens Kant’s practical turn by showing how the boundaries of action are revealed by action itself, not by a priori rules, and by deepening the meditative “circularity” that Kant inaugurates.<sup>32</sup>

Kierkegaard continues Kant’s turn to existence, but he advances it because in following through on the transfiguration of duty from law to love, morality is finally shorn of the vestiges of Newtonian language of efficient causes, which we saw in Kant’s reference to attraction and repulsion in his discussion of friendship. Indeed, this is the key reason Walsh places Kierkegaard as the high point of modernity. He does not relapse into scientism or into intramundane apocalypse, as do each of the other thinkers—in various ways—Walsh covers in *The Modern Philosophical Revolution*. If we think of scientism as the imposition of the concepts of efficient causes into moral language, then Kierkegaard plumbs the depths of scientism to bring the kenotic source of reason into focus. He does this not by criticizing scientism per se, but in his critique of modern despair,

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could express an authoritative utterance” (MPR 399).

31 For this reason, Walsh insists Kierkegaard anticipates and thinks beyond Jacques Derrida’s paradoxical thinking on writing.

32 I have elsewhere examined the significance of Kierkegaard in the light of friendship, “Friendship in Light of the Modern Philosophical Revolution,” *Fideles: A Journal of Redeemer Pacific College*, Vol. 4 (2009): 37–76.

which is the result of scientism.

This is seen clearly in *Either/Or*.<sup>33</sup> The aesthete, whom Judge William calls upon to establish his moral personality by making a choice, is the epitome of modern restlessness, which Walsh describes as a “peculiar mood of enervation when the abundance of possibilities robs all possibility from human existence” (411n.14).<sup>34</sup> The aesthete exemplifies modern man whom modern science has informed that he lives in a cosmos characterized by infinite space and therefore possesses infinite possibilities for his action. He exemplifies the Copernican revolution, of which Michael Polanyi asks why Copernicus would exchange his “actual terrestrial station for an imaginary solar standpoint.”<sup>35</sup> The imagined possibility of infinite possibilities for a concrete mortal man undermines his capacity for choice and thus his moral agency, because he finds no single possibility or choice ultimately matters.

Judge William tries to provoke his friend, the aesthete, into making a choice. Judge William further explains how marriage is the paradigmatic human relationship because in it husband and wife give themselves to one another. Continuing Kant’s insight regarding the revelation of *telos* in the unfolding of action, Judge William recognizes his argument for the superiority of marriage can only be understood from within it.<sup>36</sup> This also leads Judge William to recognize that he cannot be friends with the aesthete because the latter is not a moral agent. The ultimacy of choice in love leads Walsh to argue for a deepening of the existential turn in Kierkegaard from Kant, for whom ethical action has its origin in eternity: “Now William explains, ‘I turn everything around and say: The esthetic is

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33 It is also seen in Kierkegaard’s discussion of doubt in modern philosophy (*Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*, in *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 113–73).

34 Walsh compares enervation of the esthete to Tocqueville’s observation of the melancholy that derives from of democratic selves being so restless and to Leo Strauss’s observation that Lockean man is on a “joyless quest for joy” (MPR 412).

35 Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 3.

36 *Either/Or*, II: 98.

not in the immediate but in the acquired; but marriage is precisely that immediacy which contains mediacy, that infinity which contains finitude, that eternity which contains temporality” (409, citing *Either/Or II*, 94). Mutual giving of selves is an eschatological event (MPR 410). In choosing, “the *I* chooses itself or, more correctly, receives itself.”<sup>37</sup> Kierkegaard’s great achievement for modern philosophy is to realize that in the choice that constitutes one as moral agent, one receives himself and therefore the other, the neighbor.

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard reflects upon the command that we should love our neighbor. His meditation on love is also a meditation on duty: “The performance of duty for duty’s sake that had so occupied Kant has now been reached in the love that fulfils the law because it is free, loving only out of love” (MPR 452). *Works of Love* builds up the reader to recognize love as the horizon of existence. There is no standard beyond it. Because it is written in the existential mode, there is no need to analyze it from within the world of objects (which he thinks plagues eros and friendship). More clearly than Judge William, Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* meditates on love as the horizon of existence, which marks the outer terminus for Kant’s discovery that teleology is revealed from within ethical action. While *Works of Love* is a meditation on the actions of Jesus Christ (who *is* Love), its perspective is through and through that of the ethical agent whose understanding of the good is revealed in his moral action. Kierkegaard articulates freedom shorn from scientism and thus from the Pelagianism that frequently seems to mark Kant and the “bad” modernity that plagues all the other thinkers examined in Walsh’s final volume.

Thus Kierkegaard stands at the outer limit of the modern turn to existence because he most clearly (and paradoxically) articulates kenotic love as the horizon of our existence. If Kant deepens Copernicus’s revolution, which lost man in the cosmos, then Kierkegaard’s account of love deepens the insight made by thinkers across the ages, including Augustine, Thomas More, and Nicolaus Cusanus, that all places are equidistant from God, both infinitely far and infinitely near. As the terminus of the modern philosophical revolution (at least for now), Kierkegaard confirms Walsh’s observation that

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<sup>37</sup> *Either/Or*, II: 177.

modern philosophy has not eliminated the need for faith, “but that philosophy has come to understand the meaning of faith in a very different way” (MPR, xiv).

### Conclusion

Walsh's achievement in his trilogy is that he has recovered reality in the key of modern philosophy. Modernity, usually characterized as seeing reason as ultimate, has reasoned its way to understand the limits of reason. Behind reason is the love that grounds it. This is the insight that informs the ascent from the depths in *After Ideology* and grounds the sustaining faith in the liberal order in *Growth of the Liberal Soul*. By now it should be evident that Walsh provides more than a Christian moral theology that would seek to “tame” the radical modern philosophers. As his discussion of Nietzsche and, indeed, Kierkegaard indicates, part of the coming “to understand the meaning of faith in a very different way” is to reject Christianity and its message of kenotic love. For Walsh, this is implicit in kenotic love. It would be up to the critics of Walsh (and of Kierkegaard, for example) to demonstrate that their criticisms are borne from a perspective outside of kenotic love. Yet, as Walsh has shown of the most formidable of modern philosophers, their thinking moves within this horizon. For example, the constant “deconstruction” of the postmoderns is necessarily motivated by a desire for genuine contact with reality.

The more daunting problem that vexes the trilogy is the distance between the philosophers and liberal societies. Kant and Kierkegaard's insight that teleology is revealed only from within the moral practice may be true, but politics must frequently appeal to transcendent meaning in order to secure the necessary corrections within its practices. For example, Supreme Court judges frequently need to define fundamental principles, including freedom and dignity, in order to preserve them. While science and human rights are two of the three pillars of modernity, the ways they have been expressed (or asserted) have been problematic and reflect the familiar examples of “bad” modernity (e.g., scientism and progress). How the truth of existence can be made socially and politically effective is a conundrum. In disclosing the unexamined faith of our lives in

the realm of action, the problem of civil religion not only arises but reveals itself as an enduring fixture of political life, including in the liberal order where the faith that sustains that order always has difficulty finding *public* affirmation.<sup>38</sup>

Walsh's *Growth of the Liberal Soul* already answers much of this concern. The threats to human dignity can be corrected only on the grounds of human dignity. In addressing the challenge of elevating dignity as a public good, I have the following to add. Canada and the United States are filled with people who, along with their descendents, came to the New World in pursuit of liberty. While these societies frequently interpret themselves as beacons of liberty on the basis of their laws, and were inhabited by those escaping persecution and totalitarian terror, the meaning of their ancestors' suffering and its significance for their liberty have seldom been noted and frequently forgotten as the native-born neglect the ancestors' virtues gained through their suffering. The deepest of this suffering is done in silence, as is the case perhaps because of the very nature of suffering. Even so, such silent suffering has a social and political effect. Even though there are notable testaments to the suffering of immigrants and refugees, these numerous testaments are objects of contemplation and silent witness, but, as an aggregate, have yet to bubble up in conversation with one another to help constitute the self-interpretation of liberal societies.

It seems to me that the deeper meaning of freedom Walsh elucidates cannot have a fuller public significance until this happens. Part of what prevents this conversation from happening derives from the Pelagian dimension of the liberal order: conversing about suffering sounds like whining, which in many cases it is. As a result, when we are moderated of our Pelagianism, Stoicism merely ends up the default mode we take as a response to our fragility. But the deeper obstacle is in the nature of suffering itself. Indeed it is silent, as is our loving response to it, as Kierkegaard, first among the modern philosophers, notices.

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38 See the essays in *Civil Religion in Political Thought: Its Perennial Questions and Enduring Relevance in North America*, ed. Ronald Weed and John von Heyking (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

Yet, it is Walsh's insight in *Growth of the Liberal Soul* that what is best in the liberal order is usually silent and inarticulate. It is what usually draws liberal societies away from the abyss. Thus, while liberal societies might appear to conduct politics as "civil war by other means" (in Alasdair MacIntyre's words), its tumultuousness is in fact restrained by its core. Of course, there are no guarantees.

But of necessity, freedom has no guarantees.

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